

**Testimony Before
The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing On: "VA First, Veteran Second: The Biden-Harris Legacy"**

February 6, 2025

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Chairwoman Kiggans, Ranking Member Ramirez, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding accountability at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The Department of Veterans Affairs is a large agency with a similarly large and important mission. The care, benefits and support veterans receive through the VA is the fulfillment of a promise that our nation makes, and must continue to make, to those who serve and protect our country. My family includes veterans who served in World War II, the Korean War and in the Marines as well as the Army. My grandfather proudly worked for many years at the VA in his hometown of Tuskegee, Alabama, made famous by the Tuskegee Airman. On behalf of myself and my organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), I thank our nation's veterans and military families for their service and sacrifice for our country.

In order to meet its critical mission, the VA plays many roles. It is one of the largest federal agencies in the government with functions including administering pensions, insurance and home loans for veterans, providing survivor support for veterans' families and running the Veterans Health Administration, the largest integrated healthcare network in the United States. It is incumbent upon Congress and the president to ensure that the VA does not falter in fulfilling its mission. It is equally important to acknowledge that managing such complex systems is a daunting task. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the VA has experienced challenges across multiple administrations, Republican and Democratic. The inherent risks and challenges associated with operating a large agency make ensuring robust oversight and accountability absolutely critical.

As the members of this Committee know well, the VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) has consistently played a key role in providing oversight to help the VA fulfill its mission and to ferret out waste, fraud and abuse in the agency. For decades under both Republican and Democratic administrations, the OIG has issued numerous reports and recommendations to improve the VA's operations, including 189 open VA OIG reports in 2020 during the final year of President Trump's first term and 197 open VA OIG reports in 2016 during the final year of President Obama's administration.¹

¹ Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, Semiannual Report to Congress Issue 76 (Apr. 1, 2016 to Sept. 30, 2016), <https://www.vaog.gov/sites/default/files/document/2023-08/VAOIG-SAR-2016-2.pdf>;

Inspector General (IG) Michael Missal led VA OIG for more than eight years.² Mr. Missal was confirmed by the Senate in April 2016 after being favorably voted out of the Republican led Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and unanimously voted out of the Republican led Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.³ Mr. Missal's confirmation was "urge[d]" by Chairman Ron Johnson so that the VA OIG could have "permanent, independent leadership."⁴ The Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee at the time, Rep. Jeff Miller, expressed relief at Mr. Missal's confirmation, saying that he was "glad" that the Senate "finally confirmed a permanent" IG.⁵

In fiscal year 2024 alone, former VA Inspector General Missal's office issued "a total of 316 reports and 1,106 recommendations" and made a monetary impact of nearly \$6.8 billion amounting to "a return on investment of \$28:1" for every dollar spent on the inspector general's oversight.⁶ And those savings still pale in comparison to the extraordinary work that VA OIG did to address veteran suicides and improve health outcomes for veterans and military families throughout the many years of Mr. Missal's leadership of the office.⁷ That impact is priceless. Inspector General Missal's leadership of OIG garnered bipartisan approval for independent and vigorous oversight of the agency across the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations.⁸ As the Military Times noted, Mr. Missal released numerous

Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, Semiannual Report to Congress Issue 84 (Apr. 1, 2020 to Sept. 30, 2020), <https://www.vaogig.gov/sites/default/files/document/2023-08/vaogig-sar-2020-2.pdf>.

² Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), Inspector General Historical Data (July 25, 2017),

[https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/IG%20History%20\(PAS\)%20-%207-25-17.pdf](https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/IG%20History%20(PAS)%20-%207-25-17.pdf); Department of Veterans Affairs, Staff Biographies: Inspector General Michael J. Missal (last accessed Feb. 4, 2025) <https://department.va.gov/staff-biographies/michael-j-missal/>.

³ PN897, 114th Cong. (2016), <https://www.congress.gov/nomination/114th-congress/897>; Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), Inspector General Historical Data, (July 25, 2017)

[https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/IG%20History%20\(PAS\)%20-%207-25-17.pdf](https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/IG%20History%20(PAS)%20-%207-25-17.pdf); Department of Veterans Affairs, Staff Biographies: Inspector General Michael J. Missal (last accessed Feb. 4, 2025) <https://department.va.gov/staff-biographies/michael-j-missal/>.

⁴ Press Release, Senate HSGAC, Johnson, Committee Unanimously Approve Michael Missal For VA Inspector General, Jan. 21, 2016,

<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/rep/johnson-committee-unanimously-approve-michael-missal-for-va-inspector-general/>.

⁵ Press Release, House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Miller Statement on Senate Confirmation of VA Inspector General, Apr. 20, 2016, <https://veterans.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=876>.

⁶ Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, Semiannual Report to Congress Issue 92 (Apr. 1, 2024 to Sept. 30, 2024)

https://www.vaogig.gov/sites/default/files/document/2024-11/semiannual_report_to_congress_issue_92.pdf.

⁷ Department of Veteran Office of Inspector General, September 2024 Highlights (Sept. 24, 2024)

https://www.vaogig.gov/sites/default/files/document/2024-10/monthly_highlights_september_2024.pdf.

⁸ See e.g., @SenatorTester, X (Feb. 16, 2022, 5:47 PM), <https://x.com/SenatorTester/status/1494081013940641793>;

Press Release, Boozman, Hassan Introduce Bipartisan Legislation Requiring Mandatory Whistleblower Training for VA Employees, Office of Senator John Boozman (July 23, 2021)

<https://www.boozman.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2021/7/boozman-hassan-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-requiring-mandatory-whistleblower-training-for-va-employees>; @SenCapito, X (July 31, 2020, 1:32 PM),

<https://x.com/SenCapito/status/1289252668695748609>; and Press Release, Inspector General to Investigate Reports of "Wait Lists" at Colorado VA Facility, Senate HSGAC (Oct. 16, 2020),

<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/media/rep/inspector-general-to-investigate-reports-of-wait-lists-at-colorado-va-facility/>.

reports critical of VA officials during President Trump's first term as well as President Biden's term in office.⁹

Despite that staggering impact, Mr. Missal is not here today to testify about his oversight of the VA OIG during President Biden's tenure because President Trump unceremoniously fired him last month along with more than a dozen other independent agency inspectors general.¹⁰ The firing of IG Missal came just days after Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Jerry Moran stated: "We work closely with the inspector general at VA ... I find him valuable both to me and to this committee, and he should be valuable to the Department of Veterans Affairs."¹¹

Although it is beyond my expertise to opine on the state of VA's mission-specific operations, the mere existence of these reports highlights the value of robust oversight to ensure accountability at the VA. Without the work of the inspector general and the cooperation of past administrations, the waste, fraud, abuse and operational challenges identified in some of these reports and recommendations may never have come to light. And the efforts that administrations have taken to implement and correct these recommendations to better support our nation's veterans and military families likely would never have been possible. That includes efforts to address over 266,000 reports of potential wrongdoing, waste, abuse or inefficiencies received through the VA OIG hotline over the last eight fiscal years covering the Trump and Biden administrations.¹² During the first Trump and Biden administrations combined, the VA OIG's work resulted in cost savings with an estimated total monetary impact of over \$40 billion.¹³

Inspectors general are critical to improving government agencies' efficiency in serving the American public and investigating fraud. In the nearly 50 years since the first inspector general positions were established, these officials have provided critical independent oversight that improved the integrity of our government. Crucially, inspector general terms were not designed to be tied to that of the president, because they provide oversight and accountability regardless of political party or who sits in the Oval Office. I am proud to have worked cooperatively with inspectors general and their staff during my tenure in the House, Senate and executive branch. At a time when there is a low global trust in government, the role of inspectors general is more important than ever to rebuild and strengthen that public trust.¹⁴ Under both Presidents Trump and Biden, CREW has consistently pressed for Inspector General vacancies to be filled and advocated for strong independent oversight of federal departments and agencies.¹⁵

⁹ Leo Shane III, *VA, DOD oversight questioned after Trump inspector general firings*, Military Times (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2025/01/27/va-dod-oversight-questioned-after-trump-inspector-general-firings/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² These figures were calculated by CREW using reports available at "All Reports," Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, <https://www.vaogig.gov/reports/all>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment, OECD, July 12, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>.

¹⁵ *President Biden should fill vacant inspector general and ethics roles*, CREW (Aug. 7, 2024), <https://www.citizensforethics.org/legal-action/letters/president-biden-should-fill-vacant-inspector-general-and-ethics-roles/>; Donald K. Sherman, *12 federal agencies still do not have permanent inspectors general*, CREW

During President Trump's first term, my organization identified at least 25 actions taken by him to undermine the inspector general community, including firing two permanent IGs, removing three acting IGs without any clear justification and appointing four IGs to dual roles thus limiting their ability operate independently – a critical aspect of the IG role.¹⁶ During his first term, President Trump also suggested that he would prevent the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery from communicating with Congress about administration misconduct and obstruction, thus attempting to stifle Congress' constitutional oversight role.¹⁷ These attempts to politicize IG offices undermined their independence, thus hindering their ability to identify waste, fraud and abuse. They were rightfully condemned by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.¹⁸

Also critical to the mission of providing excellent care for our nation's veterans is the support of a strong, well-trained and experienced civil service to carry out the important mission of the department. Supporting veterans through the implementation of federal programs requires agencies to be staffed by individuals with a thorough understanding of statutory and regulatory schemes, institutional knowledge of the history of the programs, familiarity with relevant stakeholders inside and outside government, and substantial technical expertise. That is what the career civil service provides. Sometimes lost in the discussion about the civil service is that veterans make up 30 percent of the federal civilian workforce,¹⁹ 53 percent of whom are disabled.²⁰ Attacks on the federal civil service is an attack on veterans. Right now, veteran unemployment stands at 2.8 percent, but that number could rise with efforts to weaken civil service protections and reduce the size of the federal workforce.²¹

Our merit-based system is critical to the government's ability to continue operating effectively, and is thus crucial to the protection of the health and welfare of America's veterans. The merit-based civil service system was created to replace its predecessor, the

(Sept. 23, 2020),

<https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-investigations/12-inspector-general-vacancies/>.

¹⁶ Donald K. Sherman, *Trump's war on watchdogs and what Congress can do about it*, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics In Washington (June 15, 2020),

<https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-reports/trumps-war-on-watchdogs-and-what-congress-can-do-about-it/>.

¹⁷ Charlie Savage, *Trump Suggests He Can Gag Inspector General for Stimulus Bailout Program*, The New York Times (Mar. 27, 2020),

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/us/trump-signing-statement-coronavirus.html>.

¹⁸ Press Release, Grassley Leads Bipartisan Call to Safeguard Inspector General Independence Following ICIG Removal (Apr. 8, 2020),

<https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-leads-bipartisan-call-safeguard-inspector-general-independence-following>; Alexander Bolton and Laura Kelly, *Senate Republicans demand answers from Trump on IG firing*, The Hill (May 18, 2020),

<https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/498425-senate-republicans-demand-answers-from-trump-on-ig-firing/>.

¹⁹ Office of Personnel Management, *Employment of Veterans in the Federal Executive Branch (Fiscal Year 2021)*, <https://www.opm.gov/fedshirevets/hiring-officials/ved-fy21.pdf>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Department of Labor, *Veteran Unemployment Rates* (Jan. 10, 2025), <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/latest-numbers>.

spoils system, under which, politicians would put in place political cronies²² who often lacked the knowledge or expertise to fulfill their jobs in positions of power.

The first Trump administration sought to upend the merit-based civil service by implementing an executive order referred to as “Schedule F,” which would have stripped employment protections away from thousands of career civil servants. Had Schedule F not been rescinded, independent civil servants could have been replaced with political loyalists who likely would have prioritized blind obedience over following the law, leading to a government more prone to corruption.

During President Trump’s first term in office, the VA was specifically targeted by efforts to upend the civil service. In 2017, President Trump signed the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act into law.²³ Although the bill was ostensibly aimed at making it easier to remove government managers, in actuality the law was used to target low-level workers and retaliate against whistleblowers.²⁴ Between June 2017 (the month the bill was passed) and March 2018, 1,700 low level VA employees were removed from their positions, including housekeepers and food service workers, many of whom may have been veterans themselves.²⁵ An investigation by ProPublica found that whistleblowers and people who had filed discrimination complaints were among those fired. In 2018, the VA OIG reported significant staff shortages in the Veterans Health Administration, with high staff turnover being one of the top causes of the shortages.²⁶ These firings were so egregious that the VA paid roughly \$134 million to the 1,700 former VA employees who had been wrongfully fired as part of a settlement it reached with the American Federation of Government Employees.²⁷ Yet, despite this successful legal challenge, the Trump administration and its allies indicated that the VA’s system should be replicated across all federal agencies.²⁸

As unprecedented, damaging, and in some cases illegal, as President Trump’s actions were towards inspectors general and the civil service during his first term, what we have seen

²² See “Spoils System,” Encyclopedia.com; Machine Politics, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/presidents-unity-garfield/>; Gabe Lezra and Diamond Brown, *FAQ: The conservative attack on the merit-based civil service*, CREW (Jan. 25, 2024), <https://www.citizensforethics.org/news/analysis/faq-the-conservative-attack-on-the-merit-based-civil-service/>.

²³ S.1094, 115th Cong. (2017), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1094>.

²⁴ Jasper Craven, *At the VA, a Law Meant to Discipline Executives is Being Used to Fire Low-Level Workers*, The Nation (May 10, 2018),

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/at-the-va-a-law-meant-to-discipline-executives-is-being-used-to-fire-low-level-workers/>; Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, *Failures Implementing Aspects of the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017* (Oct. 24, 2019), <https://www.vaogig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2019-10/VAOIG-18-04968-249.pdf>.

²⁵ Jory Heckman, *VA reinstated 100 employees fired under widely challenged law, paid \$134M to hundreds more*, Federal News Network (Oct. 29, 2024), <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2024/10/va-reinstated-100-employees-fired-under-widely-challenged-law-paid-134m-to-hundreds-more/>; Isaac Arnsdorf, *The Trump Administration’s Campaign to Weaken Civil Service Ramps Up at the VA*, ProPublica (Mar. 12, 2018), <https://www.propublica.org/article/veterans-affairs-the-trump-administration-campaign-to-weaken-civil-service-ramps-up>; Craven, *Supra* note 24.

²⁶ Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, *OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration’s Occupational Staffing Shortages (FY2018)*, <https://www.vaogig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2018-06/VAOIG-18-01693-196.pdf>.

²⁷ Heckman, *supra* note 25.

²⁸ Arnsdorf, *supra* note 25.

unfold in recent days is on an entirely different scale. If these attacks continue, they will harm all Americans, including our veterans.

On the day President Trump was sworn in, he signed a series of executive orders, including one essentially reinstating Schedule F.²⁹ In a separate executive order, President Trump implemented an immediate and broad hiring freeze across the government,³⁰ reportedly causing chaos for certain vacancies at the VA.³¹ VA employees and applicants rightfully questioned the impact of the hiring freeze on vital care and services provided by the VA.³²

President Trump's broadside attack against the government hasn't been limited to hiring – his administration is also taking aim at across the board government funding, including funding for programs that are designed to protect and support our veterans. Last week, the Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget issued a memorandum, requiring every federal agency to pause “all activities related to obligation or disbursement of all Federal financial assistance, and other relevant agency activities that may be implicated by [President Trump's] executive orders.”³³ According to reports, 44 separate financial assistance programs related to veterans were temporarily suspended while the department reviewed them to see if they were in compliance with OMB's funding freeze.³⁴ Although they were exempted from the freeze after they were reviewed, those included veterans' suicide prevention, homelessness, job training and nursing home support programs.³⁵ The memo, which was halted by two federal court judges who heard legal challenges to the rule, was later rescinded by the administration. In one of the judicial opinions, a federal district court judge wrote, “For many, the harms caused by the freeze are non-speculative, impending, and potentially catastrophic.”³⁶

President Trump's actions aimed at the civil service have produced, and will continue to cause, untold ripple effects across departments and agencies which will likely lead to complications, waste and opportunities for abuse. That is why oversight and accountability is needed now more than ever. Yet, within his first week in office, President Trump fired

²⁹ Office of Personnel Management, Memorandum from Acting Director Charles Ezell to Heads and Acting Heads of Departments and Agencies on Guidance on Implementing President Trump's Executive Order, Restoring Accountability To Policy-Influencing Positions Within the Federal Workforce (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/latest-memos/guidance-on-implementing-president-trump-s-executive-order-titled-restoring-accountability-to-policy-influencing-positions-within-the-federal-workforce.pdf>

³⁰ The White House, *Executive Order entitled Hiring Freeze* (Jan. 20, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/hiring-freeze/>.

³¹ Jory Heckman, *VA reinstates job offers to health care hires, but some still in limbo amid hiring freeze*, Federal News Network (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/veterans-affairs/2025/01/va-reinstates-job-offers-to-health-care-hires-but-some-still-in-limbo-amid-hiring-freeze/>.

³² *Id.*

³³ Memorandum from Matthew Vaeth to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, Office of Management and Budget (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25506361-omb-memo-on-federal-aid-freeze/>.

³⁴ Leo Shane III, *VA benefits won't be halted under White House funding freeze order*, Military Times (Jan. 29, 2025), <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2025/01/29/va-benefits-wont-be-halted-under-white-house-funding-freeze-order/>.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ Lindsay Whitehurst, *Judge in nation's capital extends block on Trump administration federal funding freeze*, AP News (Feb. 3, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/trump-federal-grants-loans-funding-freeze-court-1bc457d8e333dd8a8f374572ea33927c>.

inspectors general and members of their staffs across 17 different federal agencies, including VA Inspector General Missal, who members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have lauded for his oversight work during both Democratic and Republican administrations.³⁷

President Trump defended the firing of the inspectors general, saying that “it’s a very common thing to do.”³⁸ That is not the truth. The only precedent for such a mass firing of IGs by an incoming president after the passage of the Inspectors General Act of 1978 was the firing of 15 IGs by President Ronald Reagan in 1981 – an act met by by strong disfavor, which was only eased when President Reagan renominated several of the removed IGs.³⁹

As Hannibal Ware, the Chairperson of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, publicly acknowledged, “IGs are not immune from removal. However, the law must be followed to protect independent government oversight for America.”⁴⁰ Within the last 20 years, Congress has passed two laws with bipartisan support to prevent the precise type of action President Trump just took.⁴¹ The Inspector General Reform Act of 2008, which established a requirement that Congress be notified in writing no later than 30 days before removal or transfer of an IG,⁴² and the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2021, provisions of which became law as part of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, added a requirement that Congress be given a detailed account of the justification for the removal of an inspector general and the inspector general remain in place for 30 days while Congress considers that justification.⁴³

The firings of the IGs by President Trump were made all the more concerning because President Trump failed to follow the law and provide the legally required 30-day notice and case-specific reasons for removal, as Chairman Chuck Grassley and Ranking Member Dick

³⁷ Campaign Legal Center., *The Significance of Firing Inspectors General: Explained* (Jan.31, 2025) <https://campaignlegal.org/update/significance-firing-inspectors-general-explained>; Leo Shane III, VA, *DOD oversight questioned after Trump inspector general firings*, Military Times (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2025/01/27/va-dod-oversight-questioned-after-trump-inspector-general-firings/>; *Fired Inspectors General Raise Alarms as Trump Administration Moves to Finalize Purge*, The New York Times (Jan. 27, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/27/us/politics/trump-inspectors-general-fired.html>); See e.g., VA, *DOD oversight questioned after Trump inspector general firings*, Military Times (Jan. 27, 2025) <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2025/01/27/va-dod-oversight-questioned-after-trump-inspector-general-firings/>; See e.g., House Committee on Veterans Affairs Minority, *Press Release: Ranking Member Takano’s Statement on Trump’s Late-Night Purge of 12 Inspectors General* (Jan. 25, 2025), <https://democrats-veterans.house.gov/news/press-releases/ranking-member-takanos-statement-on-trumps-late-night-purge-of-12-inspectors-general>.

³⁸ Manu Raju, Alayna Treene, Morgan Rimmer and Annie Grayer, *Trump fires inspectors general from more than a dozen federal agencies*, CNN (Jan. 25, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/25/politics/trump-fires-inspectors-general/index.html>.

³⁹ Congressional Research Service, *Removal of Inspectors General: Rules, Practice, and Considerations for Congress* (Updated January 25, 2025) <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11546>.

⁴⁰ Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), *Statement from the Honorable Hannibal Ware, Chairperson of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency* (Jan. 25, 2025) https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/CIGIE%20Statement%20--%201_25_2025.pdf

⁴¹ Roll Call 661 for Bill Number: H. R. 928 Inspector General Reform Act of 2008 (Sept. 27, 2008) <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2008661>; Cosponsors Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2021 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/587/cosponsors>.

⁴² Public Law No: 110-409 (Oct. 14, 2008).

⁴³ Public Law No: 117-263 (Dec. 23, 2022).

Durbin of the Senate Judiciary Committee recently noted in a letter to President Trump.⁴⁴ The fact that these inspectors general appear to have been fired without cause suggests that they may have been fired to stifle oversight of the new administration and raises questions about whether the next inspector general will be a partisan loyalist or simply fired on the president's political whim. Will anyone filling these posts actually conduct robust oversight? How can a federal employee stripped of their employment protections by Trump's executive orders feel comfortable going to a potential Trump loyalist hand-picked to serve as IG to blow the whistle on waste, fraud or abuse? These are important questions that I urge Congress to address.

It is critical that the VA has a permanent IG that has the expertise and institutional knowledge to provide continuity in the oversight work directed at addressing critical long-term challenges at the Department. For instance, the VA Office of Inspector General under Missal, conducted in-depth work reviewing healthcare staffing shortages, patient safety concerns, inadequate clinical care, as well as veterans' suicide risk and prevention.⁴⁵ It is important for veterans and military families that IG oversight in these areas continues unabated. Although VA Deputy IG David Case has been made acting IG, having an acting IG is a far cry from having a properly vetted and Senate-confirmed official serving in that role. As Senator Grassley has noted, permanent IGs are critical because "[e]ven the best acting Inspector General lacks the standing to make lasting changes needed to improve his or her office."⁴⁶ Moreover, an acting IG may not have the experience necessary, nor feel adequately empowered, to take sensitive and problematic issues to the Secretary or Congress as Inspector General Missal did when he confronted then-VA Secretary David Shulkin, in 2018, with allegations of the Secretary's own unethical conduct, including the improper acceptance of gifts and the misuse of agency resources.⁴⁷ Or like Mr. Missal's office did in May 2024 when it issued a report finding that the Biden VA erroneously awarded \$10.8

⁴⁴ Letter from Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley and Ranking Member Dick Durbin to President Donald J. Trump (Jan. 28, 2025), [https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/rep/releases/grassley-durbin-seek-presidential-explanation-for-ig-dissals](https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/rep/releases/grassley-durbin-seek-presidential-explanation-for-ig-dismissals) (citing Pub. L. 117-263 The "President "shall" communicate to Congress in writing 30 days before removing or transferring an IG from office the "substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons" for the removal or transfer).

⁴⁵ See e.g., Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, *Deficiencies in Inpatient Mental Health Suicide Risk Assessment, Mental Health Treatment Coordinator Processes, and Discharge Care Coordination* (Dec. 18, 2024),

<https://www.vaog.gov/reports/national-healthcare-review/deficiencies-inpatient-mental-health-suicide-risk-assessment>; Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, *Inadequate Staff Training and Lack of Oversight Contribute to the Veterans Health Administration's Suicide Risk Screening and Evaluation Deficiencies* (Dec. 18, 2024),

<https://www.vaog.gov/reports/national-healthcare-review/inadequate-staff-training-and-lack-oversight-contribute-veterans>; Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, *Mismanaged Surgical Privileging Actions and Deficient Surgical Service Quality Management Processes at the Hampton VA Medical Center in Virginia* (July 23, 2024),

<https://www.vaog.gov/reports/hotline-healthcare-inspection/mismanaged-surgical-privileging-actions-and-deficient>.

⁴⁶ Andrew Ackerman, *Maloney Named Interim SEC Inspector General*, Wall Street Journal (Jan. 27, 2012), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204573704577187443078314650>.

⁴⁷ Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, *Administrative Investigation – VA Secretary and Delegation Travel to Europe* (Feb. 14, 2018), <https://www.vaog.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2018-02/VAOIG-17-05909-106.pdf>.

million in recruitment and retention bonuses to senior executives, leading to an effort by then-Secretary McDonough to recoup those funds.⁴⁸

To an administration that claims to value monetary efficiency in government, I would argue that firing inspectors general actually hinders efficiency and results in monetary waste. Mr. Missal's ouster certainly did not benefit any veterans or military families. Instead, attacking the IG and the civil service does a disservice to veterans and makes the VA more susceptible to waste, fraud and abuse.

Thank you. I am happy to answer your questions on ways to foster accountability at the VA and ensure our veterans and military families can get the help, care and support they deserve.

⁴⁸ Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, VA Improperly Awarded \$10.8 Million in Incentives to Central Office Senior Executives (May 9, 2024), <https://www.vaoig.gov/reports/administrative-investigation/va-improperly-awarded-108-million-incentives-central-office>; Eric Katz, *Lawmakers blast VA over executive bonus scandal, but secretary declines to offer any heads*, Government Executive (June 4, 2024), <https://www.govexec.com/pay-benefits/2024/06/lawmakers-blast-va-over-executive-bonus-scandal-secretary-declines-offer-any-heads/397095/>.