



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

***Oversight of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General
April 21, 2021***

The Committee on Homeland Security is meeting today to conduct oversight of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General (OIG). Established as part of DHS in 2002, the Inspector General's mission is to provide independent oversight and promote excellence, integrity, and accountability within the Department. Unfortunately, the OIG has faced challenges for some time.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) audited the OIG in 2014 and found it needed to: fill key senior positions, address concerns about integrity and independence, develop a process to protect the identities of those making complaints and improve coordination and information sharing with law enforcement authorities.

In 2017 and 2018, the OIG removed from its website 13 reports that inaccurately painted the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster response efforts in a favorable light. I said at the time that the OIG must fully restore confidence in its work and the Committee would be monitoring its progress. Unfortunately, the hoped-for progress has not been realized. In 2019, Inspector General Cuffari was confirmed. Since then, the Committee has received several complaints from OIG employees about management of the office.

Specifically, employees have alleged that failure to develop, implement, and adhere to management policies has resulted in decisions that are arbitrary, show favoritism or bias, hurt morale, and negatively affect operations. In response to these allegations and continued concerns about the performance of the office, in December 2019 bipartisan leadership of this Committee and the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee asked GAO to review DHS OIG's management and operations.

After a comprehensive audit, GAO issued a draft report last week to the OIG and the Committees on its preliminary findings and made 21 recommendations. GAO concluded that the OIG has not adhered to a number of professional standards and key practices for effective management. For example, GAO found that the OIG has been operating without a strategic plan. Absent such a plan, DHS OIG staff may not understand oversight priorities and goals, which can negatively affect operations and performance.

GAO also found that the OIG did not adhere to professional standards for conducting audits, inspections, and evaluations. The Committee previously raised concerns about the quality of the OIG's reports, notably those issued regarding the deaths of children in Customs and Border Protection custody. The reports did not reflect thorough and accurate reviews of the relevant facts and failed to address critical questions about CBP's ability to care for children in custody.

Moreover, GAO confirmed what the Committee has observed regarding the OIG's average time to issue reports, stating that the OIG's "review timelines for work were protracted and some work products

remained unapproved for months.” For instance, in the Office of Audits, for fiscal year 2017, only 8 of 102 projects took more than 18 months to complete. Later, in fiscal year 2020, over half of projects took more than 18 months to complete.

More troubling, GAO noted the OIG had not taken steps to understand the delays or determine how to address them. Congress and the public depend on the OIG to help detect and prevent fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement of DHS programs, operations, and spending. A report that takes years to release allows problems to persist unchecked. Overall, GAO noted that while the OIG has taken steps to address some of the problems identified in the report, its efforts are incomplete or have only recently been initiated. GAO’s draft report makes clear the OIG must transform its management and operations.

Just yesterday, the Washington Post and Project on Government Oversight published reports that call into question Inspector General Cuffari’s handling of politically sensitive topics. In particular, the reports allege the Inspector General blocked investigations proposed by career OIG staff into the previous administration’s teargassing of protestors in Lafayette Square and the spread of coronavirus among Secret Service personnel. Inspectors general must not shy away from politically sensitive topics or allow political considerations to affect their work. The Committee will be following up on these very troubling allegations.

The Committee expects the OIG to fulfill its mission with independence, integrity, transparency, and accountability. I look forward to hearing today from Director Currie on GAO’s findings and Inspector General Cuffari about his plans to implement GAO’s recommendations and reestablish confidence in the Office of Inspector General. Be assured that the Committee will be watching the OIG’s response to GAO’s report closely in the days ahead.

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