

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper

“Watchdogs Needed: Top Government Investigator Positions Left Unfilled for Years”

June 3, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

I want to thank Chairman Johnson for holding this hearing today to discuss the essential role Inspectors General play in our government. Their work helps us save money, reveal and prosecute wrongdoing, and promote the integrity of government.

Every year, Inspectors General identify tens of billions of dollars in potential savings the federal government can achieve through improved management practices and recovery of improper payments.

I believe that the work of Inspectors General, along with that of Government Accountability Office (GAO), is invaluable to this committee as we work to get better results for less money and reduce the federal deficit. That’s why it is so critical that we have qualified, experienced people in place to fill these roles.

I’ve joined all of my colleagues on this committee in writing the President on several occasions to stress the importance of him providing us with strong nominees to fill these vacant positions. And while it is frustrating that no one from the Administration has responded in writing to those letters, I would note that there are fewer vacancies now than in the past few years.

Of the 72 Inspector General positions, 33 require confirmation. There are seven vacancies in these Senate-confirmed positions.

The good news is that the President has put forth nominees for three of these positions. One of these – the nominee to be Inspector General for the General Services Administration – will be considered by this Committee this month.

The remaining four vacancies include the Department of Veterans Affairs – vacant for a year and a half – and the Department of the Interior – vacant for over five years. This is just unacceptable, so I renew the request all of us have made to the President to send us well-qualified nominees for these jobs.

As my colleagues know, getting Inspectors General and other nominees into their jobs is a shared responsibility – the President nominates and the Senate confirms. The process has become far too slow on both ends, leaving key positions open too long and discouraging good people from serving.

While vacant positions are often filled in the interim by someone in an acting capacity, someone holding a job on a temporary basis is rarely as effective as someone who is Senate-confirmed.

Richard Skinner, the first Senate-confirmed Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security, explained the special authority that comes with Senate confirmation at a hearing this Committee held two years ago. He said:

‘With having acting people in place, what you are doing is running in place.... [Y]ou are not taking those risks necessary as a confirmed IG would to provide oversight... that is absolutely critical to the success of any program.’

I think that is a powerful statement of how Senate confirmation enhances independence. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today as we work together to find ways not just to reduce the number of vacancies in these key positions, but also to ensure they are filled with highly qualified candidates who will help us root out problems and save money for taxpayers.

###