

STATEMENT OF SENATOR RON JOHNSON

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

“The Nomination of Carolyn Lerner to be Special Counsel, Office of Special Counsel”

March 10, 2011

I want to begin by welcoming Ms. Lerner, who I had the pleasure of meeting a few weeks ago, and the family members she brought with her today. The Office of Special Counsel has been without a permanent leader for more than two years now so I am glad we are moving forward on this nomination.

The primary mission of the Office of Special Counsel is to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices. These include, but are not limited to discrimination, nepotism, deception or obstruction of an individual from competing for employment, and threatening or taking personnel action because of whistleblowing. The Office also is responsible for enforcing the Hatch Act, the law that regulates the political activities of federal employees and some state and local government workers.

One of the most important aspects of the Office of Special Counsel is its Disclosure Unit. This serves as a safe conduit for the receipt and evaluation of whistleblower disclosures from federal employees, former employees and applicants for federal employment. Through this secure channel, federal workers are able to disclose information regarding violations of the law, gross mismanagement and the waste of funds.

I want to focus for a moment on mismanagement and waste. We are facing a \$1.6 trillion deficit and addressing waste and mismanagement will be an important step in closing this gap. There is a lengthy GAO report just issued that chronicles vast duplication and inefficiencies across the federal government.

I bring this up because I am willing to bet there are many federal employees aware of waste in their agencies and I want them to feel they can report this without fear of reprisal. To paraphrase the new “If you see something, say something” Department of Homeland Security campaign, if federal workers see waste and mismanagement, I want them to be able to report it.

Ms. Lerner, if confirmed, you will certainly face challenges and I look forward to hearing your vision for the Office of Special Counsel and the steps you will take to implement it.