

May 19, 2016

Senator Ron Johnson  
328 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson:

The Project On Government Oversight is proud to support the inclusion of numerous provisions that promote good and transparent government – through increasing whistleblower protections and strengthening Inspectors General (IG) offices - in your “Bolster Accountability to Drive Government Efficiency and Reform Washington Act.” Founded in 1981, POGO is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that champions good government reforms. POGO’s investigations into corruption, misconduct, and conflicts of interest achieve a more effective, accountable, open, and ethical federal government. Recognizing the vital role that whistleblowers and IGs play, POGO has worked for years to study and improve the legal frameworks for both.

When we initiated our investigation into the Veterans Affairs agency we received the greatest outpouring of whistleblowers we’ve ever had in our 34-year history. In little over a month, nearly 800 current and former VA employees and veterans contacted us. Our investigation made clear that the cultural shift that is required inside the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot be accomplished without legislation that codifies accountability for those who retaliate against whistleblowers. We strongly support your bill’s inclusion of provisions to strengthen penalties for retaliating against whistleblowers and improve training for supervisors. We also support provisions to hold supervisors who retaliate accountable by stopping the practice of rewarding bad behavior through bonus pay to employees who engage in misconduct.

Federal government increasingly depends on contractors to provide a variety of government services. Our investigations into contractor misconduct have found that it is the workers on the front lines who are best suited to identify and expose misconduct, but contract workers are the most vulnerable to termination and the risk of career ending retaliation if they blow the whistle on their employer or contract manager. This is why we are glad to see this legislation extends whistleblower protections to federal civilian contractors.

Offices of Inspectors General (OIG) serve as independent watchdogs within federal agencies and are essential to a well-functioning federal government. We strongly support provisions in this bill to empower IGs to be more effective, independent watchdogs by freeing up their access to information to conduct proper oversight – both through testimonial subpoena power and clarifying the law giving them access to all agency documents. These reforms could not come soon enough, as we have seen the Office of Legal Counsel misinterpret and misapply the law as

written, and swift action is necessary to ensure that future IGs do not face these same hurdles. We are also glad to see your bill requires IGs to compile a comprehensive list of their reporting requirements and to offer suggestions for how they believe these requirements should be improved. This will reduce redundancy in reporting, freeing up IGs to complete more substantive work.

POGO is proud to support the reforms to whistleblower protections and the operations of IG offices across the government included in your bill, and we urge others to do the same.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danielle Brian". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Danielle Brian  
Executive Director