

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2018

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum:

We write to request a funding increase for the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for the remainder of FY2018. The funds would allow the OIG to meet the growing need to address cybersecurity issues, as well as potential ethical lapses, conflicts of interest, waste, fraud, mismanagement, and abuse at DOI.

The OIG has received flat funding or small cuts each year from FY2015 to FY2017. During that time, the number of complaints has increased by 27 percent. In 2008, the OIG opened investigations on 23 percent of complaints received; in 2017 that figure was only 7 percent. The OIG is referring increasing numbers of hotline complaints to the Interior Department, where the investigation suffers from a loss of independence. Because of funding and staffing shortfalls, the OIG in recent months has not taken up investigation requests from Congress and from inside DOI.

The OIG is currently unable to fully address areas of particular risk. Cybersecurity audits by the OIG have found that DOI is not fully prepared to respond to incidents, did not promptly detect or fully analyze security incidents, did not contain or fully eradicate cyber threats, and did not continuously improve its incident response capabilities.

Similarly, DOI has issued more than \$10 billion in contracts and financial assistance in FY2017. The OIG's ability to audit that spending has decreased, resulting in a 16 percent drop in audits in the last three years.

March 1 will mark the end of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's first year in office. Secretary Zinke is under investigation for threatening Alaska's senators over Sen. Lisa Murkowski's health care vote; multiple instances of personal and political travel using taxpayer funds for exorbitant flights; and potentially retaliatory or purge-related reassignments of large numbers of executive staff.

Our committee has sent dozens of document and information requests to the Secretary and the Department to learn more about how major policy decisions are being made. Not a single letter

has produced a substantial response. The Secretary has similarly rebuffed oversight efforts from the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

Several high-ranking DOI political appointees were lobbyists for or employees of the industries they now regulate. The complicated financial interests and lack of previous public-sector experience characteristic of many serving in the Trump administration create a challenging environment for ethical watchdogs at Interior and across the executive branch. In this environment, a fully staffed and funded Office of Inspector General is more crucial than ever. OIG staff are hard-working and dedicated to their mission, but they cannot perform their duties to the American people without adequate resources.

According to the Partnership for Public Service, the OIG has a 20:1 return on investment. As you face the difficult task of assembling a funding package for DOI for the remainder of FY2018, we urge you to consider the generous returns in government efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency that would accompany a sufficient increase in funding for the OIG.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



A. Donald McEachin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations