



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

April 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, Schumer, and McCarthy:

A well-lit house is one that burglars will pass by. The \$2.2 trillion in COVID-19 response funding is meant to stabilize the economy while also responding to the health care demands created by the pandemic. But without independent oversight of the funds, and given the broad flexibility provisions contained in the CARES Act, the risk of mismanagement, fraud and abuse is pervasive. Government must keep the lights on because every dollar is at risk.

This bipartisan [task force](#)—former members of Congress, cabinet and executive branch officials, inspectors general, and senior congressional staff—is gravely concerned with the status of oversight of these taxpayer dollars. As such, we support the multiple accountability mechanisms included in the CARES Act. *Those with the greatest potential for reducing and uncovering waste, fraud, and abuse—ones involving inspectors general—require immediate action and ongoing vigilance.*

Americans have little tolerance for corruption or seeing tax dollars misspent, and inspectors general (IGs) are one of the most effective tools for accountability in government. IGs have existed in some form or another since the early days of the Republic. Whether or not the public is always aware of their efforts, the government's 73 federal IGs identify [billions of dollars](#) in savings each year and make thousands of recommendations for improving the running of the government. For every dollar spent on IGs, twenty-two dollars are saved.

The IGs may not be household names, but many of the scandals and wrongdoers they have helped uncover and bring to justice are well known:

- \$2 billion dollar [health care fraud](#) involving illegal opioid dosages
- General Services Administration spending on [conferences](#)
- Lobbyist [Jack Abramoff's](#) illegal schemes involving a U.S. Representative and Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior
- The doping scandal of Olympic athlete [Lance Armstrong](#)

Perhaps more important than what IGs can uncover after the fact is what they can prevent. Relevant to the current moment, the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—smaller but not unlike the \$2 trillion CARES Act—created a board of IGs to prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse. It was an [immensely successful](#) effort, the real benefit of which might have been "...[the fraud that never happened because of enhanced scrutiny.](#)"

Inspectors general must be able to do their jobs independently and without politically motivated intervention or meddling. Given recent developments, the robust accountability regime built into the CARES Act will only be effective if certain actions are taken:

- **IGs will need unfettered access to agency information and data related to the CARES Act.** In the past IG offices have been stymied by executive branch officials in obtaining information and data necessary to complete their work. Congress must be notified when these instances occur and be willing to apply pressure, through the appropriations process or otherwise, to gain compliance.
- **The Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery must be able to communicate freely with Congress,** regardless of executive branch directives to the contrary. All IGs have an expectation of communicating openly with Congress and it should be no different for this special inspector general.
- **Congressional committees should call relevant IGs before their committee for oversight hearings related to administration of the CARES Act.** The relationship between Congress and the IGs is critical for ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent properly and Congress's intentions are adhered to. We believe Congress does not call IGs as witnesses often enough given the value they could provide. In addition to briefings, committees should consider regular, bipartisan briefings with IGs to keep abreast of ongoing matters and developments.
- **Congress should consult with IGs before requesting or mandating them to engage in investigations, audits, or other lines of work.** This consultation will ensure that work is properly prioritized and requests are clear and actionable.
- Once officially nominated, **the Senate should move quickly to consider the president's nominee for the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery position.** Given Congress's unsettled schedule and work plans amid the pandemic, this may be especially challenging but it is an immediate priority. Significant funds have already been expended and oversight is necessary.
- **The Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery and other IGs may need emergency hiring authority** to marshal the response necessary to bring accountability to this historic moment.
- **House and Senate committees should conduct an inquiry and, if appropriate, hold hearings regarding the replacement of Mr. Glenn Fine as Acting Inspector General for the Department of Defense.** This action effectively sidelined Mr. Fine from his then-recently announced selection to head the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) overseeing the government-wide response.

This task force knows and respects Mr. Fine and his work. While the president may have had the authority to name a permanent replacement for the long vacant DOD IG position, the timing raises questions about the motivation for such an action. The nascent PRAC needs permanent and steady leadership. **We believe Mr. Fine's successor as chair of the PRAC should be a permanent, already Senate-confirmed IG** to ensure that is the case going forward.

Additional measures may be necessary to support oversight of the response to COVID-19. For instance, the Government Accountability Office (GAO)—another important pillar in the government's oversight infrastructure—received \$20 million in supplemental funding in the CARES Act to conduct oversight. This task force, however, understands GAO may need approximately \$95 million in supplemental funding—a \$75 million plus up from the original amount allocated— to provide the level of oversight Congress expects. Similarly, individual IG

offices and the PRAC may need additional surge funding as well. Every dollar invested in independent oversight—on IGs and GAO—is a dollar well spent.

Support in Congress for the independent oversight of inspectors general is historically bipartisan. The 1978 statute establishing widespread IG oversight in government passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, as did the Inspector General Reform Act of 2008 and the Inspector General Empowerment Act of 2016. As Republicans and Democrats who have worked with IGs both on Capitol Hill and in the executive branch, we know their work to be non-partisan and trustworthy. That is why we urge you to take these steps to ensure they can do their job.

The integrity of the stimulus effort is paramount, and the only way to ensure proper administration is through robust and independent oversight that can root out waste, fraud, and abuse. Many of the recommendations outlined above mirror bipartisan [proposals](#) we made in 2018 for improving the work of IGs. They are still relevant to today's circumstances.

Americans expect that the stimulus and COVID-19 response will be administered fairly and efficiently. Each of the \$2 trillion is a potential target for fraud or corruption. The recommendations contained in this letter can foster the honesty and integrity this moment deserves.

Sincerely,

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CC:

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