



**COUNCIL OF THE INSPECTORS GENERAL
ON INTEGRITY AND EFFICIENCY**
INTEGRITY COMMITTEE

November 1, 2023

Via Email

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6250

The Honorable Rand Paul
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and
Government Affairs

The Honorable James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and
Accountability
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6143

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Accountability

Closure of Integrity Committee Case 23-099

Dear Chairpersons and Ranking Members:

The Integrity Committee (IC) of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency reviewed allegations of wrongdoing referred by Ranking Member Jamie Raskin on August 7, 2023, involving Mr. Sean O'Donnell, Inspector General (IG) of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General (EPA OIG).

In his letter to the IC, Ranking Member Raskin alleged that IG O'Donnell may have abused his authority, wasted government funds, created a hostile work environment, and executed his duties in a manner that suggests he lacks the independence and integrity required of an IG. Specifically, that (1) IG O'Donnell who reportedly wears a collegiate ring from Texas A&M University, stated during a meeting with senior EPA OIG staff that the ring "got him into the bedroom" with women; (2) that he allegedly told staff that white males are the minority in the OIG and that one OIG hiring official did not want to hire white men, and introduced a staff member from West Virginia stating, "at least they can read and write;" (3) that IG O'Donnell expressed viewpoints that indicated a partisan predisposition, including that he was close with the Trump White House and John McEntee, personal aide to former President Trump and Director of the White House Office of Presidential Personnel; (4) that he expressed concerns

about a draft EPA OIG report because the former EPA Administrator, appointed under former President Trump, “didn’t like” the report and that he significantly delayed the issuance of the report and sought to minimize its results and findings; and (5) that IG O’Donnell held a three-day symposium at a resort in Orlando, requiring between 250 and 300 EPA OIG employees to fly to the location, extending the three-day event by two additional days to accommodate travel and averaging costs of approximately \$1,500 for each attendee.

The IC is charged with receiving, reviewing, and investigating, where appropriate, allegations of misconduct made against IGs and designated members of an IG's staff (Covered Persons). The IC takes action on allegations of wrongdoing that involve abuse of authority in the exercise of official duties or while acting under color of office; substantial misconduct, such as gross mismanagement, gross waste of funds, or a substantial violation of law, rule, or regulation; or conduct that undermines the independence or integrity reasonably expected of such persons.¹

Moreover, with respect to an allegation of wrongdoing made by a member of Congress that is closed by the IC without referral to the IC Chairperson for investigation, the IC Chairperson shall, not later than 60 days after closing the allegation of wrongdoing, provide a written description of the nature of the allegation of wrongdoing and how the Integrity Committee evaluated the allegation of wrongdoing to the Chair and Ranking Minority Member of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate and the Chair and Ranking Minority Member of the Committee on Oversight and Reform of the House of Representatives.²

On September 8, 2023, the IC asked IG O’Donnell to respond to allegations (1) through (4).³ On September 28, 2023, IG O’Donnell submitted a five-page response denying the allegations against him and expressing concerns that for the past twelve months he has been asked to “respond to numerous accusations that were spurious and baseless.” For allegation (1), IG O’Donnell said that he “never stated, ‘during a meeting with senior staff in the EPA Office of Inspector General (OIG)’ or anywhere else, that my ‘Texas A&M University ring’ or anything else ‘got [me] into the bedroom with women.’ Furthermore, I have never used the phrase or heard anyone else use the phrase “getting into the bedroom with women” before the Integrity Committee shared it with me.

In response to allegation (2), IG O’Donnell stated that, under his leadership, the EPA OIG “is a diverse office... [that] assiduously adhere[s] to the principles associated with equal employment.” IG O’Donnell said when he first joined the EPA OIG, there was one woman in a senior leadership position or in the front office and now the OIG has at least five, including women in the positions of Deputy IG and Chief of Staff. Furthermore, he asserted he knew of “no circumstance where any OIG hiring official considered race or gender in making a hiring

¹ Integrity Committee Policies and Procedures – 2018 (ICP&P), section 7.A.

² 5 U.S.C. § 424(d)(5)(iii).

³ The IC previously addressed allegation (5) in IC case 23-058. The IC provided its evaluation and determination of the allegation to the Chair and Ranking Minority Member of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate and the Chair and Ranking Minority Member of the Committee on Oversight and Reform of the House of Representatives on September 8, 2023.

decision” and if that had occurred, he “would have addressed the matter swiftly.” Regarding the alleged statement about an OIG employee from West Virginia, IG O’Donnell said “West Virginia is a great state that I enjoy visiting whenever I can. I have not made offensive or inappropriate comments about staff members from West Virginia.”

Regarding allegation (3), IG O’Donnell denied knowing John McEntee or ever meeting or speaking to anyone named John McEntee; therefore, “there is no occasion, let alone several, where I would discuss being close to someone I don’t even know exists.” IG O’Donnell also denied stating that he was close with the Trump White House and said his work as the EPA IG “and as the acting IG at the DoD, including public statements, absolutely belie this accusation.”

Finally, IG O’Donnell denied allegation (4), telling the IC that he makes it “clear to [his] staff that [he] expect[s] reports to be timely, relevant, and well written” and that the EPA OIG will “not negotiate or otherwise weaken the recommendations” in their reports. IG O’Donnell believed the only report that former Administrator Wheeler objected to was a Management Alert, issued on March 31, 2020, on ethylene-oxide emitting facilities. IG O’Donnell said former Administrator Wheeler called him the night before and demanded that he refrain from issuing the report, he refused, and the next day, former Administrator Wheeler issued a press release denouncing the report.⁴ IG O’Donnell thought the Management Alert had been delayed prior to his arrival due to discussions with the Agency, but noted the OIG issued the report approximately two months after he became the IG.

After thoroughly reviewing the allegations, IG O’Donnell’s response, and the supporting information provided, the IC determined, pursuant to Integrity Committee Policies and Procedures – 2018, paragraph 7.C., that IG O’Donnell’s response sufficiently addressed these allegations and further investigation is not warranted; therefore, the IC will take no additional action on this matter at this time. The IC separately notified Ranking Member Raskin of its determination, which was made solely pursuant to the IC’s authorities and is not binding on any collateral or other proceeding, on November 1, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas A. Monheim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" being the most prominent part.

Thomas A. Monheim⁵
Vice Chairperson
Integrity Committee

⁴ IG O’Donnell provided a link to a news article covering the dispute: <https://www.eenews.net/articles/wheeler-to-ig-take-back-report-critical-of-agency/>

⁵ IC Chairperson Kevin H. Winters was recused from this matter and did not participate in the IC’s deliberations.