

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

April 10, 2017

The Honorable Hubert T. Bell
Inspector General
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Mr. Bell:

We write to request information regarding the urgent and serious matter of resources and funding for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) Office of Inspector General. On March 16, 2017, President Trump released his budget blueprint for fiscal year 2018.¹ The budget blueprint eviscerates programs and services that help hardworking Americans, including the elimination of long-standing federal government programs to assist low-income Americans, fund important scientific research, and help protect human health and the environment.

On April 7, 2017, *Politico* reported that high-ranking officials in the Trump White House hold millions in energy company stocks, including Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Kinder Morgan, BP, Halliburton, Marathon Petroleum, and Energy Transfer Partners LP.² *Politico* further reported some White House aides hold shares in energy companies in China, India, and Russia.³ If true, the allegations in the *Politico* report raise serious concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest and suggest that Trump White House aides may be required to divest from these holdings or recuse themselves from energy policy decisions.⁴

Reports of potential conflicts of interest in the Trump administration underscore the need for robust and effective inspectors general. By eliminating funding for federal agencies, President Trump's budget also threatens to undermine the important work of inspectors general. The 1978 Inspector General Act established independent inspectors general to conduct and

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supervise audits and investigations, to prevent and detect fraud and abuse, and to provide a means for keeping Congress and each agency head fully and currently informed about problems and deficiencies related to agency actions.⁵

Since then, inspectors general have exposed thousands of cases of wrongdoing through audits, evaluations, and investigations of agency programs. Inspectors general also continue to provide important updates to Congress on a wide range of topics. There is wide bipartisan support for these critical independent monitors, but inspectors general must have adequate resources in order to provide effective scrutiny.

In addition to the challenges posed by potential budget reductions, the civilian hiring freeze also threatens to undermine the effectiveness of inspectors general in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities to Congress and agencies. On January 31, 2017, the Acting Directors of the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management issued guidance to departments and agencies.⁶ Although this memorandum provides for exemptions to the hiring freeze, it is uncertain whether positions within offices of inspectors general qualify for such an exemption. Clearly, inspectors general require sufficient personnel in order to fulfill their important responsibilities. Additional guidance to inspectors general is necessary as to whether positions can be filled pursuant to an exemption to the hiring freeze.

The Committee has a longstanding interest in ensuring that government operates in an open and transparent manner. While we understand that difficult fiscal choices must be made, agency inspectors general are one of the federal government's best resources for reducing fraud, waste, and abuse, and actually saving taxpayer dollars. We request responses to the following questions:

1. How would budget cuts impact the ability of the NRC Office of Inspector General to conduct audits, evaluations, and investigations?
2. Have you initiated, or are you planning to initiate, a hiring freeze, reduction in force, or any other actions that may reduce your available staffing levels?
3. What changes have you made or are you planning to make to your fiscal year 2017 and 2018 Work Plans because of reduced budget resources?

⁵ 5 U.S.C. Appx. § 2.

⁶ U.S. Office of Management and Budget and U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Memorandum for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies* (Jan. 2017) (www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/M-17-18-Federal-Civilian-Hiring-Freeze.pdf).

The Honorable Hubert T. Bell

April 10, 2017

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Please respond to this inquiry as soon as possible but no later than April 24, 2017. Thank you for your assistance with this request. Should you have any questions, please contact Jon Monger with the Minority Committee Staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Pallone, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Frank Pallone, Jr.

Ranking Member

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April 10, 2017

The Honorable Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Levinson:

We write to request information regarding the urgent and serious matter of resources and funding for the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Inspector General. On March 16, 2017, President Trump released his budget blueprint for fiscal year 2018.¹ The budget blueprint eviscerates programs and services that help hardworking Americans, including the elimination of long-standing federal government programs to assist low-income Americans, fund important scientific research, and help protect human health and the environment.

On April 7, 2017, *Politico* reported that high-ranking officials in the Trump White House hold millions in energy company stocks, including Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Kinder Morgan, BP, Halliburton, Marathon Petroleum, and Energy Transfer Partners LP.² *Politico* further reported some White House aides hold shares in energy companies in China, India, and Russia.³ If true, the allegations in the *Politico* report raise serious concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest and suggest that Trump White House aides may be required to divest from these holdings or recuse themselves from energy policy decisions.⁴

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1. How would budget cuts impact the ability of the HHS Office of Inspector General to conduct audits, evaluations, and investigations?
2. Have you initiated, or are you planning to initiate, a hiring freeze, reduction in force, or any other actions that may reduce your available staffing levels?
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April 10, 2017

Ms. April Stephenson
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Ms. Stephenson:

We write to request information regarding the urgent and serious matter of resources and funding for the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Inspector General. On March 16, 2017, President Trump released his budget blueprint for fiscal year 2018.¹ The budget blueprint eviscerates programs and services that help hardworking Americans, including the elimination of long-standing federal government programs to assist low-income Americans, fund important scientific research, and help protect human health and the environment.

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Ms. April Stephenson

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April 10, 2017

The Honorable Peggy Gustafson
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Gustafson:

We write to request information regarding the urgent and serious matter of resources and funding for the Department of Commerce's (DOC) Office of Inspector General. On March 16, 2017, President Trump released his budget blueprint for fiscal year 2018.¹ The budget blueprint eviscerates programs and services that help hardworking Americans, including the elimination of long-standing federal government programs to assist low-income Americans, fund important scientific research, and help protect human health and the environment.

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April 10, 2017

The Honorable Arthur A. Elkins, Jr.
Inspector General
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Mr. Elkins:

We write to request information regarding the urgent and serious matter of resources and funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Inspector General. On March 16, 2017, President Trump released his budget blueprint for fiscal year 2018.¹ The budget blueprint eviscerates programs and services that help hardworking Americans, including the elimination of long-standing federal government programs to assist low-income Americans, fund important scientific research, and help protect human health and the environment.

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2. Have you initiated, or are you planning to initiate, a hiring freeze, reduction in force, or any other actions that may reduce your available staffing levels?
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The Honorable Arthur A. Elkins, Jr.

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