

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 5, 2015

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We call on you to nominate, without delay, a qualified, experienced, and dedicated individual of high character and integrity to serve as the Commerce Department's permanent Inspector General. As you know, the Inspector General for the Department of Commerce resigned on June 4, 2015, and the current acting Inspector General was appointed on June 8, 2015. We are concerned that a long vacancy at this position will hinder the mission of the Office of Inspector General, which is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department's programs and operations as well as to detect and deter waste, fraud, and abuse.

Recently, a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing entitled, "Watchdogs Needed: Top Government Investigator Positions Left Unfilled for Years," highlighted the fact that a sustained absence of a permanent, Senate-confirmed Inspector General at an agency creates the potential for conflicts of interest, diminishes independent oversight, and causes instability within the ranks of the Inspector General's office. In the case of the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General (OIG), past management concerns and reported morale issues within the office further underscore the importance of having the Senate confirm a new Inspector General.

Furthermore, while we appreciate the willingness of the acting Inspector General to manage the office on an interim basis, it has come to our attention that he recently recused himself from matters concerning the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet). Oversight of FirstNet is one of the most important priorities for the OIG and the Commerce Committee, as was evidenced at a Commerce Committee hearing earlier this year. We are therefore concerned that this recusal will result in insufficient focus on ensuring that the FirstNet organization has strengthened its project and contract management processes and guaranteeing good stewardship of taxpayer funds. This development provides additional impetus for a permanent Inspector General to be nominated as soon as possible.

We will conduct a prompt and thorough vetting of any nominee to be the permanent Inspector General for the Department of Commerce. Senate confirmation of a qualified candidate will bolster confidence in Congress and among the public in the ability of the OIG to act independently and produce credible investigations and audits. For these reasons, we urge you to nominate a permanent Inspector General for the Department of Commerce as soon as possible.

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We are committed to working to ensure your nominee receives full and fair consideration in Committee and by the full Senate.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation



RON JOHNSON
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

cc: The Honorable Penny Pritzker, Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs