

Congress of the United States House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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March 31, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I want to bring to your attention a matter of great concern and some urgency. This concern relates to allegations of misconduct and mismanagement by Department of Commerce Inspector General Todd Zinser. As I related in a March 26, 2015 speech to the House of Representatives, I have determined, through a bipartisan investigative effort, that the allegations of misconduct and mismanagement by Mr. Zinser are substantially supported by the evidence Congress has uncovered. Specifically, the following findings are highlighted in the attached speech:

- During his Senate confirmation for the Commerce IG post, Mr. Zinser failed to disclose a significant case against him involving his personal retaliation against a whistleblower;
- Over a period of many years, Mr. Zinser and his closest staff have engaged in efforts to identify and retaliate against whistleblowers in his office;
- Mr. Zinser has repeatedly misled the Congress about his conduct, and took steps to obstruct the Committee's investigation into allegations of misconduct;
- Mr. Zinser has been disingenuous in his official correspondence with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) regarding inappropriate hiring in his office;
- Mr. Zinser has failed to conduct himself by ethical standards expected of an Inspector General;
- Mr. Zinser has engaged in inappropriate hiring practices that undermine the integrity of federal hiring; and,
- Mr. Zinser has failed to establish policies and procedures in his office that would guarantee accountability and efficiency.

Inspectors General (IGs) stand at the forefront of the accountability community. They share a mandate to insure that agencies work with efficiency and effectiveness in spending taxpayer dollars, and carry out that work following the letter and spirit of laws and regulations. It is imperative that IGs themselves show respect for the law and be models of integrity in their own conduct. When IGs compromise their standing, the work of the IGs' offices are invariably tainted with a sense of hypocrisy and mistrust, producing cynicism among those who work for the government and disrespect for the government among the broader public.

As you can see from my extended remarks, there is ample evidence of misconduct and mismanagement by IG Todd Zinser. Based on this evidence, I believe that Mr. Zinser is no longer fit to serve as an Inspector General.

As you know, federal IGs serve at the pleasure of the President, and the IG Act makes clear the President may remove them from office. I am convinced that in order to establish an effective and ethically sound office a wholesale change in the top leadership of the Commerce Office of Inspector General is critically needed. I call on you to remove Mr. Zinser from office immediately and to take such other steps as are necessary to appoint qualified senior leadership with high ethical principles to lead the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General. I stand ready to support you in efforts to rebuild that office, reviving a sense of public service and accountability in the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eddie Bernice Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science, Space & Technology