

UNCLASSIFIED

Statement for the Record
Hearing on the Effectiveness of the
Intelligence Community's Inspector
General (Closed)

House Permanent Select
Committee on Intelligence



The Honorable Christopher R. Fox
Intelligence Community
Inspector General

24 June 2026

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Chairman Crawford, Ranking Member Himes, distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the effectiveness of the Intelligence Community's Inspector General.

This hearing is about whether secret power in our constitutional republic can still be made answerable to law.

It is about whether the most capable intelligence apparatus in the history of the world can be both feared by our adversaries and trusted by our citizens.

It is about whether inspectors general and the congressional intelligence committees can learn the truth in time to act, or whether intelligence oversight will be reduced to a ritual performed after the damage is done.

President John F. Kennedy once said, "The very word 'secrecy' is repugnant in a free and open society." He understood that power operating in darkness must still answer to the citizens and their representatives. "Nevertheless," he added, "every democracy recognizes the necessary restraints of national security." That is the promise and challenge of self-government. It is also the grave responsibility we face today.

I believe deeply in the Intelligence Community (IC), and that sensitive information must be protected. I believe in aggressive collection, rigorous analysis, bold covert action, and the operational audacity that neutralizes threats before they reach our Homeland. Americans expect the IC to prevent the next Pearl Harbor or September 11th. Our future generations depend on an IC capable of helping to prevent, or win, World War III before it begins.

However, I believe with equal conviction that the lack of meaningful and independent oversight of intelligence activities has become one of the most significant national security risks facing the United States.

Secret power, left unchecked, develops its own ends that may not align with America's interests. It rewards concealment, punishes inconvenient truth, and elevates process over judgment. It gives ambitious people incentives to elevate agency equities and personal advancement over the national interest.

The most pervasive problem we face in our oversight mission is agentic tribalism.

Many career intelligence officers confuse loyalty to mission with loyalty to faction. They treat oversight not as a legal obligation, but as an intrusion to be managed, slow-rolled, or out-maneuvered. Officers arrive at interagency meetings wearing metaphorical agency jerseys. Agencies cite their "equities" or invoke lengthy processes when delay serves their purpose.

Collectively, these tactics can stretch a weeks-long investigation into months or years. IC OIG is not able to look directly under the hood, because IC elements control access to their own systems, personnel, and records. We routinely encounter blunt "delay, deter, deny" tactics. Feigned ambiguity or confusion is also used as shield.

Our authorizing statute, 50 U.S.C. § 3033, provides IC OIG direct access to the information, individuals, and facilities necessary to perform our work and makes clear that classification or compartmentation cannot, by itself, deny that access. This is part of the essential legal architecture for a constitutional republic operating a classified enterprise. Without enforcement, however, the law is merely ornamental.

The central question is whether IC OIG can reveal the truth before it is destroyed or its value lost. I will provide the Committee with some examples of our investigative limitations based on just recent cases.

In February 2023, IC OIG learned that an IC employee had purchased illegal firearm components from a Chinese company. Without law enforcement authority, our investigators could not act directly. They waited 19 months for the Department of Justice (DOJ) to decline prosecution. During this time, the employee maintained their position and clearance. Coincidentally, the employee was detained by customs for suspicious activity on a trip to Israel, at which time the illegal items were discovered.

In June 2021, an IC contractor searched 159 individuals' security profiles without authorization. Information included personal history, foreign national contacts, and other information of value to a foreign intelligence service for spotting and assessing potential recruitment targets. IC OIG was required to wait 16 months for coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) before conducting the initial subject interview. It took another 15 months for the contractor's removal from the IC.

In March 2021, IC OIG opened an investigation into a former senior IC official for violations involving post-employment communication with IC employees. The former official began working for a large IC contractor and engaged in direct communications with current IC employees to influence the awarding of contracts worth tens of millions of dollars. Unable to compel testimony, IC OIG investigators faced delays in coordinating with DOJ for an initial subject interview. The former official was interviewed for the first time in December 2024—more than three years after the investigation was opened. At present, a civil settlement through DOJ is imminent.

These three cases are not isolated incidents. The FBI is an essential partner, yet its agents are limited by unfamiliarity with IC compartments, unacknowledged programs, agency cultures, and other nuances to intelligence oversight. IC OIG, on the other hand, lacks officers with criminal investigative training and experience to ensure cases are handled in a manner that makes them prosecutable. Consequently, actionable criminal conduct is often handled only through administrative investigations.

The proposed Intelligence Community Inspector General Parity Act would close this longstanding gap by giving IC OIG a team of criminal investigators with law enforcement authority who can preserve evidence, compel testimony, and properly investigate crime and misconduct. Instead of relying on agencies to adhere to an oversight honor system, the IC IG Parity Act will deliver genuine accountability in the IC for the first time.

History warns of what happens when secrecy, weak oversight, and institutional self-protection converge. The Church Committee from 1975 to 1976 exposed a pattern of misconduct that had persisted for years outside meaningful scrutiny: MK ULTRA's human experimentation, CIA assassination planning, COINTELPRO's targeting of Americans, and National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance programs that swept in communications involving U.S. persons.

Decades later, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's (SSCI) study of enhanced interrogation revealed a similar institutional failure. SSCI staff found that certain interrogation techniques were ineffective, abusive, and misrepresented to policymakers and Congress. The episode also exposed serious friction between CIA and congressional oversight, including allegations that CIA personnel improperly accessed Senate committee computer systems during the SSCI review.

An empowered IC IG with law enforcement authority could have served as the missing institutional safeguard in earlier eras of intelligence abuse. It could have identified misconduct sooner, preserved evidence, protected whistleblowers, and forced accountability before public hearings became the only remaining remedy. Just as important, it would have changed the incentives.

The point is not merely to punish misconduct after the fact. It is to deter misconduct before it becomes policy, practice, or culture. Without that check, the pattern repeats: secrecy shields misconduct, institutional self-protection delays exposure, and Congress is left to reconstruct the truth.

That problem has not disappeared in 2026. Even after President Trump campaigned on IC reform and installed new leadership across the national security enterprise, officials at various levels have continued to tolerate, rationalize, or participate in a conduct that undermines accountability.

The risk of secrecy protecting corruption is why the IC IG plays a unique role in “urgent concern” matters under the Intelligence Community Whistleblower Protection Act (ICWPA). Congress understood that allegations involving classified information are different. Cleared individuals need a lawful channel to report serious problems without making unauthorized disclosures, and without entrusting their careers to the very institutions they may need to report on. That channel must be trusted.

Over the past five fiscal years, IC OIG received 52 urgent concern complaints under the ICWPA. At the start of my tenure, we reviewed IC OIG’s handling of those matters and found systemic delays and coordination problems that undermine the purpose of the statute. These complaints often involve serious allegations, sensitive intelligence equities, and potential retaliation. When IC OIG cannot obtain timely access to relevant information, the problem directly impairs the IC IG’s ability to make an informed determination of urgency and credibility within the 14-day review period.

One recent matter illustrates the problem.

In October 2025, a private citizen approached an ODNI component with allegations of criminal activity by an individual whom the citizen believed was an employee of another IC element. The citizen also indicated that the allegations would be publicly released in a news article. ODNI personnel confirmed the agency affiliation of the subject and informed the ODNI Front Office, which properly notified the other IC element’s Front Office by telephone. A draft classified memorandum was prepared by the ODNI component to formalize the notification, and the draft memorandum was shared with the IC element’s leadership in good faith for situational awareness.

What followed went far outside the bounds of routine coordination. The unsigned draft memorandum was disseminated well beyond the intended channel, including to at least three other U.S. Government entities. Ultimately, the contents of the draft, unsigned memorandum were leaked to the media and published.

The IC element's security office opened an investigation exclusively into the ODNI personnel who initially handled the information, without any coordination with ODNI's Office of Counterintelligence and Security as required. Months later, the IC element's investigators demanded interviews with several ODNI employees. Officials from the IC element later admitted to my team that they knew their agency lacked authority to conduct unilateral investigations of ODNI employees, detailees, and contractors.

In January 2026, I received an urgent concern complaint relating to the IC element's handling of this matter and their investigative activities. To perform the required review under the ICWPA, I requested all records of investigative activity concerning the ODNI personnel at issue from multiple components of the IC element, including their OIG. Unbeknownst to me, the IC element's OIG had initiated their own preliminary review of the same matter without any coordination or deconfliction with my Office. Days later, when one of my investigators asked whether that OIG had any reviews or investigations relating to the named ODNI personnel or the underlying matter, the response was that they were unaware of any "responsive documents"—even though that OIG's review was already eight days underway.

When I was required by law to make a determination on the urgency and apparent credibility of this ICWPA complaint on the 14th day, I was not confident that our investigative team had obtained the necessary evidence for an informed decision.

This was not a minor paperwork dispute. It was a textbook demonstration of the cultural resistance and institutional self-protection Congress established the IC IG to confront. When oversight requests are repeatedly met with obstruction and internal processes are routinely weaponized to control the narrative rather than illuminate the facts, this indicates an urgent need for policy change. A stronger IC IG with real investigative authority and enforceable access would make such games far riskier, and far less common.

That is agentic tribalism in practice. It is the reflex of a system that too often treats oversight as a threat, cooperation as optional, and statutory transparency as something to be managed rather than obeyed.

The IC is too powerful to allow procedural friction and trust without verification. The IC IG must have explicit powers to inspect all systems without exceptions for novel technologies, classifications, compartments, political sensitivity, or any other excuse. For decades, a passive culture among inspectors general has failed to fill critical oversight gaps with the necessary speed and teeth. Those gaps led to the creation of alternative mechanisms such as the Department of Government Efficiency and ODNI's Director's Initiative Group.

The IC IG oversees 18 intelligence elements and more than 40 Federal Intelligence Coordination Offices, yet operates with a fraction of the staff and none of the criminal investigative authority possessed by peer IGs at the Departments of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, and Department of Justice.

During the most recent six-month reporting period, despite severe resource constraints, I am proud to share that IC OIG completed 11 investigations, conducted eight preliminary reviews, issued five audit and inspection reports with 30 recommendations, handled 1,177 new Hotline contacts. We also processed seven urgent concern complaints, handled five External Review Panel requests, made 134 referrals to other agencies, and recovered \$58,757 in government funds.

Due to our staffing, we triage because we must. Nonetheless, we currently have more than 30 open investigations, including five joint criminal and administrative investigations with other OIGs and law enforcement agencies.

I sincerely believe that genuine oversight does not weaken the IC. It acknowledges the extraordinary power the IC holds and the trust it requires. I strongly encourage the Congress to provide the IC IG with the authorities that 25 other Inspectors General already possess. Every case described today would resolve faster with these tools.

The Intelligence Community deserves an IG with authorities and resources for real oversight. Congress deserves timely, accurate information. Whistleblowers deserve protection. The American people deserve confidence that our national intelligence enterprise remains accountable to the rule of law.

That is the standard this moment demands.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.