

Written Testimony of

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Government Spending to Light.”**



Madam Chair Ernst, Ranking Member Markey, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on transparency and reducing government spending.

My name is Joshua Miller, and I serve as Director of Congress Watch at Public Citizen, where our work focuses on strengthening government accountability, exposing corruption, and ensuring that federal programs serve the public interest. Public Citizen is a national public interest organization with more than 1 million members and supporters. I am very glad to be here to testify and discuss some of the issues they are concerned about.

I am excited to testify here as I have fond memories of working with this Committee in my previous role, advocating on behalf of small businesses at one of the nation's leading Community Development Financial Institutions. In that role, I worked with members of Congress and federal agencies to expand access to responsible capital for entrepreneurs nationwide, particularly during the Paycheck Protection Program's implementation.

Earlier in my career, I served in investigative and legislative roles at the Government Accountability Office and within several Offices of Inspectors General across the federal government. In those roles, I worked with Congress on oversight of housing assistance programs and evaluated enforcement regimes tied to sanctions violations and anti-money laundering laws. I also supported investigations involving white-collar criminal activity and helped facilitate the data necessary to identify missing and exploited children and violent fugitive offenders.

Finally, I come to this issue as a political scientist who studies presidential power and the institutions that make our government work most effectively. My academic work examines how executive power expands or contracts depending on the strength of oversight institutions and Congress's willingness to enforce accountability. All of these experiences shape the testimony I offer today on transparency and government spending.

Scrutiny of government spending is essential, but not merely to preserve taxpayer dollars. Fraud, waste, and abuse often serve as early warning signs of deeper corruption and institutional failures within government. When oversight institutions are weakened, the consequences extend far beyond financial losses. Weak oversight can endanger public health, compromise national security, undermine consumer protection, and erode public trust in democratic institutions. Unfortunately, the President and his cabinet officials have engaged in practices that not only waste government spending, but also put

I. Unlawful Firing of Inspector Generals ¹

Since taking office in his second term, the President has taken the unprecedented step of firing seventeen Inspectors General, representing 65 percent of presidentially appointed IGs, dismantling critical oversight of government fraud, waste, and abuse. These dismissals occurred with little explanation and, in many cases, without the advance notice to Congress required by the

¹ See: "Inspectors General Fight Fraud," Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), March 18, 2025, https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/documents/default/2025-03/CIGIE_FightFraud_Final_1.pdf and "CIGIE Annual Report to the President and Congress FY2024," Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), March 18, 2025, https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2025-03/CIGIE%20Annual%20Report%20to%20the%20President%20FY2024_FINAL.pdf

Inspector General Act. Earlier this month, Public Citizen published a detailed report looking at the administration's concerted attacks on Inspectors General. Key findings from the report² include:

- President Trump has removed more IGs than all other presidents combined
- In several cases, Trump's removal of IGs has been closely tied to the issuance of [OIG reports](#) that have been critical of specific actions by the Trump administration or have come as a result of an IG fulfilling their duty to relay certain [whistleblower disclosures](#) to Congress.
- In most cases, Trump has [replaced IGs](#) he has fired with those whose independence is questionable, have had close ties to his administration, or have a history of unethical or potentially illegal conduct.
- In September 2025, the Trump administration also attempted to completely [shut down the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency \(CIGIE\)](#), the nation's federal IG coordinating council.
- Trump's actions have reduced the [number of OIG staff](#) overall by about 12% and by as much as 30% in at least one case.

To prevent the removal of Inspectors General for purely political or personal reasons, Congress established a formal process requiring the President to provide Congress with a detailed explanation for any such removal, including the rationale and any evidence of alleged wrongdoing. Those procedures appear to have been ignored.³

For decades, Congress has relied on independent oversight institutions such as the Government Accountability Office and the Offices of Inspectors General to detect fraud, investigate misconduct, and safeguard the integrity of federal programs. These watchdog institutions serve as essential safeguards, ensuring that government officials remain accountable to the American people. Their work has consistently demonstrated enormous value for taxpayers, returning an estimated \$18 for every dollar invested in Inspector General offices.

The impact of these firings has been compounded by the administration's failure to nominate qualified and independent replacements. As a result, a large share of presidentially appointed inspector general positions remain vacant, leaving many major federal agencies without permanent independent oversight leadership. In total, as of October, more than 75 percent of presidentially appointed inspector general positions are vacant.⁴ The combination of leadership vacancies, political pressure, and resource constraints has significantly eroded the institutional safeguards that Congress created to protect federal programs from corruption and abuse.

While Inspector General offices prioritize detecting fraud, waste, and abuse, they have repeatedly uncovered failures that directly threatened the health, safety, and well-being of the American people. It was an Inspector General investigation that identified dangerous lead-exposure

² Douglas Pasternak, "Undoing Accountability: An Update on Trump's Attacks on Inspectors General," Public Citizen, March 11, 2026, <https://www.citizen.org/article/undoing-accountability/>

³ Jory Heckman, "Judge finds Trump unlawfully fired agency IGs, but won't reinstate them," *Federal News Network*, September 24, 2025, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/agency-oversight/2025/09/trump-unlawfully-fired-17-agency-igs-judge-finds-but-wont-reinstate-them/>

⁴ Chris Piper, "President Trump's firing of inspectors general threatens government accountability and efficiency," Partnership for Public Service, October 21, 2026, <https://ourpublicservice.org/blog/president-trumps-firing-of-inspectors-general-threatens-government-accountability-and-efficiency/>

risks in federally subsidized housing programs, prompting reforms to protect children from long-term health consequences. Another Inspector General's office uncovered failures within the Department of Veterans Affairs to properly address toxic burn pit exposure affecting American service members.

Inspector General offices have also exposed defective military equipment that placed troops in harm's way and uncovered the presence of toxic chemicals in FEMA emergency housing units provided to disaster victims. Investigations within the Department of Health and Human Services revealed nursing homes that failed to properly control dangerous infections, putting elderly residents at serious risk. These investigations demonstrate that the work of inspectors general is not limited to tracking dollars and cents. Their investigations frequently identify policy failures, safety hazards, and institutional breakdowns that directly affect vulnerable populations.

II. Bipartisan Support Needed for Proper Oversight

The Inspector General system has historically functioned as a bipartisan accountability mechanism, and is essential for controlling spending and promoting transparency. For decades, inspectors general have issued reports and investigations that embarrassed presidents and administrations of both political parties.

During the Reagan administration, inspectors general uncovered widespread corruption within the Department of Housing and Urban Development, including bribery and fraud in the agency's moderate rehabilitation program. Investigations revealed that well-connected lobbyists and political operatives steered federally subsidized housing contracts to favored developers, leading to criminal prosecutions of senior officials and major reforms to HUD's contracting and oversight system.

During the administration of President George H. W. Bush, inspectors general investigated defense contracting practices and identified billions of dollars in waste and mismanagement in major weapons programs. These findings reinforced the need for stronger oversight of defense procurement and acquisition programs.

During the Clinton administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development Inspector General uncovered widespread corruption in federally subsidized housing programs, including bribery and contracting fraud involving local housing authorities and private developers. The investigation led to prosecutions and major reforms to HUD oversight systems.

During the George W. Bush administration, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction documented billions of dollars in waste, fraud, and abuse tied to reconstruction contracts following the Iraq War. These investigations exposed serious failures in federal contracting and oversight during wartime spending.

During the Obama administration, the Department of Justice Inspector General uncovered systemic failures in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' "Fast and Furious" operation, which allowed thousands of firearms to be trafficked into Mexico without adequate tracking. The investigation revealed serious management failures and prompted congressional oversight and reforms within the Justice Department. During the Biden administration, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction issued extensive reports documenting billions of

dollars in waste and fraud. These findings highlighted systemic oversight failures spanning multiple administrations and forced a broader reassessment of how the federal government manages large-scale foreign assistance and reconstruction programs.

Across administrations of both parties over nearly 40 years, inspectors general have investigated senior officials, exposed embarrassing failures, and forced reforms that strengthened the integrity of federal programs. These findings caused political turmoil and troubles for these Presidents, and none of them responded by firing inspector generals. It is time for us to return to the bare minimum: allowing Inspector Generals to exist and do their jobs free from political pressure and threats.

III. Concerns regarding the Department of Government Efficiency

It would be impossible to discuss transparency and government spending without addressing the problematic Department of Government Efficiency, commonly referred to as DOGE.

In the early months of the Trump administration, the world's richest person, Elon Musk, was given almost carte blanche to wreak havoc in the government through the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). DOGE ignored real projects aimed at improving efficiency.⁵ Instead, it pursued a reckless project of destruction that, among other things, led to the shuttering of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which experts estimate will result in millions of preventable deaths.⁶ Notably, from an accountability perspective, Musk had a direct business interest – related to ongoing enforcement actions, license requests, regulatory matters, government contracts, or other matters – in over 70 percent of the agencies and departments targeted by DOGE.⁷ Meanwhile, Trump officials used tariff threats against foreign countries to coerce them into opening their markets to Musk's Starlink.⁸

Musk and DOGE also led the illegal charge to shutter the most effective federal anti-consumer fraud agency, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). In February, Elon Musk, running DOGE at the time, posted: "CFPB RIP."⁹ And President Trump stated that he aimed to 'totally eliminate' the CFPB.¹⁰ Some combination of DOGE and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell Vought immediately sought to effectuate that objective, and Vought and OMB continue to do so. (Public Citizen has been involved as counsel in two lawsuits to preserve the agency.)

The administration moved aggressively to abandon two CFPB rules that would have saved

⁵ Robert Weissman, "DOGE Delusions," Public Citizen, January 15, 2025, <https://www.citizen.org/article/doge-delusions/>

⁶ Daniella Medeiros Cavalcanti, Lucas de Oliveira Ferreira de Sales, Andrea Ferreira da Silva, Elisa Landin Basterra, Daiana Pena, Caterina Monti, et. al, "Evaluating the impact of two decades of USAID interventions and projecting the effects of defunding on mortality up to 2030: a retrospective impact evaluation and forecasting analysis," *The Lancet*, Volume 406, Issue 10500, 283-294, July 19, 2025, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(25\)01186-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(25)01186-9/fulltext)

⁷ Elizabeth Beavers and Mike Tanglis, "Duplicitous Oligarch Gifting Endlessly," Public Citizen, May 8, 2025, <https://www.citizen.org/article/duplicitous-oligarch-gifting-endlessly/>

⁸ Public Citizen, "Trump's Chaotic Tariffs Benefit His Best Buddy Elon as We Predicted," May 22, 2025, <https://www.citizen.org/news/trumps-chaotic-tariffs-benefit-his-best-buddy-elon-as-we-predicted/>

⁹ Elon Musk, February 7, 2025, <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1887979940269666769?lang=en>

¹⁰ Jeanne Sahadi, "From credit cards to medical debt: What may happen to some key consumer protection rules under Trump," CNN, February 12, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/12/business/cfpb-consumer-protection-rules-trump-administration/index.html>

consumers billions annually and protected consumers from being penalized for having medical debt. In May, President Trump signed a Congressional Review Act resolution rescinding the CFPB's overdraft rule, which would have saved consumers \$5 billion while allowing banks to cover their actual overdraft costs.¹¹ The CFPB had also issued an important rule to protect consumers from having medical debt used against them in consumer credit scores; the administration declined to defend the rule in court and then, in November, proposed to preempt states from adopting similar protections on their own.¹²

Most centrally, the closure of the CFPB removed the key oversight and enforcement agency to protect consumers from financial fraud. In its decade-plus of operation, the CFPB has been a tremendous success, returning tens of billions to defrauded consumers, deterring financial misconduct, and leveling the playing field for good actors, especially small firms. The CFPB has a record of achievement in enforcement, consumer education, and transparency that is unmatched among federal agencies.¹³ Thanks to DOGE, until the CFPB is restored, financial fraudsters are free to rip off consumers without fear of enforcement by the most effective financial fraud cop on the block.

We continue to learn of more abuses perpetrated by DOGE. The federal government maintains strict rules governing access to sensitive information, decision-making authority, and program oversight for a reason. Federal employees who handle sensitive data must meet specific access requirements, undergo background investigations, and, in many cases, obtain security clearances. These safeguards exist because the federal government is entrusted with some of the most sensitive information belonging to the American people, including Social Security numbers, tax records, health information, and financial data. Protecting that information is not simply a bureaucratic requirement. It is a fundamental obligation of government.

Recent reports about DOGE personnel associated with stealing Social Security numbers raise serious concerns. When sensitive government data is accessed without appropriate safeguards, the potential consequences include identity theft, financial fraud, and long-term damage to individuals whose information is compromised. Americans share their personal information with the federal government, relying on an ironclad promise that it will remain private. A DOGE operative has allegedly broken that promise in ways that may have lasting impacts on federal government operations and public trust.

There is also new public information about disturbingly unqualified DOGE personnel making decisions involving federal grants and contracts despite lacking relevant expertise or experience in the programs they were reviewing, or apparently any understanding of those programs. The federal government has long-standing rules requiring individuals with the appropriate expertise

¹¹ Ballard CFS Group, "Trump signs resolution nullifying CFPB overdraft rule," May 12, 2025, https://www.consumerfinancemonitor.com/2025/05/12/trump-signs-resolution-nullifying-cfpb-overdraft-rule/#:~:text=President%20Trump%20signed%20a%20Congressional%20Review%20Act,services%20*%20Resulted%20in%20more%20unbanked%20Americans; National Consumer Law Center, "Overdraft Rule Returns \$5 Billion in Big Bank Junk Fees to Consumers' Pockets," January 29, 2025, <https://www.nclc.org/resources/overdraft-rule-returns-5-billion-in-big-bank-junk-fees-to-consumers-pockets/>

¹² Anna Claire Vollers, "New Trump administration rule could override state medical debt protection," Stateline, November 6, 2025, <https://stateline.org/2025/11/06/new-trump-administration-rule-would-override-state-medical-debt-protections/>

¹³ Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, "Fast Facts: CFPB by the Numbers," December 3, 2024, <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/the-bureau/>

and qualifications to make programmatic decisions. These standards exist because federal programs often involve highly technical subject matter that directly affects public health, safety, and economic stability.

There should be universal agreement – and the law requires it – that decisions affecting federal programs must be guided by expertise, evidence, and established procedures rather than by political loyalty, ideological preferences, or a cavalier eagerness to cancel grants and programs without knowledge or understanding of those programs. Reckless DOGE cancellations hurt our country.

IV. Reforms needed to restore accountability

To truly rein in spending and increase transparency, Congress should consider several reforms. First, Congress may need to review the selection and removal processes for Inspector Generals and consider adopting a process similar to GAO's. Next, Inspector General offices need to be equipped to pursue larger-scale fraud cases rather than small-scale waste and abuse. Finally, we need stronger safeguards for Americans' personal data held by federal agencies.

We must protect and fund all of our oversight institutions, including inspectors general, the Government Accountability Office, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. All of these agencies play a specific role in protecting the American people and their tax dollars.

V. Conclusion

Oversight is not a partisan exercise. It is a fundamental responsibility within a democratic system of government. Independent oversight institutions exist to ensure that government officials remain accountable to the people they serve. When those institutions are weakened or dismantled, corruption becomes easier to conceal, misconduct becomes harder to detect, and public trust in government erodes. Strengthening oversight mechanisms is essential not only for protecting taxpayer dollars but for safeguarding the health, safety, and well-being of the American people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.