November 29, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer,

As the 117th Congress comes to a close, the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) implores you to bring Robert Storch’s nomination to serve as inspector general at the Department of Defense to the floor for a vote.

POGO is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that investigates and exposes waste, corruption, abuse of power, and when the government fails to serve the public or silences those who report wrongdoing. We champion reforms to achieve a more effective, ethical, and accountable federal government that safeguards constitutional principles.

We are deeply troubled by the fact that the Department of Defense has operated without a permanent inspector general for almost seven years — the longest gap in Pentagon history. During that time, Pentagon spending has increased by more than $200 billion. In the past nine months alone, the United States has committed over $65 billion to assist Ukraine in its fight against Russia, much of which flows through the Pentagon. It’s long past time to install a permanent inspector general at the Department of Defense to oversee this massive influx of funding, not to mention the whole new generation of expensive Pentagon weapons programs that will shape U.S. national security strategy for decades to come. NSA Inspector General Storch is exactly the kind of leader we hope to see in this critical office, and the delay in considering his nomination is inexplicable.

Military spending has steadily increased, despite consistent instances of Pentagon waste and contractor misconduct. The Pentagon has not only failed to pass comprehensive financial audits for five years running, it has also documented instances of corporate price gouging

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1 Connor Echols, “There hasn’t been a confirmed Pentagon watchdog since Obama was president,” Responsible Statecraft, November 7, 2022, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/11/07/there-hasnt-been-a-confirmed-watchdog-at-the-pentagon-since-the-obama-administration/.
going back over 20 years. Most recently, a military contractor called TransDigm made nearly $21 million in excess profits by overcharging the Pentagon for spare parts. While the acting inspector general revealed this systemic abuse, this may represent only the tip of the iceberg. The Department of Defense needs a permanent watchdog to properly address waste of taxpayer dollars at scale.

When it comes to conducting oversight of federal agencies, temporary watchdogs face challenges that permanent inspectors general, who are subject to Senate confirmation, do not. Acting inspectors general aren’t properly incentivized to engage in the long-term strategic planning needed to tackle grave oversight issues associated with repeated audit failures, corporate price gouging, and billions of dollars in overseas military assistance. Additionally, acting inspectors general may not receive the level of respect necessary to do their jobs effectively. Since they are temporary, agency officials can choose to wait them out and stall ongoing investigations into the waste or abuse of taxpayer dollars.

Compelling as these reasons for confirming a permanent inspector general are, there is a more pressing and immediate reality: The current acting inspector general at the Pentagon is also the inspector general at the Environmental Protection Agency. So, on top of the challenges of being a temporary watchdog, he has a full-time job elsewhere. We cannot expect a part-time watchdog to effectively conduct oversight of an agency for which the budget makes up the largest portion of annual U.S. discretionary spending. It’s a disservice to American taxpayers, who expect accountability from their leaders, and insufficient oversight prevents servicemembers from receiving the quality equipment required to do their jobs.

Robert Storch is an excellent candidate to be the Pentagon’s permanent inspector general. In his current role as inspector general at the National Security Agency, Storch released the first ever unclassified semiannual reports to Congress summarizing his office’s oversight work. He also oversaw the effort to launch the NSA IG’s independent website, providing publicly accessible information about their work. Storch has demonstrated a commitment to protecting whistleblowers, adding a whistleblower protection page to his office’s internal website and creating a whistleblower coordinator position to help employees better understand their rights and protections.

The American people cannot afford to go any longer without a permanent inspector general at the Department of Defense, and leaving this nomination in limbo all but assures that this will be the case. Storch has already made it through Senate confirmation on a bipartisan basis; further delay of his nomination now is inexcusable.

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6 Connor Echols, “There hasn’t been a confirmed Pentagon watchdog since Obama was president,” Responsible Statecraft, November 7, 2022, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/11/07/there-hasnt-been-a-confirmed-watchdog-at-the-pentagon-since-the-obama-administration/.
The geopolitical landscape has changed quite a bit since the last Pentagon watchdog stepped down in 2016, and the United States needs a full-time Department of Defense inspector general to address a rapidly growing Pentagon budget amid rising strategic competition.

The security challenges of today will not wait for a better political landscape tomorrow, and we cannot afford a lapse in oversight and accountability with so much on the line.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Geoff Wilson, Director, Center for Defense Information
Project On Government Oversight