United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6200

October 20, 2006

Lurita A. Doan
Administrator
U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20405

Dear Administrator Doan:

I am writing in regard to concerns that have been raised about the current relationship between your office and the GSA Office of Inspector General (OIG).

I would like to briefly explain the rationale behind the IG Act of 1978 and the important role that law plays in my ongoing efforts to "watchdog" the government and "watch the watchdogs."

The IG's were established by Congress to ensure that the money taken out of the pockets of hard working Americans is spent wisely and according to law. If money is being wasted by the government, then Congress wants to know about it. That is why the IG's report directly to Congress. That is why the IG's – and the audits and investigative reports they produce - must be totally independent and free from external influence. Congress wants a clear and unobstructed view of how the money is really being spent. As a "watchdog" in Congress, I rely heavily on those reports. For congressional oversight efforts to be effective, it is imperative that the IG oversight process work as intended by law. For these reasons, any effort to undermine the independence of the IG would not be tolerated.

It is my understanding, for example, that you suggested the elimination of approximately half of the OIG's proposed audits for 2007. Furthermore, it has been brought to my attention that significant changes were made to 2007 reimbursable funding and the 2008 budget request of the OIG. According to officials in the IG's office, these changes will have significant adverse impact on the operations and investigations of that office.

The primary mission of the IG in your agency and every other government agency is to be a sentry standing guard against fraud, waste, and abuse wherever it occurs regardless of circumstances. This cannot be accomplished if the IG's independence is impaired or hindered by the agency in any way, shape, or form. I refer you to section 3 (a) of the IG Act of 1978, which states "Neither the head of the establishment nor the officer next in rank shall prevent or prohibit the Inspector General from initiating, carrying out, or completing any audit or investigation, or from issuing any subpoena during the course of any audit or investigation."

By making cuts in the OIG budget, particularly the proposed complete elimination of reimbursable audits and investigations, your office is essentially removing the IG's independence and preventing the initiation of those audits and investigations. While you no doubt have authority to exercise fiscal scrutiny over the Administration's budget, these proposed cuts to the IG's office have been described as unprecedented and far reaching. I am particularly concerned about the elimination of the pre-award audits, a program that has saved the tax payers more than $1 Billion dollars over the past two years.

Administrator Doan, I can certainly appreciate the sometimes rocky relationships that exist between an agency head and its IG. This kind of friction is normal and should never be allowed to undermine the IG's mission. The IG should be viewed as an integral – but independent - part of your staff, not an enemy in your camp. The reports presented to you by the IG must be accurate, complete, and objective. You may not always agree with their findings and recommendations, but that goes with the territory. The IG must be given and allowed to maintain his or her total independence. IG independence is the cornerstone of the Inspector General Act.

Your attention to this matter would be greatly appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you. If you feel the need to discuss these matters further, please feel free to schedule a meeting with my staff at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Chuck Grassley

Charles E. Grassley
Chairman

cc: Brian Miller, GSA IG