



COMMITTEE ON  
**HOMELAND  
SECURITY**  
DEMOCRATS

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, *Ranking member*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

***Watchdog Recommendations: A Better Way Ahead to Manage the  
Department of Homeland Security***

**Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency**

**February 16, 2017**

The work done to ensure that the Federal government is accountable to the American people is more valuable than ever. Over the years, both the DHS Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office have been reliable resources to this Committee, warning us when programs were not performing to our expectations and identifying ways that DHS can do better. The reports you issue have driven change at DHS, resulted in millions of taxpayer dollars being saved, and brought about improvements throughout the organization.

Inspector General Roth, you put it best when you said, “No government agency, no matter how dysfunctional, will change on its own accord. Independent oversight is a critical and necessary ingredient for positive, constructive change.” The dysfunction you speak of has certainly been evident from Day One of President Trump’s Administration. When, on the evening of January 27, 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order directing a seven country Muslim-ban, the Department of Homeland Security was suddenly thrust into utter confusion.

Some travelers who were in the air when the EO was signed weren’t allowed to enter the country when they landed, some were detained, and others were sent back to their country of departure. When confronted with questions, some Customs and Border Patrol Officers suggested that impacted travelers and their families should direct all their questions to the President himself since they, themselves, lacked clarity about the parameters of the EO that they were directed to enforce.

In fact, just last week, a Member of this Subcommittee shared with the Committee how, when she went to the international airport in her district in the hours after the EO’s issuance and pressed CBP officials for answers about how the Order was being implemented, they would not speak with her.

The new DHS Secretary, General John Kelly, has defended President Trump’s EO, but testified before this Committee last week that he does not believe the rollout should have happened so quickly, specifically saying the EO should have been delayed “just a bit” so Members of Congress could be prepared. Thank you, Inspector Roth, for taking on the critical task of investigating this EO and for reviewing all documentation related to its implementation.

This is a perfect example of why investigative bodies such as the OIG and GAO are vital to maintaining the integrity and efficiency of the Federal government. It is more

than a little disturbing to see the statements issued by President Trump and the people in his inner circle that reflect the view that they are not to be questioned and are unwilling to subject their activities to oversight from the press, Congress, and Federal watchdogs.

On January 13, the Trump transition team instructed transition leaders via email to contact Inspectors General that very same day, and inform them they are being held over on a temporary basis.

It is hard to know whether the Trump folks were purposely seeking to chill oversight with this directive but I am heartened that courageous watchdogs not only in OIGs across the Government but also at the Office of Government Ethics are standing their ground.

Impartial assessments from Inspectors General that identify fraud, abuse, mismanagement, and waste of taxpayer funds are essential to our democracy. The statements out of this White House also send the wrong message to the men and women that make up our Executive Branch, including within DHS.

While I am not surprised at all that the man who currently sits in the Oval Office thinks he is above oversight, I am concerned that the House Republican Leadership have, to date, refused to take a sober look at the growing mountain of evidence of contacts between Trump's people and Russian intelligence officials during the period where Russia was interfering in the election to help get Mr. Trump elected.

Unless the House Republicans step up, they risk the American public and history seeing them as puppets of a President who shows such derision toward the constitutional principles that undermine this democracy.

Given that, to date, House Republicans have willfully refused to do their job, Congress has to lean on you—the Watchdogs—to do more.

Inspector General Roth, I applaud your colleague at the Department of Justice for investigating alleged misconduct by the FBI Director and other DOJ employees in the lead up to the 2016 election.

But that one review by one Inspector General is not enough to fully restore public confidence among the people I talk with in the institutions that are constitutionally-charged with protecting our Nation's democratic system.

There is still a need for an independent, non-partisan investigation – akin to the one carried out by the 9/11 Commission—into Russia's interference in the 2016 election. This is a critical moment in our nation.

All of us who took oaths to uphold the constitution, whether we sit in an OIG office or at the GAO or in the halls of Congress, need to ask tough questions and demand answers from President Trump and his Administration.

# # #

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

