

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

August 18, 2026

Dennis Kirk
Office of the Inspector General
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20511

Dear Mr. Kirk:

We write about your residence at and nomination to the Department of the Interior Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and to ensure you do not destroy any records. Your nomination arrives at a time when the OIG has been asked to investigate multiple credible and well-evidenced allegations of corruption. But your heavily partisan record and lack of relevant experience raise questions about the potential impact of your tenure on the otherwise nonpartisan watchdog inside the Department of the Interior (DOI). Reports that officials at DOI have engaged in a pattern of records destruction increase the urgency of this matter.

Created after the historic Watergate scandal, the Inspectors General are watchdogs placed inside agencies to identify and prevent waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement. Their effectiveness as a guardrail of democracy depends heavily on their independence. An Inspector General whose loyalty to the President takes precedence over the mission of the offices of the inspectors general poses a threat to that independence. Your nomination comes on the heels of President Trump's firing of over 21 heads of Offices of Inspector General throughout the federal government starting shortly after his inauguration.¹

Your co-authorship of a chapter of Project 2025,² and your appearance in a video teaching about it³ raise questions about whether you would be able to put working families before the President when forced to choose. Your apparent lack of experience in investigations and expertise in DOI-relevant subject matter raise further questions. Your past experience with the Intelligence

¹ Dominik Lett and Chris Edwards, *Trump Cuts the Inspectors General*. CATO INSTITUTE (April 21, 2026). <https://www.cato.org/blog/trump-cuts-inspectors-general>

² Donald Devine, Dennis Dean Kirk, and Paul Dans, *Central Personnel Agencies: Managing the Bureaucracy*, in *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, ed. Paul Dans and Steven Groves. THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION (Washington D.C.: 2023), https://static.heritage.org/project2025/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf

³ ProPublica, *Project 2025 Private Training Video: Background Checks and Security Clearances*, YouTube video (August 10, 2024). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjCgd8LGUDs>

Community Inspector General (IC IG), where you led “business transformation and personnel reforms across the organization”⁴ is concerning.

You appear to have served in a partisan role when appointed as a Senior Advisor at the IC IG. Rep. Stephen Lynch, then Acting Ranking Member of the Committee of Oversight and Government Reform reported that:

“The ‘senior advisor’ purportedly attends IC IG meetings but reports to Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Tulsi Gabbard. The Committee has also learned that ODNI last month placed the IC IG’s Acting General Counsel on involuntary administrative leave as she was working to address independence issues between the ODNI and the IC IG. We further understand that ODNI intended for this newly appointed ‘senior advisor’ to assume the duties previously held by the IC IG’s Acting General Counsel.”⁵

That placement coincided with the IC IG’s high-profile investigation into Signalgate, the dangerous, negligent leak of classified military plans to attack the Houthis — a scandal that resulted from an apparent attempt to violate records-preservation laws.

During the first Trump administration, there was a similar attempt to replace the acting Inspector General at DOI with an inexperienced, unvetted appointee after then-Secretary Ryan Zinke learned that one of the many investigations into his conduct would be referred to the Department of Justice for criminal prosecution.⁶ Following the backlash, the would-be appointee resigned from the federal government.⁷ Secretary Zinke resigned in disgrace about two months later.⁸

At the time of your nomination, the OIG is likely undertaking or considering at least four consequential investigations into the actions of high-ranking administration officials. Dr. Jenifer Chatfield, a DOI appointee overseeing Fish and Wildlife Service, faces evidence of family favoritism, ethics violations, and lying to federal officials about her ethics disclosures.⁹ Karen

⁴ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Chief Operating Officer – Dennis Kirk* (accessed August 11, 2026). <https://archive.dni.gov/index.php/who-we-are/leadership/chief-operating-officer>

⁵ Oversight Democrats (U.S. House of Representatives), *Letter from Lynch to IG Johnson re: ICIG Special Advisor* (June 5, 2025). <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-06-05.lynch-to-ig-johnson-re-icig-special-advisor.pdf> and Meryl Kornfield and Ellen Nakashima, *Gabbard Placed Top Adviser Inside the ODNI’s Watchdog Office, Officials Say*. WASHINGTON POST (June 5, 2025). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/06/05/tulsi-gabbard-odni-watchdog-signalgate/>

⁶ Miranda Green, *Timing of Zinke Investigation Raises Questions About Possible Political Motives*. THE HILL (October 31, 2018). <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/414016-timing-of-zinke-investigation-raises-questions-about-possible/>

⁷ Laura Strickler and Monica Alba, *Amid Confusion, Interior Department Says HUD Official Not Taking Over*. NBC NEWS (October 18, 2018). <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/amid-confusion-interior-department-says-hud-official-not-taking-over-n921876>

⁸ Ellen Knickmeyer, Matthew Brown and Jonathan Lemire, *Zinke Resigns as Interior Secretary Amid Numerous Probes*. AP NEWS (Dec 16, 2018). [Zinke resigns as interior secretary amid numerous probes | AP News](https://www.apnews.com/Zinke-resigns-as-interior-secretary-amid-numerous-probes)

⁹ Maxine Joselow, *A Wildlife Regulator’s Family Business Had a Permit to Renew. She Stepped In*. N.Y. TIMES (July 1, 2026). <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/01/climate/interior-department-ethics-chatfield.html>

Budd-Falen, the third-highest ranking person at Interior, faces allegations that her family received a \$3.5 million windfall tied to a lithium mine her own office helped approve.¹⁰ Matt Giacona, the head of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management at DOI, faces a potential investigation into whether he violated federal ethics rules working on issues that could benefit his prior employer, a powerful oil and gas lobbying group.¹¹ Just last week, a number of U.S. senators requested an investigation into what DOI officials knew – and when they knew it – about engineering failures at the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool and whether DOI employees withheld evidence from federal prosecutors.¹²

Making matters worse, reports suggest DOI officials may be engaging in preemptive cover-ups. Just this month, the public has learned that “According to three staffers who witnessed it, officials [at DOI] have routinely shredded official documents and use disappearing Signal messages — even for mundane scheduling matters — to avoid communications being preserved, as is required by the Federal Records Act.”¹³ The Federal Records Act (FRA) requires agencies to “make and preserve records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency”¹⁴ Destruction of federal records implies there is something to hide.

Since arriving at the OIG, if you have engaged in document destruction of any kind, including shredding, the use of unauthorized messaging, automatic message deletion settings, or personal email for official business, this letter serves an instruction to stop. You are expected to maintain full compliance with the FRA. Any direction to direct, request, or suggest to others at the OIG that they destroy records or allow records to be destroyed or illegally altered will be considered a violation of the FRA. Please respond no later than September 1, 2026 with the actions you will take to ensure all your records and those of other OIG employees will be preserved.

Sincerely,

¹⁰ Lisa Friedman, *Democrats Seek Investigation of \$3.5 Million Deal by Interior Official's Husband*. N.Y. TIMES (January 20, 2026). <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/20/climate/nevada-mine-interior-department-karen-budd-falen-water-investigation.html>

¹¹ Ian Stevenson, *House Dems Request Ethics Probe of Acting BOEM Director*. POLITICO (Oct. 10, 2025). <https://www.eenews.net/articles/house-dems-request-ethics-probe-of-acting-boem-director/>

¹² Dan Diamond, *Democrats Ask Interior Watchdog to Investigate Response to Reflecting Pool Damage*. WASHINGTON POST (August 5, 2026). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/08/05/democrats-ask-interior-watchdog-investigate-response-reflecting-pool-damage/>

¹³ Daniel Lippman, Ian Stevenson and Ben Lefebvre, *Jeanine Pirro Berated Doug Burgum. But Interior Staffers Have Been Angry at Him for Months*. POLITICO (August 7, 2026). <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/08/07/doug-burgum-interior-department-pirro-01028360>

¹⁴ 44 U.S.C. Chapter 31 § 3101



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