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Procurement Collusion Strike Force Fifth Anniversary | November 21, 2024

It is no surprise to say that the American people have lost confidence in the federal government—the federal government is perceived by many not just as bloated and bureaucratic, but as poor stewards of their hard-earned tax dollars.

And that is why this Strike Force is so important—not just to hold wrongdoers accountable, which it is doing remarkably well, but also to help build confidence in the American people that their tax dollars are being spent well.

I'm here today to speak on behalf of Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency about what five years of coordination and collaboration with the Procurement Collusion Strike Force has meant for us, the IG community. That is, the 73 federal offices of inspector general devoted to identifying and rooting out fraud, waste, and abuse in federal spending.

The five-year anniversary is a good opportunity to step back and reflect on just how far we—together—have come in the fight for fair competition in federal procurements.

Thank you to DOJ leadership, Assistant Attorney General Kanter, and other contributors for bringing us together for this important event, and for inviting the OIG community to participate in commemorating the PCSF's anniversary.

Ours has been a dynamic partnership grounded by our shared mission to protect taxpayer dollars from fraud, waste, and abuse, namely, anticompetitive collusion and related fraudulent schemes in government procurement. It has been a relationship rooted in shared values and a fundamental understanding that American taxpayers fare better when their dollars are spent fairly, instead of lost unfairly to collusion and other exploitative activities.

Simply put, free and fair competition is a driving force—bolstering the economy, wages, innovation, and the quality of goods and services—and collusion is a corrupting one.

Congress created the OIG community 45 years ago, and CIGIE itself was created over 15 years ago to act as a unified council of OIGs to address issues that transcend individual Government agencies and encumber the whole. We do this by working with each other to identify weaknesses and vulnerabilities in federal programs and operations, and by conducting oversight to address them.

I see these same ideals and principals reflected in the Procurement Collusion Strike Force model.

The Strike Force, like CIGIE, is focused on outcomes and leverages interagency partnerships, collective resources, and expertise to achieve them. By acting as a hub, or nerve center, so to speak, the Strike Force enables agents, analysts, prosecutors, and many others, from over a dozen agencies, to amass their skills and expertise for a defined and noble purpose: to combat the threat criminal collusion poses to the integrity of the government procurement process.

As mentioned, I am speaking to you on behalf of a council committed to the same guiding principles, namely, integrity and efficiency.

I am also the Inspector General for the U.S. Department of the Interior and uniquely positioned to witness first-hand the importance of your work and magnitude of your task.

Interior is receiving nearly $37 billion under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, more than twice its annual budget. Funding on this scale requires a commensurate level of coordination by us, and with you. My agency frequently reports on the substantial risks DOI faces regarding acquisition oversight and expending without effective processes in place.[1]

But we are not alone. The IG community recognizes these as collective risks that come, too often, at the expense of taxpayers.

The good news is that through collaboration and collective integrity, the IG community is making inroads. Last fiscal year, we identified more than $93 billion in potential savings for the American people. With an aggregate budget of $3.5 billion, we delivered a return of about $26 for every taxpayer dollar invested in us.

The Procurement Collusion Strike Force is working, as well, breaking down silos to protect the integrity of the government's procurement processes and interests of the people.

You've heard from the DOJ leadership and AAG Kanter about how much the Strike force has done in just 5 years:

- *Over 38,000 agents and procurement officials trained,*
- *Over 140 investigations opened,*
- *More than 60 guilty pleas and trial convictions,*
- *And over $65 million in fines and restitution.*

From my perspective, I see this work within my own agency and within CIGIE.

[1] https://www.doioig.gov/sites/default/files/2021-migration/Inspector%20General%27s%20Statement_Major%20Management%20Challenges_FY%202024.pdf

DOI OIG became a Strike Force national partner in November 2022. Since then, my staff has received training on antitrust risks, investigation techniques, and crucial oversight and law enforcement updates.

They've been provided resources and been included in district meetings in 25 U.S. judicial districts, joining forces and working with other district stakeholders. They've opened and worked investigations and leveraged agency expertise and capacity in district meetings throughout the country.

Beyond my agency, the OIG community is seeing the fruits of the PCSF model through the development of a new subcommittee to address procurement collusion analytic techniques, share best practices, and coordinate analytics. Various IG offices are realizing and reporting on the risks of inadequate data collection to detect collusion in procurements.

The IG community is responding to the risk of collusion in government procurements and doubling down on its commitment to identify and mitigate this risk.

Despite these advances, however, there is still work to be done. Much of the IIJA and IRA money has yet to be distributed, and agencies—including Interior and others—don't have adequate controls in place to oversee the exponential amount of funding they are now responsible for.

The federal government's decentralized procurement structure complicates our efforts, especially when it comes to data access and proactive oversight.

There is no government-wide mandatory pre-award procurement data retention requirement. IGs have limited visibility over federal grant dollar use for national and international projects because of challenges in accessing prime and subrecipient records.

That is why continuing the PCSF's work is so important, now more than ever. Together, we must stand ready and willing to take on these challenges as partners. This gathering serves as a well-deserved opportunity to reflect on our joint successes.

It is also a fitting forum in which to remind ourselves of why we signed up to be part of the PCSF in the first place: to protect taxpayer dollars. And to rebuild the all-important confidence in the American people that the federal government can be good stewards of those tax dollars.

Please join the PCSF, the OIG community, and the many staff that we have dedicated to this important cause, and let's continue this great work on behalf of the American people.