

Statement of Ben R. Wagner
Nominee to be Inspector General, Tennessee Valley Authority
Before the
United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Subcommittee on Clean Air, Climate, and Nuclear Safety

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Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, Subcommittee Chairman Markey and Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished Members of this Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for making today's hearing possible. I would also like to thank the President for nominating me to serve as the Inspector General of the Tennessee Valley Authority. I am honored to be considered for this opportunity to serve such a great institution like the Tennessee Valley Authority, an institution that has such a tremendous impact on the quality of life for the people living in the Tennessee Valley region. I would also like to thank my family and colleagues for their love and support for me over the years. My wife, daughter, and son-in-law have dedicated their careers to the teaching profession, and my son and his wife have dedicated their life to Christian ministries. I would not be sitting here today without their unwavering support, and I am so proud of all of them.

Although I was born in New Mexico, I have spent most of my life living in the Tennessee Valley region, working in one of the nation's most dynamic economies, but also enjoying the splendor of East Tennessee, fishing and boating on the beautiful TVA lakes, and enjoying the recreational areas throughout the region. These are all areas where TVA profoundly impacts the people it serves and why I am proud of my long history with TVA and the TVA Office of Inspector General.

I graduated from the University of Tennessee with an accounting degree. Like many others, TVA was my first choice for employment after graduation. After a brief stint with the State of Tennessee as a state auditor, I was offered the opportunity to start my career at TVA at the Bellefonte Nuclear Plant in Scottsboro, Alabama. This was an exciting time for me. I was able to see firsthand the progress being made at one of the largest nuclear construction sites in the country. I worked with tremendously dedicated individuals and was proud to be associated with TVA. As my role changed to an independent oversight function, I was proud to continue to serve TVA and the people of the Tennessee Valley by helping to identify fraud, waste, and abuse, and promote economy and efficiency. In total, I spent 38 years, from 1979 until my retirement in 2017, working to improve TVA operations in one way or another.

In October 1985, the TVA Board of Directors created the TVA Office of the Inspector General. This office was created in light of significant problems in the Nuclear Power program and the high volume of whistleblower complaints. I was lucky enough to be one of the first employees hired in this office, and I feel I contributed meaningfully to the successful startup of this critical oversight function. In 1988, Congress made this office a statutory office with the full powers of an Inspector General under the Inspector General Act of 1978. The Inspector General was still an agency-appointed position, and we occasionally faced significant pushback from management, an issue familiar to many in the Inspector General community. However, our OIG continued to perform its oversight role in a highly independent and completely objective manner with the highest level of integrity, a commitment that I and those who served in the office shared.

In 2000, Congress chose to make the Inspector General position a presidentially appointed one in order to ensure this function is performed with the highest level of independence. Richard Moore, the first presidentially appointed IG, joined the office in 2003 and served as IG for 14 years. Since his tenure ended, interim leadership and former colleagues have ably led the TVA OIG for more than four years. Today, I am honored to be considered to become the second presidentially appointed Inspector General at TVA. I have worked directly for seven different individuals serving as TVA IG since 1986. Each provided me opportunities to learn from them and to broaden my responsibilities over my career. Because of this, I have vast experience in every facet of an IG office and am fully prepared to continue to build on that legacy of success.

The Tennessee Valley Authority is charged with a critical mission—improving the quality of life for the people of the Tennessee Valley through providing low-cost power, environmental stewardship, and economic development. The Tennessee Valley has some of the lowest power rates in the entire country. TVA has been a catalyst to a dynamic economy, has been a leader in carbon reduction in recent years, has prevented billions of dollars in damage through flood control, and as I mentioned earlier, maintains some of the finest lakes and recreational areas in the nation.

An Inspector General is charged with the critical mission of providing agency oversight by promoting economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the agency and in identifying fraud, waste, and abuse. This requires IGs to perform their duties in a completely independent and objective manner. An IG frequently must report on difficult issues that may not be well received by the agency. Therefore, the work of the IG must be unbiased and completely factual. I recently looked back at a TVA OIG Semiannual Report for a little historic perspective. Since creation, the TVA OIG has identified more than \$2.6 billion in costs, performed more than 13,200 cases and reviews, and investigated more than 350 matters that resulted in convictions. I want to continue this work and support this mission for the 10 million residents of the Valley.

Finally, none of this will be possible without the hardworking team at the TVA OIG. I have mentioned a number of reasons I am excited about this chance to serve, but the opportunity to work together with the experienced, dedicated staff in Knoxville, Chattanooga, Huntsville, and Nashville, again, is at the top of the list. This team is committed to the mission and every day invests in making TVA, as well as the TVA OIG, better. Their work and their commitment to excellence has been recognized numerous times by the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency and, for the last 6 years, as a best place to work in the federal government by the Partnership for Public Service. If I am confirmed, it will be an honor to lead this team. Thank you for this opportunity, and I am happy to take your questions.