

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2009

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We are writing to respectfully request that you commence a comprehensive review of the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). In light of the planned increase in the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, we have serious concerns that SIGAR currently may be unable to perform its mission at a time when the need for aggressive, independent oversight is greater than ever.

First, SIGAR has experienced significant, ongoing difficulty in recruiting adequate, qualified staff. We first brought this issue to your attention in March 2009, when we wrote to you regarding SIGAR's failure to hire sufficient staff to perform its mission. We also attempted to address this challenge by co-sponsoring legislation, which you signed in June 2009, to grant SIGAR additional hiring authorities.

While SIGAR has taken some steps to bolster the number and qualifications of its staff, its efforts have not been as successful as had been hoped. For example, SIGAR has not been successful in recruiting the experienced staff leaving the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR). SIGIR's mission is drawing to a close, meaning their forty-one auditors and thirty-eight investigators are looking for new opportunities. We have been told that because of the perception that the leadership and the quality of work at SIGAR are not as robust as that of SIGIR, most staff leaving SIGIR are not interested in transitioning to SIGAR. While SIGAR's recent hire of four former SIGIR investigators is encouraging, it would be incredibly unfortunate to see the many other experienced SIGIR staff take their skills elsewhere.

Second, SIGAR may be losing sight of its mission. SIGAR's most recent audit report, released on October 28, 2009, reviewed the role of women in the Afghan election. While evaluating female participation in Afghanistan's electoral process is important, this is not, and should not be the role of SIGAR. Instead, the SIGAR's oversight role is to focus on reconstruction contracting. In addition, we have learned that SIGAR often receives requests that are not directly related to its mission and that it is difficult for SIGAR to balance such requests against other priorities. SIGAR should be able to establish appropriate priorities for the organization. Their failure to do so is of grave concern and will further delay the critical oversight of Afghanistan contracting.

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Finally, the lack of audit and investigative reports SIGAR has completed is disappointing. Since the current Special Inspector General was sworn in on July 22, 2008, SIGAR has issued eight reports and six investigative reports. In comparison SIGIR, in its first eighteen months, issued thirty-three audits and thirty-six project assessments, or investigations. Even when you consider SIGAR's hiring challenges they still should be making much more progress.

It is also disconcerting that only one of the eight audits performed was a contract audit. With approximately \$39 billion spent on reconstruction in Afghanistan to date, primarily through federal contracts, SIGAR should be more focused on contracting.

We appreciate that you, like us, understand how the many mistakes that were made in Iraq reconstruction cost taxpayers billions of dollars. At least some of those mistakes could have been avoided with early, aggressive oversight by experienced auditors and investigators. That is why it is so critical for a fully-functioning and staffed SIGAR to be pressing ahead.

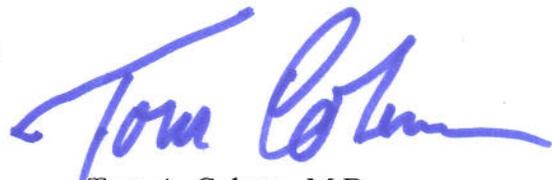
We request that you conduct a thorough review of SIGAR, including its staff, operations, and execution of its mission, in order to determine if improvements can be made to the organization. We urge you to take all necessary remedial actions to ensure effective oversight of reconstruction activities in Afghanistan. We also encourage you to consider leveraging the organizational strengths of SIGIR by using your statutory authority to name a single head of both SIGIR and SIGAR. We believe that by having one effective head of both offices, work efforts and staff will be better coordinated and shared to ensure a robust contracting oversight of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill  
United States Senator



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator