SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Full Committee
Nomination Hearing
Tuesday, November 10, 2026, at 10:30 A.M.

DEMOCRATIC QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

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COVER PAGE

RANKING MEMBER MARIA CANTWELL (D-WA)

NASA Workforce. NASA's expert workforce is critical to the success of its science and exploration missions. Yet, in 2025 NASA lost roughly 4,000 civil servants to the Administration's RIFs and voluntary separation programs.

The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel's (ASAP) 2025 report said these departures constitute "a substantial risk and safety concern."

It is also unclear that new hiring programs such as "NASA Force" and the insourcing of contractors with critical skillsets fully address the Agency's needs or concerns regarding safety, transparency, and further talent loss.

Question 1: If confirmed, will you commit to conducting independent audits of the mission and safety impacts to NASA caused by the 2025 workforce reductions, and the effectiveness of the agency's new hiring efforts?

> *Answer:* Yes. If confirmed, I welcome the Committee's input on oversight priorities, including potential audits of the mission and safety impacts to NASA caused by the 2025 workforce reductions and the effectiveness of NASA's subsequent hiring efforts.
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> Fostering a highly skilled workforce is integral to sustaining mission critical capabilities, enabling support services, and ensuring safety across NASA programs and projects. To this end, assessing the Agency's ability to retain and recruit technical expertise remains a top priority for the OIG and underpins nearly every audit and review.
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> The *2026 Report on NASA's Top Management and Performance Challenges* outlines the OIG's ongoing oversight work in this area, and we will continue to examine whether workforce reductions created or worsened gaps in critical skills—and whether those gaps affected mission execution and safety.[1] Our audits will assess whether NASA's hiring and insourcing efforts, including NASA Force, are filling those gaps, as well as how the Agency measures progress in hiring, retention, and workforce readiness.
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> OIG auditors are currently conducting a review of NASA's workforce insourcing strategy for center engineering and mission support services contracts. This is not a one-time review; it reflects our continuous effort to ensure NASA maintains the technical expertise required to safely execute its mission.

Question 2: Will you also provide your findings and recommendations to the Committee?

> *Answer*: Yes. If confirmed, I will provide the OIG's findings and recommendations to this Committee and NASA, in accordance with the Inspector General Act. I will also keep the Committee apprised of the Agency's progress in implementing corrective actions.

Ensuring Dissimilar Redundancy and Competition via NASA Agreements. NASA relies on a single company for its Artemis spacesuits, which faces delays and development challenges.

I recognized the risks involved with relying on a single provider for Artemis lunar landers, and I pushed for NASA to partner with two companies. This decision provided the flexibility and

[1] NASA OIG, *2026 Report on NASA's Top Management and Performance Challenges* (November 12, 2026).

redundancy needed to stay on track in the race back to the Moon, as the Artemis III mission will test both landers in Earth Orbit next year.

Question 1: If confirmed, will you work with the Committee and examine how single NASA providers and lack of competition have impacted NASA's development and sustainment of critical capabilities?

> *Answer:* Yes. If confirmed, I welcome the Committee's input on oversight priorities and will keep Congress informed of relevant OIG work.
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> The OIG has discussed the risks of relying on a single commercial provider for critical services across multiple recent audits. For example, our September 2025 report assessing the International Space Station (ISS) microgravity spacesuits found that Collins Aerospace was the sole maintenance provider and that NASA had limited leverage to address the contractor's declining performance.[2] A follow-on April 2026 report examining the next-generation lunar spacesuits found that, after Collins' task orders were descoped in 2024, NASA became solely reliant on Axiom to develop both the lunar and updated ISS suits.[3] The OIG recommended that NASA seek industry input on its requirements to help maintain competition and warned that the lunar spacesuits may not be ready in time for the upcoming Moon landing. The Agency has since announced plans with Axiom to develop a second, lighter "Sortie" suit design for short-duration moonwalks.
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> In addition, in June of this year, the OIG issued a report examining the Commercial Crew Program and noted that Boeing's technical issues and schedule delays have left NASA solely reliant on SpaceX for U.S.-based crew transportation to and from the ISS.[4] Further, in March of this year, the OIG issued a report on NASA's management of the Human Landing System contracts.[5] Our auditors examined the Agency's two commercial providers and found that both faced development challenges that could delay planned missions.
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> If confirmed, I will ensure the OIG continues this critical oversight work examining how reliance on a single provider and lack of competition can affect the development, safety, cost, and long-term sustainment of NASA's critical capabilities.

Question 2: If confirmed, will you commit to further examining NASA contracting practices to ensure critical taxpayer-funded capabilities are meaningfully preserved and available for future missions? If so, will you commit to sharing your findings and recommendations with the Committee?

> *Answer:* Yes. If confirmed, I will ensure the OIG continues to examine whether NASA's contracting practices preserve taxpayer investments and protect the capabilities required for future missions. I will share the OIG's findings and recommendations with the Committee, consistent with the Inspector General Act and applicable law.

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[2] NASA OIG, *NASA's Management of ISS Extravehicular Activity Spacesuits* (IG-25-012 September 30, 2025).
[3] NASA OIG, *NASA's Acquisition of Next-Generation Spacesuit Services* (IG-26-006 April 20, 2026).
[4] NASA OIG, *NASA's Management of Its Commercial Crew Program* (IG-26-011 June 30, 2026).
[5] NASA OIG, *NASA's Management of the Human Landing System Contracts* (IG-26-004 March 10, 2026).

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR (D-MN)

The Administration's 2027 Budget Request proposes a 23 percent cut to NASA's budget, with science programs losing nearly half of their funding. These cuts mean 53 NASA missions are facing termination.

- If confirmed, you will be tasked with investigating mission termination procedures. Please describe how you will approach this duty as Inspector General.

  Answer: If confirmed, I will oversee the OIG's ongoing audit assessing NASA's policies and procedures for programs and projects terminated prior to launch or operations. I will ensure this report, its findings, and recommendations are transmitted to the Committee. To provide Congress and NASA with timely, actionable insight, the OIG has already published an interim memorandum outlining four Artemis systems—valued at $5.9 billion—that the Agency plans to cancel or repurpose.[6]

  In evaluating NASA's mission termination procedures, the OIG will assess whether NASA followed applicable policies and documented its decisions; assessed the cost, schedule, technical, and mission implications of termination and available alternatives; managed contracts and financial commitments; and accounted for, protected, and appropriately reused or disposed of government-funded assets. The OIG's review will also consider lessons learned from completed terminations—and whether NASA's procedures address risks to future missions and capabilities.

  More broadly, my approach to this oversight duty will be grounded in independence and focus on responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources. As Inspector General, my role would be to assess the quality and execution of NASA's decisions and recommend improvements where warranted, while leaving mission and budget priorities to Congress and Agency officials. I commit to keeping this Committee apprised of the OIG's findings and recommendations.

[6] NASA OIG, *NASA's Management of Programs and Projects After Mission Termination – Canceled or Repurposed Artemis Campaign Systems* (ML-26-002 June 24, 2026).

SENATOR TAMMY BALDWIN (D-WI)

1. Inspectors General are agency watchdogs and are more important now than ever. They are tasked with auditing and evaluating agency programs, offering recommendations to improve programs and operations and investigating alleged misuse and mismanagement of the agency and its resources.

   If confirmed, will you commit to conducting independent audits and investigations and providing recommendations based upon factual evidence and your own independent judgement?

   Answer: Yes. If confirmed, I will continue to ensure that NASA OIG conducts independent audits and investigations and makes recommendations grounded in factual evidence and independent professional judgment.

   I've had the privilege of working at NASA OIG for the last 17 years and served as the Senior Official Performing the Duties of Inspector General from December 2024 until my nomination on September 28, 2026. Throughout my career, I have always sought to present the facts objectively, regardless of where they lead. If confirmed, I will continue to uphold that standard of independence and objectivity, ensuring the OIG reports its findings and recommendations to Congress and NASA, consistent with applicable law.

SENATOR BEN RAY LUJÁN (D-NM)

(1) In 2025, NASA lost roughly 22% of its employees due to DOGE and OPM-led workforce reduction efforts such as RIFs and voluntary separation programs. While Administrator Isaacman's Workforce Directive has aimed to convert contractors with key skillsets to NASA civil servant, union representative note issues with pay equivalency, clarity of position descriptions, short timelines and communication issues as to what skills are needed or which positions are appropriate for conversion. NASA's OIG exists to conduct oversight and investigations pertaining to fraud, waste, and abuse, and issues audits concerning NASA's technical programs. Yet the OIG has not conducted any publicly available oversight of the sweeping personnel and organizational changes at NASA caused by DOGE and the Trump Administration. During your tenure in the federal government, you have a well-documented history of leading complex criminal, civil, and administrative investigations involving fraud and other misconduct affecting federal programs. Since you have been the Senior Official Performing the Duties of Inspector General at NASA, you have yet to examine the damage done to NASA missions due to these workforce departures.

If confirmed as Inspector General of NASA, will you agree to examine the damage to all of NASA's mission areas, including those in Science mission areas, caused by these shifts in workforce?

Answer: Yes. If confirmed, I will ensure the OIG examines the effects of workforce changes on NASA's mission execution, including its science mission areas.

Assessing the Agency's workforce challenges continues to be a top priority for the OIG, as outlined in our *2026 Report on NASA's Top Management and Performance Challenges*.[7] To this end, we have noted workforce concerns in some of our recent audits. Our June 2026 audit of the Commercial Crew Program identified ongoing workforce constraints as a risk to NASA's oversight of the program.[8] We recommended that NASA use workforce assessments to prioritize critical skills. Additionally, in November 2026, we reported on workforce risks within the Aerosciences Evaluation and Test Capabilities portfolio.[9] We found retirements and attrition were making it challenging to have individuals with the right skills operating NASA's wind tunnels.

The OIG is also currently conducting an audit of NASA's workforce insourcing strategy for center engineering and mission support services contracts. Although the early timing of this audit will not allow us to fully assess the overall mission effects of this workforce initiative, it is not a one-time review. Future work will build on this audit and support our

[7] NASA OIG, *2026 Report on NASA's Top Management and Performance Challenges* (November 12, 2026).
[8] NASA OIG, *NASA's Management of Its Commercial Crew Program* (IG-26-011 June 30, 2026).
[9] NASA OIG, *NASA's Aerosciences Evaluation and Test Capabilities Portfolio* (expected November 17, 2026).

continuous efforts to ensure NASA maintains the technical expertise required to conduct its missions.

If confirmed, I will use a risk-based, evidence-driven approach to determine whether workforce changes have affected critical skills, mission performance, safety, schedules, or science outcomes across NASA.

(2) **If confirmed as Inspector General of NASA, do you agree to testify before this committee if you are called under investigation into damage caused to the missions and workforce at NASA over the past two years?**

Answer: Yes. If called, I will testify before the Committee about the OIG's work concerning NASA's workforce and missions. I will provide fact-based testimony about the OIG's findings, recommendations, and the status of corrective actions, consistent with applicable law.

(3) The goal of the Commercial Crew and the Commercial LEO Destinations (CLD) programs is to have multiple providers and develop the LEO ecosystem. **Given the large delays and increased costs as reported in NASA OIG's report this June, what are the challenges with supporting a larger provider group through a new Commercial Crew competition?**

Answer: The OIG's June 2026 report examined NASA's management of the Commercial Crew Program and its contracts with SpaceX and Boeing. The audit did not evaluate future contract competitions or the challenges associated with supporting a larger provider group.

Within the scope of the audit, the OIG found that overconfidence in Boeing's heritage systems contributed to NASA accepting unrealistic schedules, and that the Agency's underuse of contractual data rights limited its ability to analyze flight simulation issues. The report also found that ongoing workforce constraints could hinder NASA's oversight, resolution of technical issues, and certification schedules. In addition, delays left NASA without enough contracted flights to fully support ISS crew transportation through 2030, leading NASA to purchase accelerated SpaceX flights at additional cost.

If NASA pursues a new contract competition or expands the provider group, I will ensure the OIG's independent oversight addresses that process and, where appropriate, provides independent recommendations grounded in facts.