

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Sherrod Brown
Nomination Hearing of Brian Miller and Dana Wade
May 5, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to begin by saying “thank you” to staff at the Sergeant at Arms, the Architect of the Capitol, the Office of the Attending Physician, the Recording Studio, and the Senate Rules Committee for working very hard over the last couple of weeks to try to make hearings as safe as possible, including by using technology for members to join hearings remotely. And, I want to thank all of the Capitol Police and other Senate staff and contractors who have been working to make sure the Senate continues to run.

I also want to thank Chairman Crapo and his staff for working with my staff and me to coordinate this hearing and provide a remote option for Senators to join. It’s the right thing to do to keep everyone safe.

I am very concerned, however, at the reckless decision by Leader Mitch McConnell to open the Senate to session, despite ongoing emergency stay-at-home orders all over the country, including in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia.

Leader McConnell’s actions are forcing Capitol complex workers – including contract workers like the cleaning staff who just cleaned this hearing room and will clean again, and food service workers who just served the Republican caucus lunch– to go against public health authorities’ advice, and put themselves at risk to come into work.

The Republican Leader’s agenda this week doesn’t include assistance for the unemployed, anything that helps people to stay in their homes, or support for community health services. Those are issues the Senate should be taking on right now.

I want to congratulate the nominees and thank them for their willingness to serve. This is probably not the confirmation hearing you had hoped for. And, I want to thank your families watching from home.

The Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery will oversee the CARES Act lending and investment programs that were designed to stabilize our economy and get help to communities and workers and small businesses that are hurting during this pandemic. And this lending will be critical to restarting our economy, to begin the recovery.

The Federal Housing Administration Commissioner faces an affordable housing crisis made even worse by the pandemic.

The stability and future of millions of families are on the line as Congress and the Administration respond to this crisis. If confirmed, the two of you will serve in positions that are crucial to implementing the policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Committee has oversight over the Treasury and Federal Reserve loan programs under the CARES Act. That's why I fought for the Office of the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery. The American people need a strong watchdog to make sure the 500 billion dollars of taxpayer money provided under the Act, and the four trillion dollars that the Federal Reserve will lend, actually goes to support workers and communities and small businesses.

Because the Act grants the Treasury Secretary and the Federal Reserve broad discretion over who gets these loans and on what terms, the Special Inspector General will need to examine the loan terms, the transactions, the lenders involved, and the eligibility of borrowers.

We've seen how the Small Business loans went to big companies and important clients of Wall Street banks, while community banks and credit unions and their customers on Main Street and in underserved communities waited and waited. I think most of us have all heard the frustration from restaurants and barber shops and cafes and so many other small businesses in our states, that are facing impossible decisions right now. They've spent hours on the phones trying to talk to someone about a loan, and have either been turned down or can't get answers, while big, well-connected franchises go to the front of the line. It's unacceptable.

We can't let the same thing happen with these loans by Treasury and the Fed. The problems with the SBA loans should be a lesson to Congress, as we consider additional recovery measures, and to the Special Inspector General.

In addition to those concerns, President Trump has shown outright hostility toward anyone who tries to hold him accountable to the American people he serves, including inspectors general. He removed the acting IG for the Defense Department who was set to become the chairman of the Pandemic Recovery Accountability Committee, he fired the intelligence community IG, and last Friday, he replaced the acting Health and Human Services IG. All of these professionals did their jobs and exposed misconduct in the Administration.

Looking at the last twenty years, we found only one IG candidate was nominated while serving in the White House Counsel's office, and another nominee served in the White House Counsel's office under an earlier Administration. Both of them resigned, one for politicizing the office and the other for a lack of independence. Not a great track record.

We passed the CARES Act to support our economy, by helping workers, Main Street businesses, state and local governments, and non-profits. We cannot tolerate businesses and their workers suffering to protect the President, his family, or their allies, because of corruption, misuse, or favoritism.

Mr. Miller, if you are confirmed, I expect you to follow the letter and spirit of the law, and serve the American people – not President Trump. As Special Inspector General, you must be willing

to stand up to the Administration and any other bad actor and to uphold the goals of the law. Anything less is unacceptable.

While Mr. Miller is the only nominee before us today with “Pandemic Recovery” in his title, make no mistake – the FHA and the Office of Housing will be on the front lines of our nation’s response as well.

In good times, FHA provides access to affordable homeownership for millions of families. When the economy slows, as it is today, the FHA is expected to step up to meet the needs of more households and keep the mortgage market working, even as others in the market retreat.

During the 2008 financial crisis, economists estimated that FHA’s actions helped prevent an additional 25 percent decline in housing prices and the loss of an additional 3 million jobs.

FHA’s decisions will determine whether families can remain in their homes, or whether communities face a foreclosure crisis on top of a public health crisis.

They will also help determine whether the burden of this downturn, like the 2008 crisis, falls most heavily on communities of color and exacerbates economic inequality, or whether we will adopt policies and do oversight to provide an equitable recovery that keeps affordable housing in the hands of homeowners and communities, rather than Wall Street investors.

And decisions at the Office of Housing, which Mrs. Wade would lead if confirmed, will determine whether policies and funding are in place to keep the lowest income seniors, persons with disabilities, and people in HUD-financed healthcare facilities safe during this pandemic.

Over the past three years, this Administration has tried to gut funding to housing and community development programs, rolled back fair housing protections and other civil rights protections, undermined the safety of manufactured housing residents, and tried to make homeownership more expensive and harder to attain.

I hope the answers Mrs. Wade provides today will make clear that she will fight to reverse that trend.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I look forward to hearing from the nominees.