

COOPER IG REFORM BILL PASSES CONGRESS, AWAITS PRESIDENT'S SIGNATURE

Legislation improves accountability and oversight in federal government

WASHINGTON— Three decades after Congress created inspectors general (IGs) to be the watchdogs of federal government, the U.S. House and Senate have passed landmark reform legislation championed by Congressman Jim Cooper, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Henry Waxman and Ranking Member Tom Davis. The Inspector General Reform Act of 2008 strengthens IGs, protects them from political interference and increases transparency and accountability in their oversight work.

Cooper, who first introduced IG reform legislation in 2003, praised Congress for passing the bill with unanimous votes in both the House and Senate. He also commended Sen. Claire McCaskill for leading the IG reform effort in the Senate.

“Inspectors general are our first line of defense against waste, fraud and abuse in government, and in recent years they’ve been working overtime,” Cooper said. “This reform bill restores integrity to government by holding IGs accountable and giving them the independence to do their jobs. I’m proud that Congress passed this watchdog reform bill unanimously. I appreciate Chairman Waxman, Ranking Member Davis and Sen. McCaskill’s leadership, and I look forward to the president signing our bill into law.”

“This legislation is an important step forward in enhancing the independence and accountability of Inspectors General,” Waxman said. “I applaud Rep. Cooper and Sen. McCaskill for their great leadership on this issue. Their legislation enjoys strong, bipartisan support because it strengthens the IGs, our first line of defense against waste, fraud, and abuse in federal programs.”

“We all agree that IGs should operate independently, free from political interference,” Davis said. “I believe that this bill strikes the right balance between IG independence and the appropriate management role of inspectors general, and I applaud the Congress for its work on this legislation.”

This measure will provide greater independence for the IGs from the administration and agency officials, ensure that their oversight of government agencies is transparent and available to the public, and establish a council to share best practices, enhance training, develop inter-agency information-sharing policies, and generally strengthen the IG community.

Specifically, the Inspector General Reform Act of 2008 requires that:

Congress is notified 30 days in advance of a proposed removal of an IG, along with the reasons for the removal.

All IGs have access to independent legal counsel, avoiding potential conflicts of interest with agency counsels.

A Council on Integrity and Efficiency for Inspectors General is established. The mission of the Council is to address integrity, economy, and effectiveness issues that transcend individual government agencies and to increase the professionalism and effectiveness of IG personnel by helping to establish well-trained and highly skilled IG office workforces. Within the Council, an Integrity Committee must be created to investigate allegations of wrongdoing that are made against inspectors general or certain other staff members.

Budget requests for each IG's office must specifically identify how much money is being requested for training and how much is requested for the IG Council, helping to improve IG funding through greater visibility.

All IG websites be directly accessible from the home page of agency web sites. All public IG reports must also be posted on agency websites within 3 working days of release.

In the event of an IG vacancy, the Council for Integrity and Efficiency will recommend possible replacements.

The president's budget delineate how much money is requested for each IG office, as well as the funding level the IG requested for their office, allowing Congress to identify whether agencies are interfering with the work of an IG office through funding cuts.

No IG may accept a bonus or a pay raise from their agency to discourage agencies from using monetary incentives to pressure IGs.

All IGs be appointed without regard to political affiliation and on the basis of integrity, and demonstrated ability in accounting, auditing, financial analysis, law, management analysis, public administration, or investigations.

Pay is increased for all IGs to ensure enhanced independence, make their pay comparable to other senior agency officials, and to compensate for the prohibition on bonuses.

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