



OSC protects whistleblowers as they shine light of truth

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The great Greek poet Sophocles introduces us to the problem of individual integrity butting up against the power of the state: "No one delights in the bearer of bad news."

In our own times, it is the whistleblower who, at great risk to himself, speaks truth to those in power who have betrayed the public trust through neglect or corruption. The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) exists to protect federal whistleblowers and other complainants.

An illustrious whistleblower, Frank Serpico, brought to light corruption among fellow officers in the NYPD. Shot by a drug dealer, he was abandoned by his fellow officers. Serpico speaks of "lamplighters" rather than "whistleblowers," which he bases on Paul Revere and his famous midnight ride. The founders of this country had a healthy distrust of power, an unchecked executive, judiciary, or legislature. They also had a healthy awareness of tendencies in human nature toward faction, corruption, self-protection, and even self-destruction. "Lamplighters" shed the light of truth and warn our citizens of waste, fraud and illegality.

There is good news for whistleblowers coming to The Office of Special Counsel. Last year, OSC's dedicated staff doubled the number of substantiated, valid whistleblower claims over prior years. These claims were sent to agencies for full investigation and correction of fraud, waste, abuse, or danger to health or public safety. Recent cases found:

- Safety issues in hospitals serving veterans.
- An employee who was reprimed against for reporting her superior for bringing an assault rifle to work. OSC obtained corrective action on her behalf.
- The mounts of the jet engines on the C-5A Galaxy, which transports troops and supplies, were compromised by ball-bearing repairs done in violation of the manufacturer's and the Air Force's manuals.
- Near misses at a large airport air traffic control were covered up in reports, and the employee who brought that information to us was reprimed against.

Without in any way sacrificing quality, we cleared a chronic backlog of cases that plagued the Office of Special Counsel and crippled our ability to provide expeditious justice for whistleblowers and other complainants. We substantiated over twice as many claims by federal workers who disclosed improper conduct by superiors and filed the first two prosecutions in this agency's history under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), bolstering the President's commitment to care for our troops and returning veterans.

The credit belongs to the dedicated civil servants of OSC who believe in their mission and were willing to work incredibly hard this last year. Do not believe the wild tales of OSC dismissing whistleblower cases without proper review or consideration. This is baseless polemics that unfairly maligns the dedicated career public servants who have heroically worked these cases and improved justice for whistleblowers and other claimants.

Presidents and representatives speak for the people they represent. The whistleblower speaks as the conscience of the people. OSC was established to protect them because government should honor, not punish, those whose concern for the public good transcends their own private interests. Our Office is a small one, but

we stand ready to defend the core principles of integrity, good government, and fair treatment of vets, returning troops, and whistleblowers – all “lamplighters” of liberty in a Republic girded by checks and balances.

Scott Bloch began his five-year term as Special Counsel in January 2004.