

“Sunshine is the best antiseptic.”

These simple words of Justice Louis Brandeis remain as relevant today as ever, particularly as the Federal Inspector General community begins its 30th year of service under the Inspector General Act.

This comes at a time when the Inspector General community finds itself in the middle of a swirl of controversy and scrutiny. Perhaps as at no time in its history, has there been more public interest in the activities of the community, including current consideration of new legislation proposed, according to its sponsors, with the intent of strengthening the Inspector General concept.

The Inspector General Act established independent and objective units -- Inspectors General -- within most Federal departments and agencies. While the Act describes the mission of the IGs in formal terms, I view the IG's as having four major responsibilities:

- Providing an independent set of “eyes and ears” on the efficiency and effectiveness of Department operations;
- Serving as objective fact finders in controversial, high profile matters of agency concern; and,
- Bringing to justice those attempting to defraud the U.S. government.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Inspector General community works to ensure that the interests of the U.S. citizens are represented when important governmental decisions are made.

The current issues and concerns that have been raised regarding the community, serious as they are, require some balance and perspective.

Let's look at the record.

The Inspector General Act has placed our community of accountability professionals at the vanguard of so many of the great public challenges of this or any day. These include, as examples issues ranging from, the complexities of managing the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to defending vigorously the Nation in the wake of the mortal threats presented by global terrorism. Further, the IG community commits a huge proportion of its resources on an annual basis to auditing the financial statements of each department and agency. Taken collectively, this effort is one of the largest financial statement audit engagements ever undertaken. This may sound like mundane work, but the results provide the basis for audit opinions on statements reflecting trillions of dollars in operations throughout the Federal sector. Both the Administration and the Congress view this work as a priority as they endeavor to enhance Federal government accountability. Our most important work as IGs on behalf of the Nation is as it has been consistently for the past 30 years: helping to ensure that the Government works as efficiently and effectively as possible for the people, and, of course, with appropriate accountability and transparency.

Much work has been done, but much work remains. In our 2006 progress report to the President, the Federal Inspectors General reported the following results: \$9.9 billion in identified potential savings; \$6.8 billion in investigative fines and recoveries; and 8,400 criminal prosecutions. This

record of accomplishment is consistent with the community's performance over many years of service. Indeed, the 11,000 members of the Federal IG community can be proud of all that it has achieved.

The work of safeguarding public resources, to be sure, is not ours alone. Consequently, it is essential to recognize the many contributions of all our partners, dedicated public servants who perform the critical missions of Government and share our commitment to seeing that the right thing is done, that it is done the right way, and that it is done well.

The mission of the IGs is not just to find fault even when fault is due, but also, we strive to identify risks to the ongoing and future effectiveness of Government. The tackling and correcting of long-term, often well entrenched, intractable systemic deficiencies is perhaps a less glamorous, but no less important task before us. And while the fruits of this labor may only be harvested over time, the citizens of the Nation should know that we are at work every day, in countless ways, to help improve the efficiency, effectiveness, integrity, and yes – the transparency – of government operations.

The Honorable Gregory H. Friedman serves as Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Energy and Vice Chair of the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency. In June of 2007, he began his 40th year of Federal service.