

**IMPROVING GOVERNMENT
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT**
Congressman Jim Cooper

The Inspectors General serve as the principal watchdogs of the nation's major federal agencies. In 2002 alone, audits by IG offices resulted in total savings to the federal government of nearly \$72 billion. In addition, IG-led investigations resulted in more than 5,700 criminal indictments and nearly 2,200 civil or personnel actions.

Since their creation by statute 25 years ago, the Inspectors General have played an increasingly important and visible role in promoting the integrity and efficiency of federal agencies. The Improving Government Accountability Act seeks to strengthen the institutional stature of the Inspectors General and provide them with the resources to pursue their mission as effectively as possible. This Act would assist Inspectors General by:

- **Enhancing IG independence.**

Removal and terms. IGs now serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority (either the agency for which they serve or the President) and can be removed for any reason. The IGAA sets a 7-year term for IGs and allows their removal only in the event of permanent disability, malfeasance, inefficiency, neglect of duty, conviction of a felony or conduct involving moral turpitude. This provision would strengthen IG independence and eliminate the possibility of arbitrary or politically motivated dismissals.

- **Providing adequate resources.**

Appropriations. Funding for IG offices is ultimately determined by Congress through the appropriations process. However, IG budget requests are also submitted as part of an agency's overall budget request. The IGAA would allow IGs to submit copies of their funding requests directly to Congress, thereby diminishing the likelihood that agencies can "punish" their IG offices by stripping them of funding or by submitting a lower amount than originally requested. The IGAA would also require each budget submitted by the President to include a separate statement of the amount of appropriations requested by each Inspector General, as well as a statement comparing the budget request submitted by an Inspector General with the requests submitted by agency heads.

- **Ensuring professionalism.**

(a) Codifying the PCIE and ECIE. The President's Council on Integrity and the Executive Council on Integrity and Efficiency serve as the governing councils for the IGs, working to disseminate "best practices" and to provide a unified institutional voice for the IGs. As creations of executive order, the councils receive no independent funding and are not assured of their existence from administration to administration. The IGAA would codify a single joint council, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. The IGAA would also authorize \$750,000 in annual operating funds.

(b) Flexibility in personnel management. The IGAA would revamp hiring procedures for IG offices to bring them in line with current personnel practices at the GAO. Greater flexibility in hiring and pay will enable IG offices to attract and reward talent.

- **Improving direct access to Congress.**

(a) Direct reporting. Under current law, IGs submit semi-annual reports to their agency heads, who then have 30 days to transmit the reports to Congress. Some IGs argue that this process diminishes their access to Congress and undermines their ability to draw attention to agency concern. The IGAA would allow IGs to submit reports directly to Congress and bypass agency intercession in the reporting process.

(b) Timing of reporting periods. Semi-annual reporting periods currently end on March 30 and September 30. As a consequence, reports submitted by the IGs often arrive in Congress when it is not in session (either during August recess for the March reports or after adjournment in the fall). The IGAA should shift the date of the reporting periods to January 31 and July 31.