
U.S. Congressman Jim Cooper

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COOPER SEEKS IMPROVED GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY ---introduces bill to strengthen powers of Inspectors General

WASHINGTON, D.C.---U.S. Representative Jim Cooper introduced legislation today designed to improve government performance and efficiency by strengthening the powers of Inspectors General (IG), the internal watchdogs in 57 government agencies.

“You only have to look at today’s deficit to know we must do everything we can to improve efficiency throughout the federal government,” Cooper said. “By strengthening the Inspectors General Act, Congress can increase government accountability, while also reducing waste, fraud and abuse.”

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.

For example, TVA’s IG office conducted contractor audits in 2002 which identified over \$89.5 million in potential savings and recoveries. One contractor was found to have claimed \$20 million in overstated costs and excess profits. At the Department of Transportation (DOT), \$273 million was recovered after the audit of the DOT’s Central Artery/Tunnel Project. The IG at the Department of Agriculture recently uncovered fraud in the agency’s Business and Industry loan program that resulted in \$6 million in restitution and a lengthy prison sentence for one borrower.

Cooper’s proposal, the Improving Government Accountability Act, will strengthen agency IG powers. The bill is co-sponsored by Republican Chris Shays of Connecticut, who serves as Vice Chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform. Cooper is also a member of this committee which will have primary responsibility for considering Cooper’s IG proposal.

“We believe this bill is a good starting point for re-energizing the role of the IG’s office throughout the government,” Cooper said. “Now, with bipartisan support, we can count on providing IGs with the independence and support they need to do their jobs, protecting taxpayer dollars.”

The Act eliminates the possibility of arbitrary or politically-motivated removal from office by setting a 7-year term for IGs and allowing their dismissal only for cause. Cooper’s proposal also allows IGs to speak directly to Congress and creates an executive council for IGs to foster the dissemination of best practices.

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