

**Opening Statement of  
The Honorable Jim Cooper**

**Before the**

**Subcommittee on Government Efficiency  
and Financial Management  
Committee on Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives  
October 8, 2003**

Good afternoon Chairman Platts, Ranking Member Towns and members of the Subcommittee. I want to thank the Chairman for calling this hearing, and I thank my colleagues for allowing me to join this hearing to address this important issue.

Twenty-five years ago, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Inspector General Act, which for the first time created independent audit and investigative offices in 12 federal agencies. The concept of the Inspector General was borrowed from the military, which also had a custom of appointing “inspectors general” to provide an independent review of the combat readiness of the Continental Army’s troops.

The Inspectors General created in 1978 were charged with two basic missions: (1) to conduct independent investigations and

audits into agency performance and report on the problems they discover and (2) to generally foster integrity, accountability and excellence in government programs.

Since their creation, the Inspectors General have earned a solid reputation for carrying out these two missions effectively. They now serve an indispensable and increasingly visible role 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.

I believe that Congress has a responsibility to support the IGs in their mission and to provide them with the tools they need to work effectively. This is why I plan to introduce legislation that would help the Inspectors General in their continuing efforts to improve government performance and efficiency.

My bill, the Improving Government Accountability Act (IGAA), seeks to strengthen the institutional stature of the Inspectors General, enhance their independence and provide them with additional resources to carry out their mission.

First, my bill would increase the independence of each IG by creating a fixed term of office and eliminating the possibility of arbitrary or politically motivated dismissals. Currently, IGs now serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority; whether it be the agency they serve or the President. While it does not happen often, IGs have occasionally been dismissed because of their views or because of an embarrassing audit or report. The fear of arbitrary dismissal could also inhibit some IGs from speaking freely. My bill would set a seven-year term for every IG and allow their removal only for “cause.” The standard for removal would be the same as the one that applies currently under statute to the Comptroller General: permanent disability, malfeasance, inefficiency, neglect of duty, conviction of a felony or conduct involving moral turpitude

Second, my bill will help ensure that IG offices have access to sufficient resources from Congress. Although funding for IG offices is ultimately determined by Congress through the appropriations process, IG budget requests are submitted as part of an agency’s overall budget request. Anecdotally, there have been several reports of agencies “punishing” their IG offices by

submitting a budget request significantly lower than what the IG office originally asked for.

My bill would allow IGs to submit copies of their funding requests directly to Congress. It would also require the President's budget to provide a comparison of the budget requests submitted by IGs and the budget requests submitted by the agency involved. This provision would partially free the IGs from being captured by the agency appropriations process. At the very least, it would also provide some more transparency.

Third, the bill contains several provisions to help ensure that IG offices maintain high professional standards.

To enable IG offices to attract and retain top-notch employees, the IGAA includes provisions which revamp hiring procedures and bring them in line with current personnel practices at the GAO. This will enable IG offices to have greater flexibility in hiring and pay.

The bill would also codify the current governing councils for the IGs, which work to disseminate "best practices" and to provide a unified institutional voice for the IGs. These councils,

the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency and the Executive Council on Integrity and Efficiency. However, now exist only by executive order and receive no independent funding. My bill would combine both councils into a single council, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, codify the council to ensure its continuity and authorize \$750,000 in operating funds each year through 2009.

Finally, my bill would improve the direct access of IGs to Congress. Under current law, IGs submit semi-annual reports to their agency heads, who then have 30 days to transmit the report to Congress. Many IGs have argued 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.

My bill would also shift the date of the semi-annual reporting periods, when IGs submit their reports to Congress. Currently, the reporting periods end in March and September, which means that IG reports often arrive in Congress when it's not in session—either right before August recess or after

adjournment. My bill will make the reports more timely by shifting the due dates for IG reports to January 31 and July 31.

By strengthening the Inspectors General Act, Congress can take an easy step toward increasing government accountability, while also reducing waste, fraud and abuse. I applaud the IGs for their successes in the past 25 years, and I hope that the Improving Government Accountability Act will help them do their jobs even more effectively.

In drafting this legislation, my office worked with a number of IG offices, including some of the witnesses testifying here today. Although my bill does not yet carry an official endorsement by the PCIE and ECIE, I think it fairly reflects many of the priorities of the IG community. It is my hope that this legislation will be enacted in the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, and I will work with my colleagues to ensure its passage. Again I appreciate the Subcommittee taking a look into this issue today and look forward to working with you.