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Celebrating 25 Years

Reflections on the Silver Anniversary of the IG Act

October 12, 2003 will mark the 25th anniversary of the enactment of the Inspector General (IG) Act. On that date in 1978, President Jimmy Carter created independent audit and investigative offices in 12 Federal agencies. The IG concept put into place on that day was derived in part from the military custom of having an IG provide an independent review of the combat readiness of the Continental Army's troops. The need for that independent review over 225 years ago remains the solid foundation that guides the IG community today.

Moving from the IG concept into law was neither quick nor without opposition. Work in the early 1960s by a subcommittee of the Government Operations Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, began to highlight the need for independent statutory IGs. Further work by this same subcommittee in 1974 revealed a situation in the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) where processes for investigating program fraud and abuse were essentially non-existent. In response, legislation establishing a statutory IG at HEW was enacted 2 years later. During congressional hearings debating the Act itself, several witnesses sounded warnings of serious adverse consequences that would result if the Act became law, and other witnesses questioned the constitutionality of some of the Act's provisions. However, these concerns were tempered by the testimony of the HEW Secretary and IG, and the Act passed both houses of the Congress with strong bipartisan support.

Now, 25 years later, it is clear that adverse consequences have not materialized, and the basic tenets of the Act's intended mission have remained constant and strong. Although amended several times over the years to add new IGs and clarify reporting requirements, the Act has given IGs the

authority and responsibility to be independent voices for economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within the Federal Government. Today, with the recent amendment to the Act establishing an IG at the Export-Import Bank, 58 IGs protect the integrity of government; improve program efficiency and effectiveness; and prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in 60 Federal agencies.

Since their early beginnings, IGs have focused attention on good government. As charged by the Act, individual IGs direct their work toward examining agency programs and operations with the goal of promoting program efficiency and effectiveness and protecting government integrity. The IGs independently identify government vulnerabilities, facilitate solutions, and leverage their resources to promote government integrity, accountability, transparency, and excellence. Simply put, IGs appropriately view themselves as “agents of positive change.”

The IG concept has proven to be of significant benefit to our government as well as governments abroad. Each year, billions of dollars are returned to the Federal Government or better spent based on the recommendations from IG reports. IG investigations contribute to the prosecution of thousands of wrongdoers and recovery of billions of dollars annually. In FY 2001 alone, the IGs accounted for more than \$28 billion in saved and recovered Federal funds. The IG concept of good governance and accountability encourages foreign governments to seek advice with the goal of replicating the basic IG principles in their governments.

Over the last several years, IGs have been operating in a changing environment. In addition to the traditional roles of promoting economy and efficiency and fighting fraud, waste, and abuse, new responsibilities and challenges have emerged. The IGs are now playing a pivotal role within their

agencies by conducting financial audits, reporting on Results Act compliance and accountability, assessing information security efforts, identifying their agencies’ most significant challenges, and ensuring the effective implementation of the President’s Management Agenda.

The President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency (PCIE) and the Executive Council on Integrity and Efficiency (ECIE) are continuing their long tradition of coordinating the professional activities of the IG community. Established by Executive Order in 1981 and 1992, respectively, the PCIE and ECIE were charged with addressing integrity and efficiency issues that transcend individual government agencies and increasing the professionalism and effectiveness of OIG personnel throughout government. Through their committees and working groups, both Councils have addressed relevant issues related to audit, investigation, and inspection efforts; developed professional standards, guidelines, and manuals; issued reports on governmentwide initiatives and concerns; and trained OIG staff to remain current in their respective professions.

In celebrating the many accomplishments of our community, we will use this next year as an opportunity to reflect, both individually and as a community, on the successes of our past and how we can continue to build on our accomplishments. Over the next 12 months, we are looking to engage the administration and the Congress in a dialogue on ways to improve upon the Act. We hope to host forums and other events as well as produce publications, such as *The Journal of Public Inquiry* and our individual agency semiannual reports, to share our past and articulate our vision for the future.

We look forward to an exciting and productive year. 🏠