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# A Non-Random Act of Kindness

## *Congress and the Inspectors General*

### Evolution of the Inspector General Role

When the Inspector General Act (IGA) was first proposed in the late 1970's, skeptics abounded. The novel concept—of having an independent, non-partisan voice within an agency reporting to both its head and to Congress—would never work. It would infringe on traditional presidential prerogatives, undermine the authority of cabinet secretaries, and balkanize criminal investigations. Further, we were told, it would be impossible for an inspector general to be responsive to 535 different members of congress. Fortunately, experience has proven otherwise.

As we enter the third decade following passage of the IGA (Public Law No. 95-452), inspectors general have become an integral component in efforts to improve government efficiency and integrity. We are no longer best identified by the moniker of a certain Danny Kaye movie. With a new administration and Congress settling in, we are in a good position to make high impact contributions by focusing attention on federal management challenges and recommending constructive solutions. By virtue of our independent and nonpartisan status, we provide a measure of continuity and offer a wealth of institutional knowledge and expertise. We note that key members of Congress urged President Bush to recognize this vital role by adhering to established practice in retaining the services of presidentially-appointed inspectors general at the start of his administration. We appreciate knowing their trust and support, as well as that of the President.

The fruits of our work will not blossom, however, unless we, as a community, actively reach out to help new officials understand how we may assist them in confronting the management problems landing on their desks. Indeed, there are some 3,000 political appointment slots to fill in the executive branch, and many of these offi-

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<sup>1</sup>Brian A. Dettelbach, Senior Counsel for Legislative and External Affairs and Paul M. Feeney, Legislative Counsel, contributed greatly to the writing of and research for this article. Disclaimer: The views of the authors are their own. They do not reflect the views of the PCIE or its Legislation Committee.