

Exposing Corruption *Exploring Solutions*
Project On Government Oversight

January 13, 2009

Representative John Tanner
1226 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Tanner:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) regarding H.Res. 40, which requires each standing committee of the House of Representatives to hold periodic hearings on the topics of waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement. We believe that having such a systematic approach to oversight enshrined in the Rules of the House would greatly enhance Congressional oversight of executive agencies' programs and functions.

As you may know, POGO is a non-partisan nonprofit that for more than 27 years has investigated and exposed corruption and other misconduct in an effort to make federal agencies more effective, accountable, open, and honest.

For the past 18 months we have been engaged in an in-depth study of the Inspector General system, examining both the law and how the system works. We issued one report last February on issues affecting IGs' independence (www.pogo.org/pogo-files/reports/government-oversight/inspectors-general-many-lack-essential-tools-for-independence/go-ig-20080226.html), and are pleased to note that several of our suggestions were incorporated into last year's Inspector General Reform Act (H.R. 928, P.L. 110-409). We are planning to issue a second report in the coming months regarding IGs' performance and accountability.

One of our conclusions is that Congress needs to pay much more attention to the work of both IGs and the GAO. Too often reports on important issues are left languishing, unread, on the desks and shelves of Congressional staffers. It has been 30 years since Congress created the IG system, and we believe it was a brilliant and unique concept—to place internal watchdogs in most federal agencies where they would both prevent and root out waste, fraud, and abuse, and encourage federal programs to be more effective and efficient.

However, this wonderful system can only work if Congress pays attention to the resulting reports. Inspectors General have no enforcement powers. They cannot force an agency to do anything. If an agency will not fix a broken program, then it is up to Congress to force them to do so.

Frankly, there are two problems with Congress's ignoring IG reports—one is the more common, when the IG has done good work and makes important recommendations that need to be but are not implemented. The other problem is the flip side to this—some IGs produce only mediocre work and do not challenge their agencies aggressively enough. Congress needs to pay attention in both cases.

For all of these reasons, we support the passage of H. Res. 40 to require each House committee to conduct at least one hearing during each 120-day period regarding waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement of the agencies under its jurisdiction; at least one additional hearing if there are disclaimers in any agency's financial report; and at least one additional hearing if a program is listed as "high risk."

Again, we appreciate your asking us for our views and look forward to working with you to make Congressional oversight more aggressive and effective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Danielle Brian". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Danielle Brian
Executive Director