

Video Transcript: “Building on 40 Years of Excellence in Independent Oversight,” July 2018

Senator John Glenn: You’ve proven your worth. You’ve saved many times the expense it costs to have the IGs across the federal government.

Representative Henry Waxman: I’ve long supported the work of independent oversight, and the IGs provide independent oversight over the agencies.

Senator Susan Collins: The IGs are so important because they help to restore public confidence in government.

Representative Elijah Cummings: We rely on the work they do every single day through investigations, audits, and inspections. We could not possibly do all of this alone. And I cannot imagine how Congress ever did so.

Senator Chuck Grassley: We do know that in many cases we can identify that Inspector Generals have made a big difference.

Representative Trey Gowdy: Through their work at these agencies, Inspectors General promote good stewardship of taxpayer dollars and improve the effectiveness of government.

Representative Gerald E. Connolly: Cumulatively, the impact of these individual investigations or reports has been enormous.

Senator Ron Johnson: They really do give the public the information that I think the public has a right to know.

Representative Darrell Issa: We have to not only celebrate our IGs, but we also have to ask the question, “Can we give them the additional power they need?”

Representative Jason Chaffetz: If you’re part of that Inspector General community, please stand for a moment. Thank you, thank you, thank you. On behalf of all of us that serve here, we thank you for your service and your interest. And we want you to know how deeply valued you are in the work that you do.

Michael E. Horowitz: In the beginning, in 1978 when the IG Act was passed, it was an experiment. There were only 12 IGs at the outset. But the idea was, 4 years after Watergate, was to help restore confidence for the public in government. Because confidence in the government was at an all-time low.

Mark Bialek: IGs that got started back in the 78, 79, 80 and early 80s timeframe, I think we were just trying to figure out how to be IGs, what kind of relationship to have with our agency leadership, how independent to be, how argumentative to be. We were trying to figure out the best way to carry out these new and maybe sometimes nebulous responsibilities that we were given in statute.

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Glenn A. Fine: Not every agency wanted an IG or believed they needed an IG, and often they sometimes resisted the efforts of an IG. But eventually they came to understand appreciate the value and the importance of IG work.

Michael E. Horowitz: So the 12 IGs that started out in 1978 had great success.

President Ronald Reagan: I asked for junk yard dogs but I didn't know they would turn out to be blue ribbon winners (laughter).

Michael E. Horowitz: What occurred over time was an expansion of the number of IGs, from that original 12 to where we are today, 73. The first major expansion occurring in 1988.

Senate Clerk: Senate 908, an Act to amend the Inspector General Act of 1978.

Representative Jack Brooks: The Inspector Generals have proved a sound investment in good government. They've contributed substantially to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the departments and agencies where they are located.

Representative Frank Horton: It expands on the tested Inspector General concept and raises to 56 the number of statutory Inspectors General.

Phyllis K. Fong: When Congress passed the 1988 amendments, it was a wonder message to the oversight community, to the IGs, and to the departments and agencies, that the IGs had an important role. Throughout the history of the federal IGs, there's been a long tradition of interagency cooperation, sharing of best practices, dialogue, among IGs as to how best to do our job. It started out very informally and became more formal and more institutionalized as time went on.

Gaston L. Gianni: We had 2 separate organizations. We had the President's Council on Integrity and efficiency, and then we had the Executive Council on Integrity and Efficiency. One were the IGs that were appointed by the President, the other were IGs that were appointed by their agency head.

Phyllis K. Fong: The two councils created by Executive Order did a tremendous job of bringing together IGs with common interests. Those of us in the community at the time recognized that that was a tremendous development, and that the next step in the path towards an effective community would be to unify all IGs in the executive and legislative branches.

Kathy A. Buller: Prior to 2008 we didn't have budget autonomy, we didn't have separate legal counsel, a lot of IGs got their legal counsel from the General Counsel, and we also didn't have a cohesive community.

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Tammy L. Whitcomb: At that time I was in the field, most of that time, I came to Washington in 2003, but we didn't really have a structure or training provided by the community. Nothing like we have now.

Senator Susan Collins: The Inspector Generals Reform Act of 2008 strengthened the authority of the IGs. It also sent a strong signal to the leaders of federal agencies that we had the backs of the Inspectors General.

Phyllis K. Fong: Congress gave CIGIE two core missions. The first mission is to conduct cross-cutting studies of issues. The second core mission is to provide training to the IG workforce. Through the Training Institute, CIGIE currently trains thousands of employees every year.

Dan Levinson: And to 2008 Act that establish CIGIE was really a quantum leap in the ability for IGs to work across government agencies in a corporate way.

Glenn A. Fine: That consolidation, I think, has improved the IG community, has increased collaboration and coordination, and helped to provide a better vehicle for IGs to have their voices heard.

Scott S. Dahl: With the creation of CIGIE in 2008, we were now one community. But it wasn't until we faced this challenge of access to records in the community that we finally found that commanding voice.

Michael E. Horowitz: Several of us were being told by our agencies, despite the word “all” being in the IG Act, that we had a right to get all records, that all didn't really mean all. It meant something less than that.

Kathy A. Buller: There was a point at which we had an IG conference and I brought the issue forward and there was like a groundswell.

Carol Fortine Ochoa: That had a ripple effect across the community, and it posed an existential threat to all Inspectors General. Because if you don't have access to all the records you need to do an investigation or an audit, you cannot possibly exercise independent oversight.

Robert P. Storch: Even the impression that we might not have all the information we need to do our work would undermine the credibility of what we're doing.

Senator Chuck Grassley: Well some lawyer, someplace, one little person out of two and a half million employees saying, “Well really all doesn't mean all.” And that's after Congress passes it and the Congress – and the President signed it. That the law really doesn't mean what Congress intended?

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Michael E. Horowitz: The OLC opinion represents a serious threat to not only my independence, but to that of all Inspectors General. A hallmark of the IG Act, that Inspectors General are entitled to independent access to all information in an agency’s possession, has been pierced.

Representative Darrell Issa: When agencies withhold information and their records from these watchdogs, it impedes their ability to conduct their work thoroughly, independently, and most of all, timely.

Senator Ron Johnson: The bill has 18 bipartisan co-sponsors. And it’s just incredibly important.

Jay N. Lerner: It was passed at 3 in the morning on Saturday morning December 10th 2016, I remember it well. And Congress adjourned just a couple hours after that.

Michael E. Horowitz: How do we bring 73 IGs together, whose very foundation is to be independent, to work together as a community on communal interests, and to move forward? I think that was a seminal moment for the community.

Kathy A. Buller: I do think it was a turning point for the community. I think that was the first time I’d seen the community come together over an issue like that.

Jay N. Lerner: I’m proud of the fact that the IG community came together and spoke with one voice with unanimity.

Michael J. Missal: What I would like to see for the future of IGs is IGs working more closely and collaboratively together.

Hannibal “Mike” Ware: For somebody like myself who’s been in this community for their entire adult lives, I can tell you that I have seen that the impact of Inspectors General have been transformative in terms of ensuring that there is integrity in the programs across government.

Tammy L. Whitcomb: We decided to build Oversight.gov to make a platform that can showcase the work of IGs so that we can better connect with external stakeholders on the work that we do, and also connect better internally so we can see the work that other IGs are doing, as it relates to the work that we do.

Arthur A. Elkins Jr.: Every day, we come to work with the idea that we want to make a difference. And we work for the American taxpayer.

Robert A. Westbrook: There’s greater strength when we actually speak as one voice and we amplify each other’s message.

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Carol Fortine Ochoa: I hope and I wish that we will continue to support each other as a community.

Kathleen S. Tighe: I hope for the future of IGs that we can continue to come together looking at issues that transcend our individual agencies, that we can look at government-wide issues, because I really think we have an opportunity as a community to have real impact.

Inspectors General are Building on 40 Years of Excellence in Independent Oversight. Learn more: <https://www.ignet.gov/2018-commemoration>.

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