

It's time to stop the 'run amok' OIG



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Nearly every federal agency has an Inspector General's office that investigates charges of misconduct and roots out contracting fraud, which the Pentagon's IG just did with a report on Iraq spending. The Postal Service's Office of Inspector General claims its investigations saved more than \$8 million in 2006. Even if that's true, the office has wasted millions of dollars itself and the NALC has called on Congress to launch an investigation to put a stop to it.

The OIG has run amok in recent months, unleashing a reign of terror on letter carriers in dozens of post offices across the country. Time and again, overzealous agents have swooped into stations and placed groups of carriers on emergency suspensions pending removal—all for activities and work methods long approved by their supervisors or local postmasters. Like a bunch of fanatic Barney Fifes, OIG hotshots have seized dozens of carriers on dubious charges without proper investigations or respect for our members' due process rights. They also have routinely ignored the Postal Service's obligations to consult and inform the NALC on matters involving discipline set out in our National Agreement.

A couple of examples will show you what I mean. In one station in the Southwest Area, OIG "Special Agents" descended one day last fall and placed dozens of carriers on EP status for "mishandling the mail." Their crime? Returning undeliverable circulars to the post office. The mail pieces in question were total market coverage circulars destined for apartment buildings with high levels of vacancies, as well as those sent to patrons whose mail receptacles were filled to capacity. The practice of returning such circulars was well-known to managers and built into the route adjustment process. Yet the OIG is seeking to remove these carriers.

Needless to say, the NALC is fighting these removals and expects to prevail. But the damage already done is serious. The OIG's scattergun approach resulted in nu-

merous carriers being suspended even though they were on leave or not scheduled to work on the day in question. Some of the falsely accused carriers were eventually returned to work, but only after months of agony, during which time they lost their cars, their homes and their credit ratings.

In similar instances in the Great Lakes Area, the OIG has refused to give NALC representatives copies of "reports of investigation" or its agents' notes. In other cases, it claims the right to decide what evidence is relevant, providing edited versions of videos and notes instead of all the evidence available, including exculpatory evidence. The OIG seems to think it can intimidate carriers and threaten witnesses with impunity. In one case, they snatched a carrier off the street and interrogated him in a van.

This must stop. So, last month I called on key members of Congress to request an investigation of the OIG by another watchdog—the GAO, the Government Accountability Office. The OIG's annual budget exceeds \$200 million. Surely, it has better things to do than harass letter carriers, who are doing a difficult job and doing it honestly and well. If ever there was a federal agency wasting money and sabotaging a vital public service, this is it.

The top management of the Postal Service is not blameless in this. The USPS has an obligation to adhere to the due process procedures established by our labor agreement. But instead of curbing the OIG, they hide behind a memorandum of understanding that requires the OIG to respect our National Agreement. Clearly that is not enough. The USPS must act now to ensure the OIG's compliance or renegotiate the MOU to include some teeth.

As it stands, the OIG and its special agents honor our labor agreement only when it is convenient. We will not tolerate this any longer. It's time for the OIG and the USPS to get their act together. If we can't make 'em do it, it may take an act of Congress. But it will get done. ☒