

In a Divided Congress, Bipartisan Support for Whistleblowers

Senate's passage of new legislation -- by vote of 85-14 -- shows widespread embrace of whistleblowers as a weapon against fraud and other wrongdoing

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, USA, January 28, 2014 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Congress may not agree on much these days, but the bipartisan support of a new whistleblower statute -- aimed at protecting those who speak out about improper behavior in the military -- highlights the wide embrace of whistleblowers as a means for identifying and ending wrongful activity.

In an 85-14 vote, the Senate passed a major overhaul to the Military Whistleblower Protection Act of 1988 on December 19. The new statute is intended to strengthen protections for those who report misconduct in the military, including sexual assault, fraud, and waste. Specifically, it is designed to eliminate retaliation for speaking out -- and when retaliation does occur, to provide swift corrective action.

"It is rare to see Congress reach a consensus on anything today, but the fact that they do agree -- overwhelmingly so -- on whistleblowers demonstrates just how effective insiders are at rooting out bad behavior," says Jeffrey F. Keller, a founding partner at Keller Grover, a nationally recognized whistleblower [law firm](#), and a veteran whistleblower lawyer. "An increasing number of states are enacting and strengthening whistleblower statutes, while federal agencies like the Internal Revenue Service and the Securities and Exchange Commission have launched whistleblower programs. Everyone, from all sides of the political spectrum, sees the value in encouraging, rewarding, and protecting those who speak out about wrongdoing. Congress understands this, too."

In fact, Keller notes, it was Congress that spurred the success behind the [gold standard](#) of whistleblower laws, the federal False Claims Act, which targets fraud and other wrongdoing committed against the U.S. government. Since lawmakers modified that law in the mid-1980s to incentivize whistleblowers -- by awarding them a percentage of any ultimate recovery -- the False Claims Act has facilitated the recovery of more than \$34 billion in improperly paid government funds. The whistleblowers it empowered -- and protected from retaliation -- have helped beat back fraud in areas including Medicare and Medicaid, defense spending, pharmaceuticals, and banking.

The military whistleblower legislation -- which was sponsored by Senators Mark Warner (D-VA),

Susan Collins (R-ME), Tim Kaine (D-VA), and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) -- gives military personnel greater parity with civilians who report fraud, waste, and other improper behavior, and expands whistleblower protections to witnesses as well as victims. The statute will now go to the president for his signature.

"Whether it is fraud against the government, or sexual assaults on those in uniform, wrongdoing needs to be stopped, and whistleblowers have proven an extremely effective means for doing so," says Keller, whose whistleblower firm has offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco. "It is reassuring -- and important -- to see Congress expressing support for them yet again."

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