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Restore state inspector general money: Editorial

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Abolishing the state inspector general's office would be a step backward for Louisiana, and that's why the **Senate Finance Committee must restore funding** that was eliminated by the House. Gov. Bobby Jindal signed the law that made the inspector general an independent agency back in 2008, at the urging of Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans and other groups. He needs to show that he continues to support this important facet of reform by putting his clout behind efforts to amend House Bill 1 and restore the \$1.7 million that the House cut.



Times-Picayune archive
SUSAN POAG/THE TIMES-PICAYUNE
Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal addressing West Bank business leaders.

Killing this office would be a mistake, and legislators haven't given good arguments for doing so. Rep. Joe Harrison of Napoleonville, who led the charge to eliminate the agency's funding when the bill came before the House Appropriations Committee, claimed that it is "pretty much redundant" and that other law enforcement agencies can take on the inspector general's tasks.

But the truth is, the state inspector general is the sole agency that is dedicated to finding wrongdoing in the state's executive branch. Rafael Goyeneche, president of the Metropolitan Crime Commission, pointed out that other agencies cited by Rep. Harrison have backlogs of cases to pursue. "Eliminating the inspector general would have a chilling impact," Mr. Goyeneche said.

The office has been successful in ferreting out waste and in conducting investigations that have led to indictments and convictions.

If Louisiana didn't have an inspector general, this state might still be wasting money on non-refundable airfares that were never used. The inspector general found almost \$230,000 wasted in that manner. Jefferson Parish public school system workers might still be exceeding overtime limits -- a \$400,000 discovery by the IG. And the \$1.6 million that was stolen from a police retirement system might never have been noticed.

In the 2010-11 fiscal year alone, the state inspector general found \$3.2 million in fraud and waste, which was almost twice its budget for that year.

The state will hardly be saving money by defunding this office, and lawmakers should be ready to explain to their constituents why they think a watchdog is unnecessary.

Eliminating the inspector general also would send the message that Louisiana isn't committed to cleaning up corruption. That's not a very smart way to lure business and industry to this state.

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