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## Help Whistle-Blowers

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The House and Senate each have overwhelmingly passed bipartisan legislation to strengthen protections for whistle-blowers who report waste, fraud and abuse in federal agencies. But efforts to reconcile the two bills in a conference committee have failed so far, and time is running out this session.

Members of Congress should get busy and pass a strong compromise bill. Connecticut's Joseph I. Lieberman, one of four Senate negotiators, is in a good position to help make that happen.

Congress has given far greater protection to whistle-blowers in the private sector. Why not act now to give federal employees relief if they blow the whistle on such things as lax oversight of drugs at the Food and Drug Administration or billions of dollars wasted in no-bid defense contracts or cozy relationships between Federal Aviation Administration inspectors and certain airlines?

Protections offered under the original Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989 and its 1994 update don't work as intended.

Unfortunately, far too many federal workers who stand up for taxpayers by reporting waste, fraud and abuse are subject to intimidation and retaliation and are often fired or demoted.

A vast majority lose when they seek relief from the Merit Systems Protection Board or the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals, the only court to which they have access.

A strengthening of protections for whistle-blowers is obviously needed. The Senate and House bills are identical for about 60 percent of their provisions, but the House bill is by far the stronger. The compromise bill must, among other provisions:

- Grant employees the right to a jury trial in federal court.
- Specifically protect federal scientists who report efforts to alter, misrepresent or suppress federal research.
- Extend meaningful protections to FBI and intelligence agency whistle-blowers.
- Strengthen protections for federal contractors and extend meaningful protections to Transportation Security Officers (screeners).
- Provide whistle-blowers the right to be made whole, including compensatory damages.

This is right up Mr. Lieberman's alley. He can help whistle-blowers help the rest of us.