

The Patriot-News - One provision that should stay in stimulus bill is that protecting those who report waste, fraud

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There is much to grumble about in the 680-page stimulus package the House passed last week.

The spirit of bipartisanship that President Obama tried to bring to the process appears to have been tossed aside by the House leadership, which ended up including numerous questionable projects in the bill and then limiting debate to a few hours before the vote on H.R. 1.

One of the few parts of the stimulus legislation that is hard to argue with is an amendment to protect government "whistleblowers" who report fraud and waste.

That amendment, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Todd Platts, a Republican who represents York and Cumberland counties, protects any disclosure regarding waste, fraud or abuse "without restriction as to time, place, form, motive, context or prior disclosure."

The amendment also protects whistleblowers within government contractors, which is one of the key groups causing contention in discussions about inappropriate conduct in the contracts stemming from the U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There are countless examples of government excess and fraud, but one of the more recent and egregious examples came out this fall at the Department of the Interior -- the agency that oversees our parks and much of our oil and gas reserves. About a dozen Interior staff members were found to have been accepting gifts, drugs and even sexual favors from energy companies bidding for Interior Department contracts.

Would the Interior scandal have come out sooner had Platt's whistleblower provision been in place? It's difficult to say, but the House is sending a strong message by passing this amendment to foster an environment for reporting of improper behavior.

In this new era of greater open access in the executive office, it's time to enable rank and file career civil servants to be able to do their jobs and call out their superiors when fraud is at hand.

We encourage Pennsylvania Sens. Casey and Specter to follow suit and ensure this amendment is part of the Senate stimulus package.