

# The Washington Post

## Senators Have Questions About Changes in the Office of Special Counsel

[FINAL Edition]

The Washington Post - Washington, D.C.  
Author: Stephen Barr  
Date: Mar 9, 2005  
Start Page: B.02  
Section: METRO  
Document Types: Commentary  
Text Word Count: 638

**Full Text** (638 words)

*Copyright The Washington Post Company Mar 9, 2005*

Four senators have asked the Office of Special Counsel, the independent agency created to investigate whistle-blower complaints made by government employees, to explain a recent reorganization and how the changes affect the processing of cases.

The request, made in a letter, appears to be a prelude to a Senate hearing on the office, which is headed by Scott J. Bloch. The office has been in turmoil in recent months, partly because of the reorganization and partly because some employees have accused Bloch of retaliating against workers who have been critical of his leadership.

"Concerns have been brought to our attention that certain efforts to improve OSC operations may actually hinder its mission," the letter from the senators said.

The letter was signed by Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine), chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee; Joseph I. Lieberman (Conn.), the committee's ranking Democrat; George V. Voinovich (R-Ohio), chairman of the Senate subcommittee on government management and the federal workforce; and Sen. Daniel K. Akaka (Hawaii), the subcommittee's ranking Democrat.

Voinovich, at the request of Akaka, will conduct an oversight hearing on the Office of Special Counsel, Scott Milburn, communications director for Voinovich, said. No date has been set for the hearing.

In the letter, the four senators ask Bloch to provide a rationale for his reorganization, including an explanation of why he decided to open a field office in Detroit. The letter also seeks information about the agency's expenses, including the cost of reassigning and relocating headquarters employees to field offices.

In addition, the letter seeks information on the agency's workload, including details on the types of cases before the agency, and how and where they are processed.

The letter follows a private briefing given by agency officials to Senate aides, a Capitol Hill staff member said.

The Office of Special Counsel investigates complaints of waste, fraud and abuse filed by whistle-blowers, protects federal employees from prohibited personnel actions, and enforces the Hatch Act, which limits partisan activities by government workers.

Shortly after taking office, controversy began to swirl around Bloch. He was accused of failing to enforce prohibitions against bias in the federal workplace based on sexual orientation. The charge, made by some Democratic lawmakers and gay rights groups, led the White House to reiterate President Bush's support for protecting gay federal employees from discrimination.

After announcing the reorganization in January, watchdog groups complained that Bloch's reorganization was an attempt to purge career employees and replace them with political allies. This month, some of Bloch's employees renewed attention on the agency by filing a complaint alleging that Bloch was trying to undermine civil service protections for federal employees.

Cathy Deeds, the agency's spokeswoman, has said the reorganization complies with civil service law. Earlier this month, Deeds said that employee allegations against Bloch were false and that the agency would forward them to an

interagency council of inspectors general for an independent review.

Three federal financial leaders will be honored at the 34th annual conference of the Joint Financial Management Improvement Program tomorrow.

Donald V. Hammond, fiscal assistant secretary at the Treasury Department; James L. Taylor, deputy chief financial officer at the Commerce Department; and John D. Webster, chief financial officer at the Library of Congress, will receive the Donald L. Scantlebury memorial awards.

The awards are named in honor of the late chief accountant of the Government Accountability Office and chairman of the JFMIP Steering Committee.

Speakers for the conference include Clay Johnson III, a deputy director at the Office of Management and Budget; David M. Walker, head of the GAO; and Dan G. Blair, acting director of the Office of Personnel Management. For more information on the conference, go to [www.jfmip.gov](http://www.jfmip.gov).

Please join me for a discussion of federal employee and retiree issues at noon today on Federal Diary Live at [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

E-mail: [barrs@washpost.com](mailto:barrs@washpost.com)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.