

Published on November 29, 2016



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Louisiana State Inspector General

Inspectors General are the Constant

“We are the flank.”

(Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, 20th Maine Regiment, at the Battle of Gettysburg)

On July 2, 1863, Colonel Joshua Chamberlain uttered these words as he and his men prepared to defend Little Round Top at Gettysburg. Colonel Chamberlain had his men look to their left. There was no one there. They *were* the flank. They were outnumbered and had limited resources, but could not withdraw under any condition. Withdraw, and the flank of the entire Union Army would collapse. Withdraw, and the course of American history might have been very different. Those of you who are history buffs know what happened: Chamberlain and his 20th Maine defended that ground against repeated charges of what should have been an overwhelming Confederate force. Finally, when they had no more ammunition for their muskets, Chamberlain’s men fixed bayonets and charged down the hill themselves. *Against all odds, they held their ground*, and won a victory that helped changed the course of the American Civil War.

While in Boston this month for the Association of Inspectors General Board Meeting and Annual Conference (which also celebrated the 20th Anniversary of AIG) I was reminded one more time that Inspectors General *are the flank*. IG's *are the constant*. No matter the circumstances or which way the political winds might blow, IG's must press on with determination and integrity. Bob Cerasoli, former Massachusetts IG and the first AIG President, reminded me of that again this week. Shortly after I was appointed as Louisiana State Inspector General back in 2008, I had lunch with Bob and he told me: *“Stephen, if you do this job right, they will eventually try to shut you down.”* Sure enough, in 2012 it happened, and there was a high-profile fight for the survival of the Louisiana Inspector General. In May of 2016, it was “*déjà vu* all over again,” when the Louisiana Legislature again attempted to close down the IG. We won both of those fights with

the help of ordinary citizens, good government groups, and a lot of media coverage. I am still here, still vigilant, and still doing my best to “do the job right” one day at a time.

What does “doing the job right” mean? I believe my colleagues in the IG community will agree that for starters, it means that when an IG gets a complaint, we don’t ask whether the subject of the complaint has friends in high places before we decide whether to investigate it. It means being strictly fact driven, without regard to politics. It means being in the evidence business, with one goal: to get to the truth, whatever it may be. It means choosing what is right over what is easy. All IG’s understand that when you do that, it *will* trigger the sort of attacks that have become all too common in the IG community at large: lawsuits, efforts to restrict or dial back IG authority and access, attacks on funding and the like. It just goes with the territory. If you are effective, people are going to come after you. In my opinion, there can be no greater indication that an IG is doing the job well.

While in Boston, it was personally very encouraging for me to be surrounded by so many dedicated IG’s from across the country. In our business, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you are alone and have no friends. Being in Boston reminded me that there is a large community of folks who understand what it means to do the right thing and come under attack for it. As we come to the end of a tumultuous 2016, this is my message for you: *we are the flank and the constant. Be encouraged, and never stop fighting the good fight.*

Stephen Street, President, National Association of Inspectors General