

Federal whistle-blower protection cut from Economic Stimulus

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Protections for federal whistle-blowers that were part of an earlier version of the economic stimulus bill were left out in the final legislation.

Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., who has led efforts to better protect federal workers exposing waste and abuse, said it was disappointing that whistle-blower protections had been eliminated from a bill that approves the spending of billions of federal dollars.

The original House version of the \$787 billion bill included legislation, sponsored by Van Hollen and Rep. Todd Platts, R-Pa., that gives federal employees, including those working in national security areas, legal means to challenge reprisals and firings linked to their revealing wrongdoing. The measure shielded federal workers who make public those who try to manipulate or censor scientific research in federal agencies for political purposes.

Senate negotiators objected, saying the House bill was substantially different from a companion Senate proposal and it would be better to take up the issue separately. In the last session of Congress, the House and Senate both approved whistle-blower protection bills, but they were unable to reconcile their differences.

Colleen M. Kelley, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, noted that the bill contains \$1 billion for aviation screening equipment and that without full whistle-blower rights, Transportation Security Administration officers "continue to be at serious risk of retaliation for reporting instances of waste, fraud and abuse."

But the National Whistleblowers Center said it was a victory that the final bill does contain a provision, offered by Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., to protect private

contractors and state and local government workers who expose improper uses of stimulus spending.

"Congress has started to listen," said Michael Kohn, general counsel for the center. "The public must redouble its efforts and obtain universal whistle-blower protection coverage for all American workers who blow the whistle on any abusive spending or corruption concerning taxpayer dollars."

Van Hollen said he would reintroduce his legislation later this month.