

February 27, 2002

The Paul Revere Forum: National Security Whistleblowers Speak, Canon House Office Building, Room 402

Statement of Congressman Steve Israel on the Introduction of the *Paul Revere Freedom to Warn Act*

Mr. Speaker, on the evening of April 18, 1775, Paul Revere bravely went out into the Massachusetts night to warn his fellow patriots of a threat they faced.

The tyranny of the time dictated that if caught, Paul Revere would be hanged; he rode that night knowing that if caught, he would die.

Today we have other Americans who take risks that are just as real to preserve our liberty.

These brave men and women risk their jobs, their livelihoods, to ensure our safety. They are fighting for us. And so the least we can do is fight for them.

I didn't come here to Washington to fight for the special interests. I came here to make sure the little guy was protected.

In today's climate, we face new threats, threats of life and death. And despite these threats, there are still powerful interests that try to hide their mistakes and negligence rather than protect the public.

When there are powerful interests trying to hide what they are doing, we have found that there is always a brave soul willing to step up and take the heat. We have seen that with the FAA and airline security. We have seen some of that with Enron. And yes, we saw that with the brave whistleblowers I met with this morning. They each stood up and fought for what was right and just.

And all of them faced real heat and the intimidation that too often comes along with doing the right thing. All too often that heat isn't fair, and in fact, isn't even legal.

The law is clear: according to the Lloyd-LaFollette Act, employers can't interfere with whistle-blowers. Unfortunately, while the law is clear, it doesn't have any penalties if the act is violated. It has no teeth; it is like Paul Revere without a voice. The Paul Revere Freedom to Warn Act, which I will be introducing later today, protects employees who blow the whistle by allowing them to bring a civil action in federal courts with jury trials.

These people have three years to bring these actions for lost wages and benefits,

reinstatement, costs and attorney fees, compensatory or punitive damages, and any other relief that the courts believe are appropriate.

This is just common sense; if something is against the law, then there has to be a price to pay if you violate the law.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for us all to stand up for the whistleblowers. They are the true patriots, and I want to thank them, salute them, and help them by introducing and passing the Paul Revere Freedom to Warn Act.

I would like to thank the Government Accountability Project (GAP). In particular I want to thank Tom Devine and Doug Hartnett, for constantly keeping the issue of whistleblower protection before Congress.

The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and even though they only represent whistleblowers, they too serve as modern Paul Reveres through their work.

The Government Accountability Project has been a very effective partner in laying the groundwork for this necessary legislation.