

For Immediate Release

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Grassley calls on administration to safeguard independence of Inspectors General

WASHINGTON --- Senator Chuck Grassley is urging the administration to follow the letter and spirit of the law, which the President co-sponsored as legislation as a U.S. senator in 2007, regarding the dismissal of the Inspector General for the AmeriCorps program, after reports last night that administration officials gave the watchdog an hour to resign or be terminated.

Grassley said it looks like the White House is today modifying its stance and saying that last night's ultimatum started the 30-day notification clock. "Either way, it looks like the letter and spirit of the law Congress passed last year to try to safeguard the independence of Inspectors General from the heavy hand of the executive branch that it's supposed to oversee might have been circumvented," he said.

Grassley has worked for many years to empower Inspectors General to act as effective watchdogs for taxpayers and federal program beneficiaries. He's also worked to hold Inspectors General accountable when they've failed to fulfill the responsibilities of the role. Grassley has conducted extensive and active oversight of the federal bureaucracy.

"The importance of constant, independent review of the work of federal agencies has been proven again and again, and Inspectors General are a key part of that effort," Grassley said. "Congress recognized the need for independence when it passed the reform legislation last year requiring congressional notification 30 days prior to removal. Inspectors General need to know they have independence and won't be removed for arbitrary reasons. The public needs confidence that the watchdogs can hold the bureaucracy accountable."

The text of Grassley's letter to the President is below.

June 11, 2009

Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I was troubled to learn that last night your staff reportedly issued an ultimatum to the Americorps Inspector General Gerald Walpin that he had one hour to resign or be terminated. As you know, Inspectors General were created by Congress as a means to combat waste, fraud, and abuse and to be independent watchdogs ensuring that federal agencies were held accountable for their actions. Inspectors General were designed to have a dual role reporting to both the President and Congress so that they would be free from undue political pressure. This independence is the hallmark of all Inspectors General and is essential so they may operate independently, without political pressure or interference from agencies attempting to keep their failings from public scrutiny.

Last year, President Bush signed the Inspector General Reform Act (P.L. 110-409) into law. Both you and I were cosponsors of this important legislation that was introduced to strengthen the independence and integrity of the Inspectors General. One of the most important provisions of the legislation we cosponsored was Section 3 which amended the procedures for the removal of Inspectors General. Specifically, Section 3 requires that, “the President shall communicate in writing the reasons for any such removal or transfer to both Houses of Congress, not later than 30 days before the removal or transfer.” No such notice was provided to Congress in this instance.

As you may recall, the Senate Committee Report (S. Rep. 110-262) accompanying the Inspector General Reform Act stated the intent of Congress. That report stated:

“The Committee intends that Inspectors General who fail to perform their duties properly whether through malfeasance or nonfeasance, or whose personal actions bring discredit upon the office, be removed. The requirement to notify the Congress in advance of the reasons for the removal should serve to ensure that Inspectors General are not removed for political reasons.”

Given that you were a cosponsor of this vital legislation I am deeply troubled to learn of the ultimatum given Inspector General Walpin absent Congressional notification.

There have been no negative findings against Mr. Walpin by the Integrity Committee of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), and he has identified millions of dollars in Americorps funds either wasted outright or spent in violation of established guidelines.^[1] In other words, it appears he has been doing his job.

^[1] Corporation for National and Community Service, OIG Report 09-11A, Evaluation of Corporation for National and Community Service Grants Nos. 04EDHNY003 and 07EDHNY002, June 4, 2009; Corporation for National and Community Service, OIG Special Report to Congress, St. Hope Academy investigative summary, May 5, 2007.

We cannot afford to have Inspector General independence threatened. In light of the massive increases in federal spending of late, it is more critical than ever that we have an Inspector General community that is vigorous, independent, and active in rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse. I urge you to review the Inspector General Reform Act you cosponsored and to follow the letter of the law should you have cause to remove any Inspector General.

Sincerely,
Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator
