



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on June 27, 2009

Obama's Walpin Firing Tip of the Iceberg

The administration did attempt to characterize Walpin as being confused, disoriented, and unable to answer questions at a meeting. It is strange then, considering the president's single-minded focus on healthcare, that no one from the administration has insisted that Walpin, age 77, undergo a medical examination to find a cause for these alleged problems. If some cause could be found, it would certainly lend credence to the administration's allegations.



Senator Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) has stood up on Walpin's behalf, saying that the former inspector general "has identified millions of dollars in AmeriCorps funds either wasted outright or spent in violation of established guidelines," and that "it appears he has been doing his job." A June 24 *U.S. News & World Report* article entitled ["Even Political Foes Cheer on Fired AmeriCorps Inspector General Walpin"](#) points out that 145 of Walpin's acquaintances, from both sides of the political divide, have written a letter to Congress and the White House defending his capabilities and integrity. As *U.S. News* notes, the 145 "include former federal judges and even Democrats like Bernie Nussbaum, former President Clinton's first White House counsel."

[The letter states](#), in part: "We note that the signers of this letter include both Republicans and Democrats, voters for President Obama and Senator McCain, and many who do not agree with Mr. Walpin's personal political views. But all of us are unanimous in affirming Mr. Walpin's integrity and competence." This is not a bunch of Walpin's closest personal friends who could be expected to show loyalty but a disparate group of those who don't even agree with him. In light of this support, one would expect the administration to have more substantial reasons for being so anxious to get rid of Walpin. It is true that the administration has claimed to have good reasons, but a June 16 *Washington Post* article gave [Walpin's rebuttal](#) to these claims and is worth looking at for further details.

What is truly disturbing is that the Walpin firing appears to be just the tip of the iceberg. Inspectors general are under fire by government agencies throughout the Obama administration. The *Washington Post's* June 22 article ["Eye Opener: The IG Saga Continues..."](#) gives a quick overview of other incidents



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being investigated by Senator Grassley. Though not all of the IGs involved are presidential appointees, the difficulties they are experiencing suggest an unnerving pattern:

- 1) Grassley has expressed concern about “repeated and continuous interference” with the efforts of Amtrak’s new acting inspector general, E. Bret Coulson, including “third parties being told to first send documents under subpoena by the inspector general to Amtrak for review, and the inspector general being chastised for communicating directly with congressional appropriations and authorizing committees.”
- 2) In early June, Grassley inquired about “[possible interference](#)” at the Library of Congress, including allegations that top officials regularly admonished the IG staff for the tone and focus of their investigations.”
- 3) Grassley looked into a [March incident](#) when an employee of the International Trade Commission “allegedly took files in the possession of the IG [for the ITC].” The International Trade Commission responded by informing the inspector that her contract will not be renewed after it expires in July.
- 4) Neil M. Barofsky, the special inspector general for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (SIGTARP), has [raised concerns](#) with Grassley and other lawmakers that “a potential Justice Department ruling on his office’s relationship with the Treasury Department is unnecessary and could have a serious impact on its independence.” The suspect timing of this potential ruling was noted by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.): “It is extremely troubling that in the midst of SIGTARP’s investigation into bonuses received by AIG executives, the Treasury Department would seek to exert control over this independent overseer.”

One must concur with the *Post* that “Grassley’s inquiries suggest a pattern of interference with watchdog investigations, despite laws that clearly state that inspectors have the mandate to act independently.” And all this interference is coming from the same administration that wants the American people to trust it to run a public health insurance option. To the myriad reasons one could cite in opposition to a public insurance option, we can now add this administration’s extreme (and quite possibly criminal) aversion to independent oversight of its activities.

Photo of Gerald Walpin: AP Images



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