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OBAMA WATCH CENTRAL

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Obama fires watchdog who barked at his crony

Rush Limbaugh calls action illegal, 'bigger' than Alberto Gonzales fray

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By Drew Zahn

WorldNetDaily

Former Inspector General Gerald Walpin filed two reports exposing gross misappropriation of federal AmeriCorps funds by a prominent Barack Obama supporter and was shortly thereafter fired by the White House, circumstances he told WND are likely linked and others have called an outright illegal action by the administration.

"I think you have to look at the facts and the circumstances and reach your conclusions," Walpin said in a WND interview. "I will tell you that [my firing] came only after we had issued those two reports to Congress, and I don't think that's a coincidence."

Further, Walpin said, "I am convinced that I and my office are not guilty of any impropriety. In essence, I was fired for doing my job."

Independent federal inspectors general are supposed to be granted special protection from political interference – thanks in part to a law co-sponsored by then-Sen. Barack Obama – to ensure they are free to investigate waste and fraud uninfluenced by political cronyism.

But after Walpin dared to push for action against the St. HOPE Academy program – run by Obama supporter and former NBA star Kevin Johnson – which had misappropriated hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal AmeriCorps funds, he nonetheless found himself fired by the White House under circumstances that have led some to wonder if Obama has violated his own co-sponsored law in retaliation.

"There are two big questions about the president's actions," writes Byron York, chief political correspondent for the Washington Examiner. "One, why did he decide to fire Walpin? And two, did he abide by the law that he himself co-sponsored?"

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Gerald Walpin

Happens When the Government Breaks Its Own Laws."

Radio talk host Rush Limbaugh fired off an answer to York's questions on his program yesterday:

"Firing an inspector general is a big deal. If you'll remember, Alberto Gonzales as attorney general fired a couple of U.S. attorneys. He took hell for it. This is bigger. Inspectors general are supposed to be completely above politics," Limbaugh commented. "This is big. This is political cronyism, power and so forth. ... I'm telling you, firing an I.G., because they're not political, it is a much bigger deal than replacing United States attorneys."

Furthermore, Limbaugh stated, the unusual circumstances surrounding the night before Walpin's dismissal constitute a clear violation of the law.

"The Obama administration did it overnight," Limbaugh stated. "[It] broke the law firing the AmeriCorps I.G."

(Story continues below)

According to the Inspector General Reform Act of 2008, co-sponsored by Obama, inspectors general do not serve at the president's pleasure and therefore cannot be fired without 30 days notice and written cause for the decision sent to Congress.

The firing of Walpin, however, took on a very different form.

Walpin confirmed to WND that on Wednesday evening he received a sudden and unexpected ultimatum from White House counsel Norman L. Eisen: Resign within the hour or suffer being fired.

Walpin refused to resign, replying in an e-mail, "It would do a disservice to the independent scheme that Congress has mandated – and could potentially raise questions about my own integrity – if I were to render what would seem to many a very hasty response to your request."

The next day the administration nevertheless fired Walpin and sent a letter to Congress citing as its only reason for the dismissal, "It is vital that I have the fullest confidence in the appointees serving as inspectors general. That is no longer the case with regard to this inspector general."

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, who also co-sponsored the Inspector General Reform Act, immediately protested the White House's action.

"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," Grassley stated in [a letter to the president](#). "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."

Grassley's letter reminded Obama of the statute requiring the president to submit 30-days notice to Congress of an inspector general's dismissal and stated, "No such notice was provided to Congress in this instance."

"We cannot afford to have inspector general independence threatened," Grassley concluded. "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 co-sponsored and to follow the letter of the law should you have cause to remove any inspector general."

The White House then clarified two issues, explaining that Walpin was not immediately fired, but suspended for 30 days of paid leave as a countdown to his official release, and that his dismissal, indeed, was related to the Johnson investigation.

In a written response to Sen. Grassley, White House counsel Gregory Craig cited an ethics complaint filed against Walpin by the acting U.S. attorney in Sacramento, Lawrence Brown.

Brown had declined to file criminal charges against Johnson, who was elected in November as mayor of Sacramento, or the St. HOPE Academy, but did reach a settlement requiring the organization to pay back over \$400,000 of \$850,000 in grants it was given through the AmeriCorps program.

Both Grassley's letter and Walpin, however, pointed out that the inspector general has not been found guilty of any misconduct, and the charges are disputed.

"I have been performing – and my office has been performing – its work with the highest integrity, in the spirit of an independent office, calling the shots as it sees them," Walpin told WND. "The integrity committee will decide the merits of the complaint, but what troubles me is that the White House is apparently relying on the complaint. At this point, it is before an adjudicatory body, and if the White House felt it couldn't wait for that decision, it should have at least waited for me to come in and provide my factual response, so it could consider it. It did not."

And while Walpin has been guarded in responses to the media, refraining from commenting on his future plans or even accusing the president of firing him for political reasons, he did share with WND that he believes Obama has compromised the independent integrity of the office of inspector general.

"I am sorry for what I believe to be clear interference with the institution of the inspector general," Walpin said. "And I am sorry for the people in my office, who I respect. I took the position because I believed when the president called upon me, it was a great opportunity to give something back to this country. I have done what I believe is right, and I will go on."



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