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8 inspectors general fired by Trump file lawsuit challenging dismissals

By [Melissa Quinn](#)

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Critics decry Trump's purge of federal watchdogs

[Critics decry Trump's purge of federal watchdogs 03:20](#)

Washington — A group of eight former internal government watchdogs who were fired by President Trump filed a lawsuit Wednesday challenging their terminations.

The [legal challenge](#), brought in federal district court in Washington, D.C., argues that their firings violate federal laws meant to protect inspectors general from interference with their oversight duties. One of those laws, passed in 2022 with bipartisan support in both chambers, requires a president to give Congress 30 days notice before removing an inspector general and provide the "substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons" for the termination.

The former inspectors general involved in the lawsuit worked at the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, State, Education, Agriculture and Labor, as well as the Small Business Administration. The lawsuit names the president and the heads of those departments and agencies as defendants.

Inspectors general are nonpartisan and are tasked with conducting audits and investigations of the agencies they oversee to protect against waste, fraud and abuse. They have typically been appointed regardless of political affiliation and must be confirmed by the Senate.

"President Trump's attempt to eliminate a crucial and longstanding source of impartial, non-partisan oversight of his administration is contrary to the rule of law," they said in the 32-page lawsuit, which called the firings "unlawful and unjustified."

The watchdogs said that the agencies revoked access to their government email accounts and computer systems, and collected their equipment, such as government-issued phones and computers and access badges. The officials said they were also "physically disabled" from entering the government buildings where they work. Agency employees also arranged for the inspectors general to collect their personal belongings from their offices, the lawsuit states.

"These actions have had their intended effect of making it impossible for the IGs to perform their lawful duties," the lawsuit states. "Because the purported removals were illegal and hence a nullity, the actions just described constituted illegal interference with the IGs' official duties."

The watchdogs are asking the court to declare that their removals are void, which would mean that they are still duly appointed inspectors general of their respective agencies until the president removes them in compliance with federal law.

One of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit is Michael Missal, former inspector general of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs since 2016.

"My only guess could be they're trying to impact the independence that IGs have, because it makes no sense," Missal told CBS News Wednesday of his firing.

Missal argues the firing threatens not only his paycheck, but the safety of veterans in hospitals and clinics nationwide.

"The work that we did protected veterans' lives and made the healthcare much safer for veterans," Missal said.

Missal recently uncovered delays in medical appointments for veterans, including cancer patients in Buffalo. Other inspectors general flagged meat inspections that bypassed safety rules in California, and postal workers stealing credit cards from the mail, including near St. Louis.

Republican Rep. Darrell Issa of California argued the fired inspectors general failed to perform.

"Again, a new administration is acting quicker than any other administration in modern history," Issa told CBS News. "But no, they need to be judged on who's the acting, who's replacing them, how fast they'll name those names, and will they be naming people who will aggressively look for waste, fraud and abuse."

Mr. Trump [fired the internal government watchdogs](#) on Jan. 24, four days into his second term. They were notified in a two-line email from the Office of Presidential Personnel stating that "due to changing priorities your position as inspector general ... is terminated, effective immediately. Thank you for your service."

The president told reporters late last month that the firings were "standard" and a "very common thing to do."

But the inspectors general argued in their lawsuit that Mr. Trump's claims are wrong, as presidents of both parties — including the president during his first term — refrained from removing the internal watchdogs that were in place by their predecessors.

They also said that Mr. Trump has not communicated to Congress his intention to remove the inspectors general or provided a "substantive rationale," as required by law.

"IGs must be watchdogs, not lapdogs," the lawsuit states. "The deleterious consequences of the Trump administration's contrary approach are hard to overstate."

Mr. Trump's decision to terminate the officials set off alarm bells in Congress. In the wake of his action, Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, and ranking member Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois, sent the president a [letter](#) asking him to provide the legally required 30-day notice and reasons for their removal.

Grassley sponsored the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2022, which laid out the requirements for getting rid of an inspector general.

"While IGs aren't immune from committing acts requiring their removal and they can be removed by the president, the law must be followed," Grassley and Durbin wrote.

They added: "This is a matter of public and congressional accountability and ensuring the public's confidence in the Inspector General community, a sentiment shared more broadly by other members of Congress. IGs are critical to rooting out waste, fraud, abuse, and misconduct within the Executive Branch bureaucracy, which you have publicly made clear you are also intent on doing."

The lawsuit challenging Mr. Trump's removal of the watchdogs is one of more than four dozen that have been filed in courts from coast to coast against the administration. Several of those legal battles target the president's firing of government officials, including the heads of the National Labor Relations Board and Office of Special Counsel, which investigates retaliation against whistleblowers and violations of the Hatch Act, as well as a member of the Merit Systems Protection Board.

[Scott MacFarlane](#) contributed to this report.

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[Melissa Quinn](#)

Melissa Quinn is a politics reporter for CBSNews.com. She has written for outlets including the Washington Examiner, Daily Signal and Alexandria Times. Melissa covers U.S. politics, with a focus on the Supreme Court and federal courts.

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