



United States Senate



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, June 29, 2009

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Enzi & Hatch Request Bipartisan Hearing to Investigate Firing of National and Community Service Corporation Inspector General

White House Yet to Substantiate Basis for Termination

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), Senior Member of the HELP Committee, today requested that HELP Committee Chairman Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) hold a hearing to examine President Obama’s removal of the Inspector General (IG) of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Gerald Walpin.

“As you know, a number of news reports have noted that the IG’s removal coincided with the issuance of reports that were critical of CNCS grantees, prominently including St. HOPE Academy and its then-head Kevin Johnson, now the Mayor of Sacramento, California,” wrote the Senators. “Since then, there have been reports of an FBI investigation regarding potential obstruction of justice by St. HOPE, as well as significant questions raised regarding the propriety of the decision to remove the IG. We have asked for information from the White House Counsel and CNCS, but they have not been forthcoming to date nor willing to commit to a timeframe.”

The Senators received a letter this week signed by over 100 members of the New York bar, including former Attorney General Mukasey and former White House Counsel Bernard Nussbaum, supporting the integrity and capacity of Inspector General Walpin, which cast doubt on the Administration’s assertions that Mr. Walpin lacked the candor or capacity necessary for his position.

“We believe the above facts compel us as to ask for a public hearing to determine whether the actions taken in this matter were appropriate,” added Enzi and Hatch.

A copy of the Senator’s request to Chairman Kennedy is below.

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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June 29, 2009

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy,

We respectfully request that the Committee hold a hearing as soon as possible on the issues leading to the President's removal of the Inspector General (IG) of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Gerald Walpin. As you know, a number of news reports have noted that the IG's removal coincided with the issuance of reports that were critical of CNCS grantees, prominently including St. HOPE Academy and its then-head Kevin Johnson, now the Mayor of Sacramento, California. Since then, there have been reports of an FBI investigation regarding potential obstruction of justice by St. HOPE, as well as significant questions raised regarding the propriety of the decision to remove the IG. We have asked for information from the White House Counsel and CNCS, but they have not been forthcoming nor willing to commit to a timeframe.

We are particularly concerned because of the Corporation's recent expansion of responsibilities under the Serve America Act. To best ensure the Committee is meeting its oversight responsibility for CNCS, we invite the Majority to join us in conducting a bipartisan investigation of this matter. We also believe the administration should welcome a public hearing and bipartisan investigation in light of the President's repeated commitments of transparency and accountability in government.

On June 11th, the President first sent a letter stating an intention to terminate the Corporation's IG because of a loss of confidence, and CNCS placed the IG on administrative leave, precluded him from returning to the building and named an acting inspector general. Subsequently on June 16th, the Special Counsel to the President provided additional information on the President's decision, citing a number of more specific reasons for terminating Mr. Walpin. Then, on June 17th, seven of nine CNCS Board members sent a letter to Senator Grassley referencing the IG's performance at an event in May as the basis for terminating him.

On Thursday, June 18, we asked the White House to answer four short questions on whether the decision to terminate the IG complied with the Inspector General Reform Act, legislation that President Obama co-sponsored while a Member of the Senate, with a requested deadline of Wednesday, June 24, 2009. We also requested documents from the Corporation and/or the White House to substantiate the decision to terminate the Inspector General. On Friday, June 19, our staff participated in a bipartisan meeting with the White House Special Counsel to discuss the issue. The Special Counsel strongly encouraged our offices to follow up with CNCS and its Board on our requests for information. As follow up to the meeting, on June 23, 2009, we sent a letter to the White House General Counsel indicating our offices were reaching out to CNCS Board. Our staff also placed a call to CNCS on Monday and again on Tuesday of last week requesting an update, and CNCS said they will have to get back to us and could not commit to any timeframe.

We have since received a copy of a letter signed by over 100 members of the New York bar, including former Attorney General Mukasey and former White House Counsel Bernard Nussbaum, supporting the integrity and capacity of Inspector General Walpin, which casts doubt on the assertions that Mr. Walpin lacked the candor or capacity necessary for his position. Just before close of business on June 24, 2009, CNCS sent a letter stating they were still working on our request but providing neither documents nor a delivery timeframe. On June 25th, we received a letter from White House Counsel dated June 24th, declining to answer our four questions and directing us to the CNCS for additional information. In addition, despite the Special Counsel's direction that we interview CNCS Board members, neither the White House nor CNCS has been willing to provide our offices with contact information for CNCS Board members despite several such requests. In fact, in one call with a Committee Oversight and Investigations staff member, the CNCS general counsel noted concerns with having Committee staff interview the Board.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask you to call a hearing to determine whether the actions taken were appropriate. If you have questions and are unable to reach me, please have your staff contact Amy Shank, Oversight and Investigations Director for Senator Enzi, at 202-224-6770, or Bryan Hickman, Counsel to Senator Hatch, at 202-224-5251.

Sincerely,



Michael B. Enzi
Ranking Member



Orrin G. Hatch
Senator

cc: The Honorable Christopher Dodd