

By Rep. Steve King

Americans believe in transparent government. We want our federal government to be lean, effective and to use our tax dollars wisely.

We need sharp people in place to monitor how Washington is spending our money. Inspectors general (IGs) perform this important investigative role.

Throughout the government, IGs are in place to monitor the actions of agencies and guard against the abuse of your money. IGs perform a vital service to hard-working taxpayers across America by serving as our taxpayer watchdogs.

Despite the important contributions of IGs, a growing trend has emerged in Washington over the past few months. Several IGs have been stifled and prevented from completing the jobs they were assigned. The treatment these IGs have received for trying to fulfill their difficult assignments has raised questions about whether government bureaucrats are protecting themselves from oversight.

Last month, AmeriCorps IG Gerald Walpin was told by a White House bureaucrat that he could either resign or be fired. He was given one hour to decide. This bureaucrat told Walpin that the President appreciated his service but believed the time had come for Walpin to move on.

Later, the Administration offered an alternative explanation: that Walpin appeared “confused” and “disoriented” at a May meeting. Walpin told the Politico newspaper that these allegations were “amazing” and that “they terminated me because I was doing my job.”

In truth, Walpin might have been confused - confused about whether he was allowed to do the job he was hired to do. Walpin recently uncovered misuse of over \$800,000 in tax dollars by St. HOPE, a California nonprofit run by Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson. Johnson, a former NBA star, is a friend and political supporter of President Obama and the First Lady.

Uncovering misuse of AmeriCorps funds is the AmeriCorps IG's duty. Where I come from, we do not fire people for doing a job well. Instead, we reward them. Terminating Walpin for doing his job and investigating fraud was unacceptable.

Walpin is not the only IG to be stifled in recent months. Longtime Amtrak inspector Fred Weiderhold is no longer serving as an IG. Weiderhold abruptly retired this June without explanation leading some to speculate he was forced out.

While it is not yet known why Weiderhold left his post, it is clear that Amtrak was not exactly cooperating with his investigations. Documents required by a court to be given to Weiderhold were being sent to Amtrak for prior review, allowing documents about Amtrak to be reviewed by Amtrak itself before Weiderhold could access them. In effect, this process enabled the bloated Amtrak bureaucracy to muzzle Weiderhold.

Along with Walpin and Weiderhold, a third IG - Neil Barofsky – encountered strong resistance when he attempted to do his job. Barofsky is responsible for monitoring abuse of taxpayer money included in the massive bailout bill I opposed last year. His role is ironic, considering the bailout itself is an enormous misuse of our money.

For months, the Treasury Department attempted to keep documents from Barofsky. After Senator Grassley and others stood up on Barofsky's behalf, the

outcry over his treatment finally forced the Treasury to release all the documents Barofsky requested.

Even the IG of the International Trade Commission (ITC) has recently been stifled. Judith Gwynn, IG of the ITC, had ITC employees forcibly remove documents from her possession. Gwynn's contract, up for negotiation earlier this month, was not renewed after she voiced concerns about this violation.

Sadly, the experiences of these four IG's show there are some in Washington who believe protecting political cronies and irresponsibly spending our money are more important than transparent government. As concerned citizens, we cannot have faith in our government if the investigations of government watchdogs are stifled.

In a time of record deficit spending, we cannot have our few watchdogs muzzled by big-government bureaucrats who want to spend away our grandchildren's money with no oversight.