Executive Branch

Report Outlines Contributions of Inspectors General Fired by Trump

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The potential savings generated through the IGs' wide-ranging enforcement actions outweigh any DOGE has produced.

On Jan. 24, four days into his second term, President Trump fired the inspectors general (IGs) of 18 federal agencies. Of the IGs in cabinet-level agencies, only two —those in the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security— survived. The late-night firings, dubbed the "Friday night purge," drew immediate and widespread criticism from media, civil society, and top Democratic lawmakers, who expressed concern over the ramifications for accountability, transparency, and ethics in the new administration.

On May 21, Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.), ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, unveiled a report titled "Undermining the Watchdogs: The 19 Independent Inspectors General Fired by President Trump Uncovered Billions in Fraud, Waste, and Abuse." The report, which sets out to "underscore the value" of the work the IGs do, concludes that the IGs identified billions of dollars more in potential savings than the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

The report provides three key categories of information:

- The monetary footprint of the IGs in fiscal year (FY) 2024, calculated as a combination of savings and potential savings.
- Examples of enforcement actions each IG took in FY 2024.
- Testimony from staff at the offices of the fired IGs about the effects of the firings, provided in briefings to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committees in March 2025.

What follows is a summary of the report's findings regarding IGs' monetary impact, the range of work they do, and the effects of their removal on staff, as well as a discussion of the legal issues raised by the firings.

Background

Established by the Inspector General Act of 1978, an IG's mission is to "conduct independent and objective audits, investigations and inspections," "prevent and detect waste, fraud and abuse," and "promote economy, effectiveness and efficiency." IGs are appointed "without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of integrity and demonstrated ability." While IGs are based within the agency they oversee, their work is independent of the agency; as the report puts it, IGs are widely recognized as "one of the federal government's primary mechanisms for ensuring good governance and proper stewardship of taxpayer dollars."

In total, there are 74 IGs dispersed across the federal government. Approximately half are presidentially appointed and Senate confirmed, with the remainder appointed by the head of the agency in which they reside. The president is responsible for nominating the IGs for all cabinet-level agencies.

At present, 39 IG positions sit vacant. The committee's report focuses on the 19 IGs Trump has fired since taking office, 17 of whom were victims of the Friday night purge. The remaining two are the IG of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), fired Feb. 11 (the circumstances of which are discussed below), and the IG for the Department of the Treasury. The Treasury IG's firing is particularly unusual, given that the position was already vacant. As the report relays:

> When President Trump fired the initial 18 Inspectors General, Treasury-OIG did not have a confirmed IG and was under the leadership of Deputy IG Loren Sciurba, a career official performing the functions and duties of the IG. Treasury-OIG reported to the Committee that on Jan. 24, 2025, the White House sent an email to Mr. Sciurba seeking to remove him as IG, but as Treasury-OIG noted, "this is a position Mr. Sciurba has not held, and does not currently hold, even in an Acting capacity." Treasury-OIG explained that situation to the White House and requested clarification, but received none. As such, Mr. Sciurba has continued as Deputy IG performing the functions and duties of the IG. (Treasury-OIG response to the Committee (Feb. 7, 2025)).

Despite lacking a formal IG to fire, the Treasury is included in the report.

Monetary Impact

The report's primary offering is its documentation of the fired IGs' financial contribution to the federal government, which it calculates using data from the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) Annual Report to the President and Congress for Fiscal Year 2024. The IGs' financial contribution is defined according to three categories:

- FY 2024 monetary impact: the savings resulting from audits and evaluations, combined with recoveries (fines, settlements, and restitutions) from criminal, civil, and administrative investigations in FY 2024.
- Total potential savings to date: savings from recommendations that remain open to date. While not explicitly clarified in the report, it appears to be non-inclusive of FY 2024 monetary impact.
- Return on investment (ROI): expressed as a ratio of monetary impact against budget. While the report does not explicitly provide a formula for calculating ROI, the introduction notes that, combined, federal IGs had a return of 18:1, having produced a monetary impact of $71 billion against a total budget of $3.9 billion.

Page 8 of the report displays the financial contribution of the 19 IGs fired by Trump for each of the three categories listed above. The total savings per category (combined across all 19 IGs) as well as the top three agencies in terms of savings are shown below.

MONETARY IMPACT OF THE 19 INSPECTORS GENERAL FIRED BY PRESIDENT TRUMP

OIG	Fiscal Year 2024 Monetary Impact			Total Potential Savings to Date[3]	Return on Investment
	Audits / Evaluations[1]	Investigations[2]	Total		
Social Security Administration	$12,130,981,319	$248,182,819	$12,379,164,138	$18,455,855,130	21:1
Health & Human Services	$2,901,388,816	$6,513,028,452	$9,414,417,268	$34,381,729,347	10:1
Small Business Administration	$8,062,519,961	$444,076,555	$8,506,596,516	$15,460,828,524	17:1
Dept. of Defense	$4,895,300,000	$2,156,100,000	$7,051,400,000	$8,861,485,541	4:1
Dept. of Veterans Affairs	$2,174,945,069	$4,407,063,831	$6,582,008,900	$1,682,910,084	28:1
Dept. of Agriculture	$1,705,440,919	$247,689,075	$1,953,129,994	$1,332,551,279	18:1
Dept. of Commerce	$1,382,604,533	$31,404,637	$1,414,009,170	$1,673,257,925	24:1
Dept. of Transportation	$1,185,608,935	$55,779,008	$1,241,387,943	$2,270,000,000	11:1
Dept. of Energy	$823,333,478	$25,051,285	$848,384,763	$301,541,484	9:1
Office of Personnel Management	$310,873,785	$3,437,807	$314,311,592	$303,688,559	9:1
Dept. of Labor	$129,565,581	$138,790,754	$268,356,335	$75,677,203,834	3:1
Housing & Urban Development	$111,908,966	$76,042,966	$187,951,932	$12,030,247,712	1.2:1
Dept. of Education	$2,918,892	$94,613,491	$97,532,383	$23,764,898	1.5:1
Dept. of Interior	$13,895,123	$59,908,738	$73,803,861	$57,226,535	1.1:1
U.S. Agency for Intl. Development	$46,795,078	$16,463,665	$63,258,743	$54,669,539	0.8:1
Environmental Protection Agency	$56,695,934	$570,180	$57,266,114	$38,536,000	2:1
Dept. of State	$819,201	$43,732,893	$44,552,094	$238,638,207	3.6:1
Dept. of Treasury	$1,292,965	$22,108,838	$23,401,803	$2,237,683,672	33:1
SIGAR	$4,871,441	$0	$4,871,441	$4,670,000	6:1
TOTAL	$35,941,759,996	$14,584,044,994	$50,525,804,990	$175,086,488,270	

Table 1. 1) Includes potential savings through recommendations such as questioned costs and funds put to better use. 2) Includes criminal, civil, and administrative recoveries such as fines, settlements, and restitution. 3) Includes total potential savings through recommendations that remain open to date.

Based on the investigation's findings of the IGs' monetary impact, the report concludes that the stated mission of DOGE—to root out fraud, waste, and abuse—is antithetical to Trump's firing of the IGs. While DOGE's efforts "would seem to dovetail with the IGs' missions," the report argues that the administration's failure to capitalize on IGs' recommendations and generate savings suggests a lack of commitment to its own goals.

The report bases this assessment on a comparison of each initiative's monetary impact. It notes that in April, Elon Musk adjusted the projection of DOGE's savings from $2 trillion to $150 billion—$25 billion less than the $175 billion in potential savings the IGs in the report had identified. (As of May 26, the last time the DOGE website updated, it lists DOGE's estimated savings as $175 billion.) According to the report, on a simple comparison of overall totals DOGE's efforts are "wasteful and duplicative." (The report does not consider what DOGE has cost the government—some observers suggest as much as $135 billion.)

The report points out that DOGE's figures are dubious given that its "wall of receipts" has at times contained erroneous information, including an $8 million contract recorded as being worth $8 billion. In fact, it may understate the severity of DOGE's pricing opacity; as Nick Bednar reported for *Lawfare*, DOGE at one point appeared to take credit for canceling an office lease that was actually automatically terminated after former President Carter's death. One expert suggested that DOGE is essentially "over estimating contracts by a factor of two," placing its total savings closer to $80 billion.

The report also briefly discusses the qualitative differences in DOGE versus IG savings, citing DOGE's "chaotic and haphazard approach" to cuts—such as "accidentally" canceling Ebola prevention work or firing employees who work on nuclear programs. In doing so, the report hints at a larger problem: DOGE's cuts to agencies such as the Department of Education, the National Weather Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and more will likely have negative effects on Americans' quality of life, impacting the American taxpayer in often nonquantifiable ways.

Examples of Enforcement Actions

The bulk of the report (pages 7-49) provides examples of enforcement actions each IG took in FY 2024. These actions—which resulted in fines, prison sentences, and other forms of relief—cover a variety of crimes. While the report does not discuss the impact of each action beyond its monetary value, the activities described show the critical role IGs play in protecting the integrity and effectiveness of a variety of government operations. The following paragraphs highlight the work of IGs in countering fraud, rooting out corruption, advancing the administration's own priorities, and more.

Fraud

The examples highlight the role IGs play in deterring and eliminating fraud. From the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) IG, which investigated two individuals who defrauded Medicare of $93 million, to the Department of Labor IG, which handled numerous unemployment and coronavirus pandemic benefits fraud schemes, the reports highlights IGs' work to address fraud that DOGE has claimed goes unchecked.

DOGE has claimed that deceased people are fraudulently receiving Social Security benefits, with Musk at one point suggesting that there are "20 million people who are definitely dead marked as alive" in the Social Security database. (Those claims, which are rooted in how the Social Security Administration's (SSA's) Numident system records death dates for people born before 1920, have been debunked; only 0.1 percent of benefits go to people over 100 years old.) Ironically, while DOGE targets fictional large-scale fraud, IGs have worked to curb the limited instances of fraud that do involve deceased persons. For example, an SSA IG investigation resulted in a fine and prison sentence for an individual who collected his dead mother's Social Security benefits for 32 years. The IG also investigated a woman who for 13 years "used the identity of a deceased child to avoid a pending criminal prosecution, fraudulently obtain benefits from SSA, and defraud several other government agencies."

Similarly, DOGE officials and Republican lawmakers have asserted that weak oversight, loopholes, and eligibility checks enable people to take advantage of benefits, and that bureaucrats "play down problems in the system in an effort to protect their political interests." Sentiments such as these disregard IGs' successful efforts to check abuse of the system; for example, in 2024, the HHS IG excluded over 3,000 bad actors from federal health programs, including a nurse practitioner who was convicted for her role in a nationwide $192 million Medicare fraud scheme, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture IG took part in multiple joint investigations into individuals who stole millions in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits from eligible beneficiaries.

Veterans

Several examples also highlight IGs' crucial work to protect veterans, which the administration has consistently cited as one of its highest priorities. The work of the Veterans Affairs (VA) IG ranged from inquiries into individuals pretending to be service members or spouses of service members in order to collect VA benefits, to investigations that saved the lives of veterans vulnerable to abuse. In 2024, the IG helped investigate a former VA doctor who illegally distributed over 1.8 million doses of opioids to patients and, in a separate case, secured prison sentences for individuals planning to distribute fentanyl to veterans seeking treatment for substance use disorder at a VA hospital. Without the IG, these criminal enterprises might have continued.

Given the Trump team's claim that it supports veterans and its promises on the campaign trail, the work of the IG would seem indispensable. In reality, veterans have been disproportionately affected by DOGE's efforts—thousands have lost their jobs, and DOGE has cut funding for veterans' housing, health care, and more.

Corruption

Another action the report cites is the Department of Defense IG's role in an investigation into Raytheon, a defense contractor, which resulted in a $950 million judgment against the company. Raytheon admitted to having defrauded the government of $111 million by providing false information during contract negotiations on behalf of an unknown foreign client, and also of conspiring to pay bribes to a Qatari official to secure contracts—violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) and the Arms Export Control Act. Given that Raytheon's conduct compromised the integrity of the defense procurement process and potentially put sensitive military technology in the hands of U.S. adversaries, the IG's efforts not only recovered taxpayer dollars but also helped eliminate a national security vulnerability.

The IGs' efforts also arguably had a positive impact on the global business ecosystem. As the foundational anti-bribery law, FCPA enforcement is crucial to creating a fair environment in which American companies can operate. (Notably, Trump issued an executive order pausing FCPA enforcement for 180 days on the grounds that it is "overexpansive and unpredictable.") By weakening IGs, the Trump administration has kneecapped the international anti-bribery system, potentially hurting American businesses in the process.

Other examples of enforcement actions from FY 2024 show how attacks on IGs will stymie U.S. anti-corruption efforts. In one instance, the Small Business Administration IG helped secure a fine and prison sentence for a financial adviser who submitted fraudulent applications for shell companies. During the Biden administration, there was bipartisan support for imposing more extensive due diligence requirements on "enablers"—white-collar professionals who act as gatekeepers to the U.S. financial system. Because of the role of these enablers in facilitating illicit financial flows, the Biden administration cited its work in this area as a key achievement in its fight against corruption.

Critical Technology and National Security

Attacks on IGs also pose threats to national security. In an era of economic and geopolitical competition with China, there is bipartisan consensus that maintaining U.S. leadership in critical technologies—particularly semiconductors—is essential to safeguarding U.S. economic and national security. In 2024, the Department of Energy revoked $100 million in grants to a company after an investigation by the IG revealed the grantee was under investigation for illegally exporting semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China. Without the IG, the government may have inadvertently supported a company engaged in exposing critical technologies to a U.S. adversary.

Effects on Staff

The final pages of the report (pages 50-56) describe the effects the firings have had on Office of Inspector General (OIG) staff, who gave testimony before the committee in March 2025. During the briefing sessions, key trends emerged, with staff reporting low morale, concerns about independence, and an inability to carry out responsibilities.

Concerns About Independence

In particular, the committee found that the firings resulted in concerns about the future of IGs' independence—as well as their existence. One employee stated their "biggest concern is that we have no independence," while another stated that "people are terrified to do their work [...] speak up, give new ideas, report anything unfavorably on the agency, [or] disagree [with] DOGE." Many in the federal workforce are increasingly concerned about the extent to which the laws underlying IGs can actually safeguard against interference by the executive branch. As one anonymous staff member put it in their interview with the committee:

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> We felt protected doing our work because of the IG Act, and the firing of the IGs and the lack of congressional response has told us that the IG Act doesn't protect us at all. So we now have to do our work based on who's in power. [...] Everybody here is operating out of fear of being fired at any time.

The provisions in the IG Act—meant to guarantee the ability of IGs to operate independently—seem inadequate in the face of the administration's willingness to retaliate against those who criticize it. Some have suggested that the United States is on the brink of a constitutional crisis, as Congress is unwilling or unable to exercise its authority to protect these offices, and the administration has proved willing to defy court orders. Even if the litigation results in a temporary reinstatement, the impact of the firings on the offices' institutional culture and IGs' confidence in their ability to operate independently will be much harder to restore.

These sentiments are particularly strong given the circumstances of the USAID IG's firing, after which staff reported that they widely viewed firings as punishment for raising concerns about the administration's conduct. Initially spared from the Friday night purge, the USAID IG was dismissed on Feb. 11—one day after warning that staffing reductions at USAID put $489 million of food at risk and jeopardized the agency's counterterrorism efforts. To staff, the timing was not a coincidence; as one employee put it, "USAID was not lost on [us]—everyone down to our entry level auditors saw that and took what they would from it." The report similarly concludes that the "true reasons" for the firings were not based on performance, but were rather a political act by Trump to "remove yet another check on [his] responsibilities to faithfully execute the law."

Morale

Employees widely reported low morale following the firings. Anonymous employees described the firings as "a morale hit" and an "absolutely devastating loss." The clear downturn in morale raises an important point—while the firings have consequences for the work of the offices and demonstrate the administration's lack of commitment to transparency and accountability, "morale was primarily the highest impact" casualty of the purge.

As Nick Bednar has discussed extensively on *Lawfare*, a demoralized federal workforce is not an unintended consequence of the administration's personnel actions, but a goal. Whether it is politically motivated firings, the introduction of Schedule Policy/Career, reductions in force, or an array of other actions to reshape the ranks of the workforce, the Trump administration's efforts seem designed to cripple civil service. Indeed, Director of the Office of Management and Budget and Project 2025 architect Russell Vought admitted that the administration wants federal employees "to not want to go to work … we want to put them in trauma."

Institutional Capacity

The reduced amount of personnel due to firings and resignations has decreased the IGs' capacity to conduct investigations. Speaking about staffing deficiencies, one employee said: "If we had more people, could we do more investigations, could we put more bad guys in jail? Absolutely." Another OIG staff member told the committee during briefings that their office may not finish its planned audits, which could jeopardize efforts to curb waste, fraud, and abuse: "[W]e have an aggressive audit plan, and [may have] 10-15 percent less people to do it. So that's a challenge."

Losing employees also entails losing the institutional knowledge they have accumulated. While many of the fired IGs were appointed during the first Trump administration or the Biden administration, others had served for decades; the IG for the Department of Agriculture had led the office since 2002, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction since 2012. As former IG for the Defense and Justice departments Glenn Fine explains, the high number of reports an OIG can issue and the millions of dollars it can recover is in part a function of expertise: "It's because the inspector general is within the agency and knows where the issues are and knows where the problematic areas are and has experience in detecting and deterring waste and abuse within the agency."

Officials' effectiveness is not something that DOGE can replicate, due to the notoriously slow federal hiring process, the complexity of the systems these professionals oversee, and a number of other factors.

In a particularly ironic twist, the employees who resign take not only their knowledge and experience with them—as a result of the deferred resignation program, they also take their salaries. One staff member remarked, "When I say we lost people, I have to chuckle, because they're still on the books so we're still paying them even though they're not doing the work."

Legal Issues

While monetary and staffing impact are the focus of the investigation, the report also briefly addresses the legal questions surrounding the firings. It acknowledges that the president's power to remove IGs is not an issue, as they have no for cause removal protections; it instead suggests that the manner in which the firings occurred violated "clear requirements [Congress established] to ensure such removals are transparent." By failing to provide 30-day notices to both chambers of Congress and case-specific rationale for each IG's firing, the administration likely violated the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2022.

The administration's attempt to fire the Treasury IG is particularly telling in this regard. That the administration did not know that the office was vacant raises questions about its reasons for firing the IG; indeed, the fact that there was no one to fire suggests that no such reasons existed. As the report puts it:

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> President Trump failed to provide either the mandatory 30-day notice or a rationale for the removal of these 19 IGs. But the true reasons for him doing so appear clear: weaken one of the most powerful independent checks on his Administration from within the federal government, and send a message to anyone else who would consider criticizing his actions.

As with President Trump's other executive actions, the firings quickly generated litigation. On Feb. 12, eight of the fired IGs filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia arguing that Trump's failure to provide 30-day notice and specific rationale for removals constitutes a violation of the IG Act. The plaintiffs requested that the court declare the firings legally ineffective and enjoin the government from taking further action that would inhibit the IGs from carrying out their duties. On May 9, the plaintiffs filed a status report bringing to the court's attention Trump's nomination of replacement IGs for four departments —posts that the plaintiffs argue they still legally occupy due the failure to adhere to the removal procedures set forth in the 2022 reforms to the IG Act. As of July 7, the case is awaiting a ruling from the court on the plaintiffs' motion for a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction after oral arguments took place on March 27. [1] [2]

The likely outcome of this litigation is unclear, with more legal questions likely to arise. While the Trump administration could remedy the situation by satisfying the notice requirements and then proceeding with the firings, the administration has shown itself unwilling to walk back its mistakes (as demonstrated by the case of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, wrongly deported to El Salvador). However, Trump may not need to back down at all; as Jack Goldsmith explained on *Lawfare*, the administration could argue that these notice requirements are unconstitutional, given the Supreme Court's erosion of *Morrison v. Olson*(1988)—which allowed exceptions to the president's removal power—through decisions like *Seila Law*(2020). Rather, Goldsmith suggested that the greater question is whether Congress can limit who the president appoints to replace an IG, particularly after *Trump v. UnitedStates* (2024). (In *Trump*, the Court suggested the Take Care Clause may shield certain presidential actions from congressional oversight.)

A second lawsuit pertains to the administration's unwillingness to fulfill Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests about the firings. On Jan. 30, American Oversight—a nonpartisan, nonprofit watchdog dedicated to obtaining and making public government records—submitted FOIA requests for communications between Jan. 20 and Jan. 28 pertaining to the IGs' firings. On Feb. 11, American Oversight then filed a wide-ranging lawsuit against the administration, asking the court to, among other things, compel the administration to turn over the records, since 10 days had passed with no communication beyond an email acknowledging receipt of the requests. (While agencies typically have 20 days to fulfill FOIA requests, under 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E)(ii), they only have 10 days for expedited requests.) In its response filing, the administration argued that the court lacks subject matter jurisdiction and, in any event, the plaintiff is not entitled to compel production of records because they are exempt from disclosure due to exceptions in FOIA. At present, the court is considering whether to grant the plaintiff's motion for discovery.

Though not currently the subject of litigation, Trump's choices for replacement IGs have also sparked concerns about whether they adhere to the requirement that IGs be "nonpartisan and selected without regard to political affiliation." Mark Greenblatt, former IG of the Department of the Interior, criticized the nominations of former Rep. Anthony D'Esposito (R-N.Y.) for IG of the Department of Labor and Thomas Bell for IG for the Department of Health and Human Services, arguing that their extensive partisan political backgrounds and allegations of misconduct make them unsuitable candidates. (In 1997, Bell was forced to resign from his role in the Virginia government after an auditor found that he authorized improper payments, and in 2023, D'Esposito allegedly violated House ethics rules when he hired both his fiancee's daughter and his affair partner to work in his district office.)

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The report makes a numbers-based, evidence-backed case for what most observers can already see: The value-add of IGs dwarfs that of DOGE. By providing tangible examples of how IGs improve the efficiency and integrity of the federal government, the report offers insight into the costs of losing these valuable public servants. With Trump and his associates' history of eliminating watchdogs, using his office for self-enrichment, wasting taxpayer dollars, and punishing his political enemies, having independent, empowered IGs may be more important than ever.

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