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President Donald Trump during a meeting at the 80th session of the UN's General Assembly on Sept. 23 in New York City. The president fired 17 agency inspectors general at the start of his second term. CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY IMAGES

Oversight

Fired watchdogs can't be reinstated despite Trump's 'obvious' law breaking, court decides

A federal judge determined the removed inspectors general could not show irreparable harm.

[SEAN MICHAEL NEWHOUSE](#) | SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

INSPECTORS GENERAL



Updated at 4:55 p.m. ET Sept. 25

A federal judge on Wednesday [rejected a request](#) by a group of agency inspectors general who were fired by Donald Trump to be reinstated, but she agreed that how the president went about removing them violated the law.

District Judge Ana C. Reyes, a Biden appointee, wrote that it is "obvious" that Trump broke federal law when [he fired 17 of the governmental watchdogs](#) on the fifth day of his second term because he ignored requirements to notify Congress 30 days in advance and provide the "substantive rationale, including detailed and case-specific reasons" for the removals.

Despite contending that the eight fired IGs who filed the lawsuit "deserved better from their government," Reyes determined they could not show that they suffered irreparable harm. She noted that, if they were reinstated, Trump could easily remove them again after 30 days by providing notice and rationale to Congress.

"IGs are officials in the executive branch, and the president's authority to remove IGs is undisputed. The question here is whether the president's failure to provide the required 30-day notice and rationale to Congress constitutes irreparable harm to plaintiffs," Reyes wrote. "Failing to provide such notice is a statutory or structural breach or the kind of 'extraordinary situation' needed to justify injunctive relief."

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The federal judge deferred on deciding the plaintiffs' request for back pay due to a pending Supreme Court case regarding Trump's attempt to fire Federal Trade Commission member Rebecca Slaughter, which could expand the president's ability to dismiss federal officials who have statutory protections against removal. The justices on Monday [paused a lower court order](#), which had allowed Slaughter to continue to serve, until they issue a ruling.

In January, the White House in a statement characterized the fired IGs as "rogue, partisan bureaucrats who have weaponized the justice system against their political enemies." Government lawyers in court argued that the limits on the president's ability to remove the oversight officials contravene the executive's constitutional powers to dismiss officials.

WilmerHale, which represented the axed IGs, did not respond to a request for comment regarding what actions the plaintiffs may take in response to Wednesday's ruling.

As part of her memorandum opinion, Reyes praised each of the fired IG plaintiffs by highlighting their years of federal service and career awards.

"This recognition is no doubt of little comfort to them now," she wrote. "The historical record must, however, reflect the unbiased contributions, experience and skills of the government officials President Trump dismissed without explanation."

Mark Lee Greenblatt — the former IG for the Interior Department who also was fired in January, but who was not a plaintiff in the lawsuit — said that he hopes Wednesday's decision prompts improved protections to maintain the watchdogs' independence.

"Though the court declined to rule on the larger constitutional question or order immediate reinstatement of the IGs, it acknowledged that the dismissals violated the law. As a nation of laws, that recognition matters," he said in a statement. "This opinion also underscores the central tenet for inspectors general: independence is essential to effective oversight."

Trump's IG nominees have started to be confirmed. The Senate has approved Peter Thomson to be the IG for the CIA and Cheryl Mason as the watchdog for the Veterans Affairs Department. [Democrats criticized Mason](#) over her past role as a senior advisor to VA Secretary Doug Collins.

employee of an IG office — including at the Education Department where the former acting IG, René Rocque, [notified Congress that agency officials were stonewalling an investigation](#) into the effects of workforce reductions at the department.

This story has been updated with a statement from Greenblatt.

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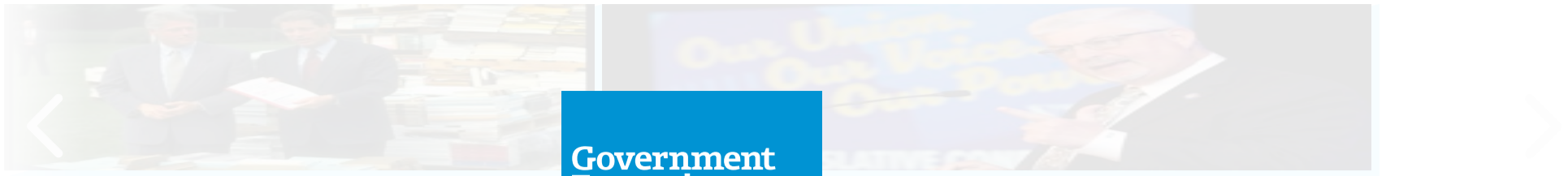
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