



Federal Eye

Keeping Tabs on the Government
by Ed O'Keefe

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Report: Amtrak improperly removed its watchdog



Republicans allege Amtrak improperly kicked its watchdog off the train, if you will. (Reuters)

[Amtrak](#) violated a federal law by failing to inform Congress of its plans to remove its watchdog, according to a new report by Congressional Republicans.

Former Amtrak Inspector General **Fred Weiderhold** [unexpectedly retired](#) in July 2009 after alleging that the rail agency's executives botched his internal investigations. The retirement came amid [several unrelated incidents](#) involving potential interference with federal watchdog investigations and after President Obama [fired](#) **Gerald Walpin**, the inspector general for the government's community service agency.

[A report released Monday](#) by Sen. **Charles E. Grassley** (R-Iowa) and Rep. **Darrell Issa** (R-Calif.) concludes Amtrak failed to comply with the 2008 Inspector General Act by not informing Congress of its plans to part ways with Weiderhold. The report also pans Amtrak for replacing him with an executive who had no oversight experience.

"Like any entity that receives billions of tax dollars, Amtrak needs independent oversight, and I hope this controversy has helped Amtrak learn that valuable lesson," Grassley said.

"Amtrak interfered with and ultimately decided to get rid of its Inspector General for the worst possible reason: to stop an investigation," Issa said. "Inspectors General can't be effective if they believe looking for waste and abuse could cost them their job."

The California Republican [hinted to CNN on Monday](#) that he may introduce legislation giving subpoena power to federal inspectors general to help bolster their investigations. Currently only the Pentagon's watchdog can subpoena witnesses and evidence.

Amtrak fully cooperated with the investigation and a "full and fair reading of all the information provided...confirms important facts and circumstances regarding the retirement of its former IG and demonstrates Amtrak acted appropriately," the agency said in a statement. It has removed IG investigators from its legal department, is seeking law enforcement authority for watchdog agents and has placed their e-mail accounts on a separate server, Amtrak said.

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