

# *Trump Moves to Replace Watchdog Who Identified Critical Medical Shortages*

The president announced the nomination of an inspector general for the Department of Health and Human Services, who, if confirmed, would replace an acting official whose report embarrassed Mr. Trump.



By Peter Baker

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Christi A. Grimm, the principal deputy inspector general at the Department of Health and Human Services, released a report outlining hospital equipment shortages.  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

WASHINGTON — President Trump moved on Friday night to replace a top official at the Department of Health and Human Services who angered him with a report last month highlighting supply shortages and testing delays at hospitals during the coronavirus pandemic.

The White House waited until after business hours to announce the nomination of a new inspector general for the department who, if confirmed, would take over for Christi A. Grimm, the principal deputy inspector general who was publicly assailed by the president at a news briefing three weeks ago.

The nomination was the latest effort by Mr. Trump against watchdog offices around his administration that have defied him. In recent weeks, he fired an inspector general involved in the inquiry that led to the president's impeachment, nominated a White House aide to another key inspector general post overseeing virus relief spending and moved to block still another inspector general from taking over as chairman of a pandemic spending oversight panel.

Mr. Trump has sought to assert more authority over his administration and clear out officials deemed insufficiently loyal in the three months since his Senate impeachment trial on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress ended in acquittal largely along party lines. While inspectors general are appointed by the president, they are meant to be semiautonomous watchdogs ferreting out waste, fraud and corruption in executive agencies.

The purge has continued unabated even during the coronavirus pandemic that has claimed about 65,000 lives in the United States. Ms. Grimm's case in effect merged the conflict over Mr. Trump's response to the outbreak with his determination to sweep out those he perceives to be speaking out against him.

Her report, released last month and based on extensive interviews with hospitals around the country, identified critical shortages of supplies, revealing that hundreds of medical centers were struggling to obtain test kits, protective gear for staff members and ventilators. Mr. Trump was embarrassed by the report at a time he was already under fire for playing down the threat of the virus and not acting quickly enough to ramp up testing and provide equipment to doctors and nurses.

"It's just wrong," the president said when asked about the report on April 6. "Did I hear the word 'inspector general'? Really? It's wrong. And they'll talk to you about it. It's wrong." He then sought to find out who wrote the report. "Where did he

come from, the inspector general? What's his name? No, what's his name? What's his name?"

When the reporter did not know, Mr. Trump insisted. "Well, find me his name," the president said. "Let me know." He expressed no interest in the report's findings except to categorically reject them sight unseen.

After learning that Ms. Grimm had worked during President Barack Obama's administration, Mr. Trump asserted that the report was politically biased. In fact, Ms. Grimm is not a political appointee but a career official who began working in the inspector general office late in President Bill Clinton's administration and served under President George W. Bush as well as Mr. Obama. She took over the office in an acting capacity when the previous inspector general stepped down.

Mr. Trump was undaunted and attacked her on Twitter. "Why didn't the I.G., who spent 8 years with the Obama Administration (Did she Report on the failed H1N1 Swine Flu debacle where 17,000 people died?), want to talk to the Admirals, Generals, V.P. & others in charge, before doing her report," he wrote, mischaracterizing the government's generally praised response to the 2009 epidemic that actually killed about 12,000 in the United States. "Another Fake Dossier!"

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To take over as inspector general, Mr. Trump on Friday night named Jason C. Weida, an assistant United States attorney in Boston. The White House said in its announcement that he had "overseen numerous complex investigations in health care and other sectors." He must be confirmed by the Senate before assuming the position.

Ms. Grimm declined to comment but her office issued a statement recommitting itself to its mission of accountability. “Our professionals have risen to a variety of challenges, including our groundbreaking work fighting the opioid epidemic and health care fraud, as well as oversight of the planning, response, and funding for Covid-19,” the statement said. “We will continue to serve the American people by ensuring that their health and welfare are protected.”

Among several other nominations announced on Friday was the president’s choice for a new ambassador to Ukraine, filling a position last occupied by Marie L. Yovanovitch.

Ms. Yovanovitch was ousted a year ago because she was seen as an obstacle by the president’s advisers as they tried to pressure the government in Kyiv to incriminate Mr. Trump’s Democratic rivals. That effort to solicit political benefit from Ukraine, while withholding security aid, led to Mr. Trump’s impeachment largely along party lines in December.



Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, a retired 40-year Army officer, has been nominated as ambassador to Ukraine. Christine June

Mr. Trump selected Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, a retired 40-year Army officer now serving as the director of the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Germany. Mr. Dayton speaks Russian and served as defense attaché in Moscow. More recently, he served as a senior United States defense adviser in Ukraine appointed by Jim Mattis, Mr. Trump's first defense secretary.

**Peter Baker** is the chief White House correspondent and has covered the last four presidents for The Times and The Washington Post. He also is the author of five books, most recently "Impeachment: An American History." More about Peter Baker

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