



A Government Against Liberty

Let's say you're like most people and believe  the federal government has become too large, too wasteful, too crooked, and too intrusive. Now imagine the morning mail arrives from the money-bleeding U.S. Postal Service (\$16 billion in the hole last year) and there's a letter from the Internal Revenue Service with a stern warning about "penalties for perjury" and a long list of questions and probes about your friends, associates, ideas, and political activities.

Here's an example, directed from the IRS to the Linchpins of Liberty in Franklin, Tennessee:

"Provide details regarding all training you have provided or will provide. Indicate who has received or will receive the training and submit copies of the training material."

"Liberty," it seems, unless it's a 19th century gift from France standing quietly in New York Harbor, has become a concept that's now viewed by D.C.'s central planners and tax collectors as a bit too messy, subversive, uncontrolled and individualistic.

Following its review of IRS letters to 11 tea party groups and conservative organizations applying for tax-exempt status, Politico reported that the agency "wanted to know everything — in some cases, it even seemed curious about what members were thinking."

In fact, it went beyond what people were thinking with the IRS summoning a pro-life group in Iowa to reveal detailed information regarding the content of their prayers.

"Please detail the content of the members of your organization's prayers," the IRS asked the Coalition for Life in Iowa. Additionally, the IRS office in Cincinnati asked all board members of the Iowa group to sign a sworn declaration promising not to picket Planned Parenthood.

And from ABC News, listed below is a sample of the questions and requests that ABC News found in roughly half a dozen IRS questionnaires sent to tea party groups" from 2010 to 2012:

"Provide copies of the agendas and minutes of your Board meetings and, if applicable, membership meetings, including a description of legislative and electoral issues discussed, and whether candidates for political office were invited to address the meeting."

"Submit the following information relating to your past and present directors, officers and key employees: (a) Provide a resume for each."

"The names of donors, contributors and grantors. The amount of each of the donations, contributions, and grants and the dates you received them."

"Fully describe your youth outreach program with the local school."

"Provide a list of all issues that are important to your organization. Indicate your position regarding each issue."

"Please explain in detail your organization's involvement with the Tea Party."



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"Provide copies of handbills you distributed at your monthly meetings."

"The names of persons from your organization and the amount of time they spent on the event or program, or events." The IRS also asked for "copies of all your current web pages, including blog posts" and "copies of all your newsletters, bulletins, flyers or any other media or literature you have disseminated to your members or others," plus copies of related information on "Facebook and other social networking sites," and "copies of stories or articles that have been published about you."

And this: "Do you have a close relationship with any candidate for political office or political party? If so, describe fully the nature of that relationship."

On June 29, 2011, IRS staffers told senior agency official Lois Lerner that they were giving special scrutiny to "statements in the case file" by groups that "criticize how the country is being run." Also targeted were groups that focused on government spending, deficits, government debt, and educating people on ways to "make America a better place to live."

On Jan. 15, 2012, the IRS widened its target list to include "political action type organizations" involved in education on the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

In his recent column, "In AP, Rosen investigations, government makes criminals of reporters" (May 22, 2013), *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank pointed to the fundamental threats to freedom in the Obama administration's "broad snooping into Associated Press phone records," along with the administration's spying on journalist James Rosen at Fox News and the administration's identification of Rosen in a search warrant as a "possible co-conspirator" in violation of the Espionage Act.

"To treat a reporter as a criminal for doing his job — seeking out information the government doesn't want made public — deprives Americans of the First Amendment freedom on which all other constitutional rights are based," warned Milbank. "Guns? Privacy? Due Process? Equal protection? If you can't speak out, you can't defend those rights, either."

And while White House Press Secretary Jay Carney says that President Obama is "a fierce defender of the First Amendment" and doesn't think "journalists should be prosecuted for doing their jobs," Milbank points out that the Obama administration "has launched more leak prosecutions than all previous administrations combined."

On what's next, Milbank posted a warning: "If the administration is spying on reporters and accusing them of criminality just for asking questions — well, who knows what else this crowd is capable of doing?"

It's "a culture of cover-ups and intimidation that is giving the administration so much trouble," recently asserted Sen. John Cornyn, a member of the Judiciary Committee, referring to the Justice Department's covert seizure of phone records at The Associated Press.

Charging that "our constitutional rights have been violated," the President and Chief Executive Officer of The Associated Press, Gary Pruitt, said the government's surreptitious monitoring of reporters has already had a chilling effect on news-gathering operations.

News sources, understandably, are more likely to be reluctant to call reporters if they think the government is on the line — and that's especially true if the disclosure is about government transgressions.

"Under their own rules, they are required to narrow this request as narrowly as possible so as to not tread upon the First Amendment," explained Pruitt on CBS's *Face the Nation*, referring to the Obama



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administration's phone monitoring.

"And yet they had a broad, sweeping collection, and they did it secretly," explained Pruitt. "Their rules require them to come to us first, but in this case they didn't, claiming an exception, saying that would have posed a substantial threat to their investigation. But they have not explained why it would and we can't understand why it would."

The end product of this increased monitoring and harassment of the press, this increased threat to reporters and to sources who come forward with information, is that the government is likely to become even more insulated from public scrutiny, more heavy-handed and inept, and more shielded from reform.

Once the government is successful in restricting the news-gathering operations of the press, warned Pruitt, "the people of the United States will only know what the government wants them to know and that's not what the framers of the Constitution had in mind when they wrote the First Amendment."

Pruitt has it right about the philosophy of the nation's Founders, as demonstrated in the letters of Thomas Jefferson.

"Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost," asserted Jefferson in a January 28, 1786, letter to James Currie (1745-1807), a Virginia physician and frequent correspondent during Jefferson's residence in France.

"Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter," wrote Jefferson in 1787 to Edward Carrington, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Continental Army and a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress from 1786 to 1788.

"Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe," stated Jefferson in 1816 in a letter to Colonel Charles Yancey, a commanding officer in Virginia Militia during the War of 1812.

And regarding those who seek to restrict the freedom of the press, Jefferson wrote this in 1804 to Judge John Tyler on the U.S. Circuit Court in Richmond: "No experiment can be more interesting than that we are now trying, and which we trust will end in establishing the fact, that man may be governed by reason and truth. Our first object should therefore be, to leave open to him all avenues of truth. The most effectual hitherto found, is the freedom of the press. It is, therefore, the first shut up by those who fear the investigation of their actions."

Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party, 1953 to 1964, also understood the importance of the press. "The press," he proclaimed, "is our chief ideological weapon."



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