



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 13, 2013

IRS Admits It Targeted Tea Party and Other Conservative Groups

The Internal Revenue Service has admitted that it was involved in the “inappropriate” targeting of conservative political groups during the 2012 election cycle, under the guise of investigating the possible violation of tax exempt status. Lois Lerner, head of the IRS division overseeing tax-exempt groups, offered an apology of sorts after admitting that the tax bureaucracy had singled out dozens of organizations for additional reviews because they included words like “tea party” or “patriot” in their exemption applications. In some cases the IRS even demanded other information, such as lists of their donors, an action that violates IRS investigative policy.



Lerner acknowledged that the behavior was “absolutely incorrect, it was insensitive and it was inappropriate. That’s not how we go about selecting cases for further review. The IRS would like to apologize for that.”

According to the [Associated Press](#), Lerner insisted “the practice was initiated by low-level workers in Cincinnati and was not motivated by political bias. Agency officials found out about the practice last year and moved to correct it, the IRS said in a statement. The statement did not specify when officials found out.” At least 75 groups were targeted in the action, but, Lerner assured, none had their tax-exempt status revoked.

While the agency conceded that “mistakes were made,” it insisted that “they were in no way due to any political or partisan rationale.” In a conference call May 10 Lerner apologized for the breach, saying, “We made some mistakes, some people didn’t use good judgment.”

According to [Fox News](#), “Lerner said the number of groups filing for the tax-exempt status more than doubled from 2010 to 2012, to more than 3,400. To handle the influx, the IRS centralized its review of these applications in the office in Cincinnati. As part of the review, staffers look for signs that groups are participating in political activity. If so, IRS agents take a closer look to make sure that politics isn’t the group’s primary activity, Lerner said.” She said that in all around 300 groups were targeted for additional investigation, and of those about 75 were singled out because they had the words “tea party” or “patriot” in their applications.

[CNN](#) reported that the issue began drawing the attention of conservative groups and Congress months ago, and in March “a dozen U.S. senators led by Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, and Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, sent a letter to IRS Commissioner Douglas Shulman asking for more information about the situation.” Said Hatch: “We need to have ironclad guarantees from the IRS that it will adopt significant protocols to ensure this kind of harassment of groups that have a constitutional right to express their



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own views never happens again.”

Some conservative groups and Republican lawmakers responded to the news with anger and demands that the largely self-monitored agency be reined in. “People are outraged,” Jenny Beth Martin, national coordinator for Tea Party Patriots, told the [Daily Caller](#). “It is absolutely disgusting what we’ve seen happening with this.... It is an abuse of power. It seems it was the way the IRS was trying to prevent us from exercising our right to free speech. Congress needs to investigate to see how this could have happened.”

Martin added that she would be just as outraged if the IRS were investigating liberal groups. “This is not about whether people agree with each other,” she said. “It is about whether there will be free speech without approval from elected officials and unelected bureaucrats ... and one of the things that the Tea Party has been upset about is the concentration of power.”

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said he was calling on the White House “to conduct a transparent, government-wide review aimed at assuring the American people that these thuggish practices are not under way at the IRS or elsewhere in the administration against anyone, regardless of their political views.”

AP reported that while White House spokesman Jay Carney agreed the IRS behavior was indeed inappropriate, “he brushed aside questions about whether the White House itself would investigate. Instead, Carney said the administration expects a thorough investigation by the Treasury Department’s inspector general for tax administration.”

Niger Innis, chief strategist for [TheTeaParty.net](#), strongly suggested that the White House was complicit in the IRS activity. “The Obama administration has used the IRS as a political weapon,” said Innis, adding, “What would Democrats have done if the Nixon administration ordered the IRS to actively target the National Organization for Women or the American Civil Liberties Union? These activities are eerily similar, and yet Obama remains in office.... We would expect intimidation like this from third-world, tin-pot dictators, not our own U.S. government.”

House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) agreed, arguing that the “admission by the Obama administration that the Internal Revenue Service targeted political opponents echoes some of the most shameful abuses of government power in 20th century American history.”

South Dakota Senator John Thune, chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, reacted even more strongly, charging that “Chicago-style politics strikes again. The Obama IRS needs to answer for its harassment of conservative groups.”

The [American Center for Law and Justice](#), a conservative legal advocacy group, is representing 27 of the groups affected by the IRS intrusion. The ACLJ’s Chief Counsel, Jay Sekulow, said the agency’s belated *mea culpa* was insufficient. “The IRS admission and apology should have come much sooner,” he said. “It took the threat of legal action to get the IRS to make this admission. And while many of the organizations we represent have finally been granted tax-exempt status, we demand the IRS to immediately approve the pending applications for the remainder of our clients.”

Photo of New York City IRS field office



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