

Democrats Want Time to Review Bush Administration Plan to Cut Most Productive IRS Auditors

For Immediate Release: July 28, 2006

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Lawmakers Write: "We ask that you immediately delay this decision until Congress has adequate time to review your plan."

(Washington, DC)— Today, 23 Members of Congress, led by Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ), expressed "serious concerns" with the Bush Administration's recently-exposed plan to slash the number of estate and gift tax auditors at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) by September 30. In a letter to IRS Commissioner Mark Everson, Rothman, joined by other lawmakers, requested an immediate delay in the plan's implementation until Congress has adequate time to review it.

"The IRS has repeatedly told Congress that the problem of the wealthiest Americans failing to pay the true amount of taxes owed is a growing problem. Therefore, we cannot understand why you would want to eliminate auditors from a division that is not only the most productive, but also, according to your agency, where there is a growing need for audits. We would appreciate clarification about the exact workload of these auditors, the distribution of cases by the amount of taxable estate value, and how their possible elimination will affect tax collection for this division of the IRS," they wrote.

According to internal documents obtained by the New York Times, the Administration plans to eliminate 157 of 345 estate and gift tax auditors and 17 support staff personnel at the IRS in less than 70 days. Whistleblowers at the IRS revealed the plan, which was then confirmed by IRS Commissioner Everson's own deputy, Kevin Brown.

"These IRS employees audit the tax returns of some of the wealthiest Americans and they review the payment of taxes the Bush Administration has tried to repeal," explained Rothman. "With no Congressional review whatsoever of this plan, I don't see how political appointees at the IRS can deny charges that these layoffs are intended to weaken enforcement of tax laws that the Administration opposes. It's in their best interest to work with Congress before moving forward."

Estate and gift tax auditors collect \$2,200 in taxes for each hour of work, making them the most productive auditing personnel at the IRS. The agency claims that it wants to instead hire additional auditors to examine individual income tax

returns, but has shown no evidence that those new auditors would collect as much in unpaid taxes as those being laid off and no evidence that the trend in the wealthiest Americans failing to pay their taxes has subsided.

The full letter can be read online at: <http://rothman.house.gov/taxlawenforcement.pdf> .

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