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Dave McClure • May. 10, 2013

From the [Bleeding Edge](#) blog.

In an awkward and unprecedented announcement this week, the Internal Revenue Service admitted that it targeted non-profits with "Tea Party" and "Patriot" in their names during the 2012 election year. The agency admitted they held up non-profit status for these groups, demanded lists of contributors to those organizations, and sought additional information about the groups.

Mysteriously, no one in charge of anything at the IRS, the Treasury Department or the Administration will admit to have known anything about this. The abuse of IRS authority to target conservative groups, the agency insists, appears to have been done by career IRS employees with no political motivation at all.

"That was wrong. That was absolutely incorrect, it was insensitive and it was inappropriate," said Lois Lerner, who runs the division of the agency that oversees non-profits. "The IRS would like to apologize for that."

She told the Associated Press that no senior executives of the IRS had any idea what the employees were doing.

Really?

Does this mean, as it appears, that low-level IRS employees are free to run rampant with absolutely no supervision, to punish groups they have no motivation to punish

each election year? That seems a bit hard to swallow. But if it is true, it is even more

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“I’m not good at math,” she confessed as she tried to summon a statistic.

Lerner clarified that she is a lawyer and not an accountant, but it was too late to keep the comment from going worldwide via Twitter. And as the press conference dragged on, Lerner and her staff were unable or unwilling to answer questions.

IRS officials claimed that there was no political bias behind the targeting of these conservative groups, but they were unable to produce any examples of similar targeting of groups with non-conservative-sounding names, according to the Washington Post. Initially, they suggested that other non-conservative-sounding names might have been targeted. By the end of the call, though, Lerner acknowledged: “I only said that because I never like to say ‘absolutely not.’ I don’t have any information on that.”

Here’s why it matters. Beginning next year, the IRS will become the enforcement agency for ObamaCare, managing the health care industry that makes up nearly one-fifth of the nation’s economy. If what the IRS said today is true, that could mean that lots of Americans and small businesses could find themselves in serious financial trouble instigated by low-level employees at their own whim.

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.

In all, about 300 groups were singled out for additional review, Lerner said. Of those, about a quarter were singled out because they had “tea party” or “patriot” somewhere in their applications. Lerner said 150 of the cases have been closed and

no group had its tax-exempt status revoked, though some withdrew their

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particularly targeted in an election year with no one in authority being aware of it.

Memo to Tea Leoni and thousands of other women name Tea: You may want to change your name. Also those whose name is Pat, Patty, Patriot, Party or any derivative. You just never know.

[Editor's Note: *For clarification, the pre-2012 election timeframe when this improper targeting happened was during the tenure of IRS Commissioner Douglas Shulman, who was originally a Bush appointee.*]

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