

Dayton Daily News

Butler County group was flagged by IRS

Liberty Twp. Tea Party has yet to receive approval for tax-exempt status.

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By [Jessica Wehrman](#) - Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON —

When Butler County's Liberty Twp. Tea Party asked the Internal Revenue Service for tax-exempt status as a charitable organization, IRS officials in Cincinnati last year responded with a list of 35 questions.

They wanted to know the organization's relationship with Justin Binik-Thomas, a Tea Party member in Cincinnati who had never worked with their organization. They also wanted a "list of all the issues that are important to your organization" and "your position regarding each issue."

Questions like those — which IRS officials admitted Friday were aimed primarily at Tea Party organizations — have provoked bipartisan outrage on Capitol Hill and have caused considerable heartburn for the tax collection agency and the Obama administration, which faces accusations that it targeted political foes for extra scrutiny.

An independent investigator for the U.S. Treasury Department concluded in a report released Tuesday that the IRS "used inappropriate criteria" that targeted Tea Party and other organizations for extra scrutiny based on their names or policy positions rather than whether they were involved in political campaigns.

The Justice Department has launched a criminal probe. House Speaker John Boehner, R-West Chester, warned Wednesday that IRS officials face the possibility of "going to jail."

Tim Savaglio, a board member for the Liberty Twp. Tea Party, will join scores of conservatives from Ohio and across the country who will descend on Capitol Hill today to tell similar stories of what they see as abuse by the IRS.

The focus so far has been on 501(c)4 "social welfare" organizations, which blossomed during the 2010 and 2012 election seasons, in part because of the flexibility they have to spend money on some political activity without disclosing donors. But Savaglio's organization wanted IRS approval to qualify as what is known as a 501(c)3 charitable organization. The IRS has yet to grant approval.

"We're an educational group," said Savaglio. "We don't have a paid staff. We don't take stands. We don't endorse candidates. We don't man phone banks. We don't do any of those kind of political activities."

Binik-Thomas said he was “shocked” when he discovered that the IRS was asking questions about him to a group he barely knew. He’d been involved in the Cincinnati Tea Party — he’d even served as a spokesman — but said he had not worked with the Liberty Twp. Tea Party.

“The obvious questions that comes to your mind are, ‘Why am I targeted amongst all the others?’ ” Binik-Thomas said. “Where does this information go in the end? Clearly, it’s housed in the IRS, but does it get shared with other government agencies? Do I get an audit? If I do, is it against my business? All of those things go through your mind.”

George Brunemann, a Cincinnati engineering consultant, was audited by the IRS in 2011. He said IRS staff informed him that he was being audited because of his relationship with the Cincinnati Tea Party.

Brunemann said he believes the IRS flagged him and his wife Nancy because they dealt with the cash flow from a 2010 Tea Party rally at the University of Cincinnati and put a large deposit in the bank. He said the IRS agent’s comments made it clear to them that their affiliation with the Tea Party put them at risk. He said other Tea Party officials had warned him of the possibility.

“You know you’re doing something right when you get the attention of the Obama machine,” he said. “It’s almost like a badge of honor.”

Although the vast majority of independent organizations examined by the IRS tend to be conservative, at least one of Ohio’s most prominent liberal policy groups may have faced similar scrutiny from the IRS. Innovation Ohio, which was created by some of former Democratic Gov. Ted Strickland’s top aides, waited nine months for its application for a tax-exemption status as a 501(c)3 was approved on

May 16, 2012.

“We didn’t have any problem providing the answers to their questions,” said Dale Butland, a spokesman for Innovation Ohio. “At the time though, we did think ‘My goodness, they are asking a lot of questions like the name of your donors and this and that.’ Now, in retrospect, from what I can see, apparently they were asking these same questions of lots of organizations.”

Joe Vardon of the Columbus Dispatch contributed to this story.

Original article:

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