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Tea Party Infuriated over IRS Action

Tea Party chapters in various parts of the country are irate with the IRS for demanding information from them about their politics, contributors and even family members. Certain Tea Party chapters including the one in Waco, Texas and the Ohio Liberty Council (another Tea Party chapter) received letters from the IRS office in Cincinnati asking them to provide details of their donors, volunteers, financial support and relationship with political candidates and parties, among other things. The letters even asked for printed copies of their Facebook pages.

Toby Marie Walker, President of the Waco Tea Party chapter told the press that some things requested by the IRS “reasonable”. However, she added that, “there were some requests on there that were strange. It makes you wonder if they do this to groups like ACORN or other left-leaning groups.” Leaders in the Tea Party took umbrage at the IRS’ request for details of any political ambitions of its board members or their relatives.

In Richmond, Virginia Tea Party leaders were asked to provide almost 500 pages of documents just two weeks before the party was due for its local convention. Furthermore the deadline set by the IRS for submitting the documents was just two days before the convention was due to begin. Colleen Owens, spokeswoman for the Richmond chapter said, “Most of these groups are not wealthy and they've had their applications for 501(c)(4) status since 2010. We only had two weeks to gather everything. The timing was suspicious.”

The Tea Party is registered as a 501(c)(4) status non-profit organization that affords it greater liberty than the more familiar 501(c)(3) status of most non-profits. Unlike 501(c)(3) non-profits, a 501(c)(4) organization is allowed to lobby for support from the public and given the freedom to participate in political activities like donating money to political campaigns and endorsing political candidates, provided this is not their primary activity. However, those who donate money to 501(c)(4) organizations are not allowed to claim for deductions against their taxable income.

In response, an IRS spokesman said, “When determining whether an organization is eligible for tax-exempt status, including 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations, all the facts and circumstances of that specific organization must be considered to determine whether it is eligible for tax-exempt status. To be tax-exempt as a social welfare organization, they must be primarily engaged in the promotion of social welfare. Career civil servants make all decisions on exemption applications in a fair, impartial manner and do so without regard to political party affiliation or ideology.”