

Only Two Ministries Meet Grassley Deadline

Only Joyce Meyer Ministries and Kenneth Copeland Ministries complied with the Dec. 6 deadline to submit financial records to the U.S. Senate.



Only two of the six charismatic ministries asked to submit financial data to the ranking Republican member of the Senate Finance Committee complied with their Dec. 6 deadline.

Last month, Sen. Charles Grassley sent letters requesting detailed information about perks, salaries, compensations and board-meeting minutes to Randy and Paula White, Benny Hinn, David and Joyce Meyer, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Eddie Long, and Creflo and Taffi Dollar. Grassley said his interest was in determining whether or not the nonprofits were operating in compliance with their tax-exempt status and gave the televangelists 30 days to respond.

Because the letter was sent from Grassley's office and not from the Senate Finance Committee, the law does not require compliance. Nonetheless, Joyce Meyer Ministries and Kenneth Copeland Ministries mailed in their documents by the deadline. "Our timely response to the senator's efforts to ensure the financial accountability of all nonprofits is a decisive demonstration of the high standard of fiscal responsibility that we hold ourselves to," said a spokesman from Joyce Meyer ministries.

Benny Hinn Ministries asked for an extension until Jan. 30. Grassley said representatives for Randy and Paula White spoke with his office, but there had been no further response.

Long's ministry did not release the requested information because Grassley's letter was "not a subpoena or a formal inquiry by the Senate Finance Committee," his attorneys said in a statement. The ministry sent Grassley a letter instead,

saying the church will fully comply with all laws applicable to churches but that Grassley's request disregards the ministry's privacy protections.

Creflo Dollar, who has been vocal in the media in saying that the inquiry was an invasion of privacy, also sent a letter stating that it would not voluntarily turn over documents, Grassley's office said. In a letter written by Dollar's attorney, the ministry stated that the "religious doctrine and practices of a church should not be held out for the world to evaluate as a result of responding to Congressional inquiries," the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported.

Grassley has said issuing a subpoena is an option open to the finance committee, but that he would rather not have to pursue it. The senator noted that the only time he has had to pursue a subpoena was when he was gathering information from charities connected to Jack Abramoff, the political lobbyist now in prison for fraud, conspiracy and tax evasion.

"It's good that some of the ministries are cooperating," Grassley said in a statement released shortly after the 5 p.m. deadline. "I hope all of them will cooperate in the end. For the focus of this inquiry, ministries are the same as any other nonprofit organization. It's a question of abiding by tax laws just like any tax-exempt group."