

Why Copeland and Dollar Refuse to Cooperate With Grassley

Creflo Dollar and Kenneth Copeland have released letters explaining their concerns with Sen. Charles Grassley's investigation into tax-related issues.



[04-03-08] Two ministries not fully cooperating with Sen. Charles Grassley's investigation into tax-related issues have released letters explaining their concerns.

As of Monday, Creflo Dollar and Kenneth Copeland have shown an unwillingness to provide the senator with any further documentation. The documents requested by Grassley would conceivably clear up his concerns that six TV-based ministries have possibly mishandled or misused tax-exempt donations in the past.

According to the senator's office, of the six ministries under investigation, the four others have either complied, or have shown a greater willingness to comply.

Earlier this week, a lawyer for Kenneth Copeland Ministries (KCM) responded in a letter to Grassley's latest request for tax-related information—a request that gave four of the six ministries, including Copeland's and Dollar's, March 31 as a new deadline.

KCM lawyer Shane T. Hamilton pointed out in a letter addressed to the two ranking members on the Senate Finance Committee how KCM was one of only two ministries that filed a timely response to Grassley's original deadline last year of Dec. 6.

KCM attempted to answer as many of the 42 questions as it deemed appropriate, stated Hamilton, and the response "reflected a sincere and good faith effort."

"Where [KCM] did not provide a complete answer, [KCM] determined that the question raises constitutionally and statutorily based privacy, confidentiality, and freedom of association issues."

Hamilton said KCM is concerned because the six ministries Grassley has targeted all "share a common theology" based on the belief that "prosperity in all areas of one's life is an outward sign of the fulfillment of God's promises contained in the Bible."

Grassley's investigation, Hamilton believes, could infringe on fundamental First Amendment rights of the six prosperity-based ministries because "the government should not single out any religion for disparate treatment because of its beliefs."

"The selective investigation only of churches that preach the 'Word of Faith' message raises significant concerns as to whether the inquiry is aimed at publicly questioning the religious beliefs of the targeted churches, their preachers, and their members," he stated.

Hamilton also questioned the committee's motivation, suggesting that if the main basis for launching the investigation is oversight of federal tax laws, then it "could be accomplished just as effectively by the [Senate Finance] Committee asking the Internal Revenue Service to provide all of the information Grassley is seeking through a request pursuant to section 6103 of the [IRS] code."

He added: "Section 6103 of the code does not limit what the committee can request from the Internal Revenue Service. It only limits the committee's ability to make that information public. [KCM] does not understand how subjecting the information sought by Senator Grassley to the section 6103 confidentiality protections would compromise any bona fide oversight-related interests of the committee."

Concluded Hamilton: "Given [KCM's] many continuing concerns regarding Senator Grassley's inquiry, [KCM] has decided not to

provide any additional information.”

Meanwhile, Creflo Dollar explained to members of the Senate Finance Committee in a letter last week that his ministry, World Changers Church International, has always made every effort to comply with IRS code.

“I would like to assure you that we believe that, like every other citizen, each Christian has a religious duty to pay taxes and comply with the law,” he wrote. “Three of the four gospels specifically emphasize Jesus’ teaching to his disciples: that we are to render unto Caesar what is due to Caesar, and to render unto God what is due to God.”

But regarding disclosure of the ministry’s tithing history, Dollar called it World Changers’ duty “to protect the privacy rights of our friends and members” which could be “seriously jeopardized by an open-ended public governmental investigation like Senator Grassley’s.”

He likened such disclosures to “asking particular parishioners the substance of their prayers or confessions.”

Dollar, like Copeland, also expressed concern that Grassley’s investigation singled out six ministries that preach the “prosperity gospel.”

Dollar and his followers believe wealth is nothing to be ashamed of and that God wanted him and his followers to “be rich spiritually, physically and financially” because it is “an outward sign of God’s favor, and we celebrate that blessing.”

“Like any other church in America, World Changers has deeply held religious beliefs, and we must protest any kind of evaluation of those beliefs by a member of the United States Senate,” he said. “As much as we would like to provide information to the senator, we simply must do everything within our power to protect our church and its members from public scrutiny and a Congressional evaluation of the validity of our beliefs.

"We have no choice, therefore," said Dollar, "but to decline to provide Senator Grassley with a response to his inquiries. We are confident that you will agree that this inquiry speaks to the very heart of our First Amendment rights and will concur that compelling a response would certainly violate the Separation of Church and State."

Of the four other televangelist ministries also under investigation, Grassley's office reported this week that Benny Hinn's ministry had sent additional documents in an ongoing process of compliance while lawyers for Randy and Paula White told Grassley's staff last week that the Whites' first batch of documents were in the mail.

Eddie Long's ministry told Grassley's office last week that the information the senator requested would be in by April 15 and Joyce Meyer's ministry sent some of her tax-related information by the deadline Grassley originally requested last November. His office has indicated that Meyer has "cooperated substantially."

"It's good to see the majority of the ministries offering information," Grassley said. "They receive generous tax-breaks as non-profit organizations. In general, the federal treasury forgoes billions of tax-dollars a year to tax-exempt groups. The ministries sharing of material with the Senate Committee in charge of tax-policy shows an interest in accountability for their special tax status." **Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**