

What President Obama Really Knew About IRS Targeting Tactics

The latest line from the White House on the **IRS scandal**—and most all the scandals his administration is embroiled in—is, “What the president doesn’t know can’t hurt him.”

White House press secretary Jay Carney admitted at the daily press briefing today that the White House counsel and President Obama’s chief of staff were told several weeks ago that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) was being investigated for intentionally targeting the tea party and that the investigation’s initial findings were that those allegations were credible. Yet those senior White House officials allegedly decided the president didn’t need to know his IRS had been caught targeting his political enemies.

Now, of course this doesn’t answer the question of whether or not the president actually knew. It only addresses that his chief of staff and counsel didn’t tell him.

President Obama had the opportunity to assure the American people last week that he didn’t know about the targeting, but he would only admit to not knowing about the inspector general report until the press broke the news.

Yet the question remains: Does the fact, if true, that President Obama didn’t know the IRS was targeting **conservative groups** absolve him of blame? After all, the misconduct has persisted for more than 18 months.

It seems that outgoing acting commissioner of the IRS Steven Miller had the same attitude as those White House senior officials. He admitted to Congress last week that he found out but didn’t think he needed to tell his boss. In fact, it seems

everyone who found out thought it unimportant to tell their superiors.

That's how scandals begin. You learn of wrongdoing and decide to do nothing about it.

The IRS intentionally targeted conservative groups—because they were conservative—on President Obama's watch. And no one—including the head of the IRS right on up through the president's chief of staff—put a stop to it. Culpability lies at the top. Every new revelation about the scandal points to the fact that everyone at every stage didn't do what they should have done to stop the abuse. Today, there are still conservative groups caught up in an ongoing, admittedly intrusive and targeted inquiry process. It hasn't ended.

Now that **President Obama** is fully aware of the situation, he sent his senior adviser on the Sunday talk shows to explain that the “law is irrelevant,” and his outgoing IRS head testified that what happened was merely “horrible customer service.”

This “nothing to see here, move along” approach to the burgeoning scandal by the president and his team does nothing to address the ongoing abuse of power by one of the most powerful (and abusive) agencies of the federal government.

Mr. President, if you didn't know your IRS was targeting your political enemies, say so, categorically. If you are really outraged, act like it. Join bipartisan calls for the appointment of independent counsel, and demand those responsible to resign immediately or be fired.

Matthew Clark is associate counsel for government affairs and media advocacy with the American Center for Law and Justice in its Washington, D.C., headquarters.