

Franklin Graham Calls IRS Probe of Ministry Finances 'Un-American'

Evangelist Franklin Graham blasted the Internal Revenue Service probe of conservative nonprofit groups as "un-American," saying both the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the relief group Samaritan's Purse were audited by the IRS.

In a Tuesday letter to President Obama, Graham said the two organizations he leads were notified last September that the IRS would review their records for the 2010 tax year.

The IRS inquiry, he noted, occurred months after the BGEA ran ads in April 2012 supporting a North Carolina amendment that banned same-sex marriage, which passed in May. The BGEA also ran ads last fall urging voters to consider candidates who make decisions based on "biblical principles and support the nation of Israel."

Graham noted that the ads were bought with designated funds given by ministry donors for that purpose.

The IRS audits were conducted on Oct. 15 at Samaritan's Purse, an international relief organization based in Boone, N.C., and on Oct. 29 at the BGEA, in Charlotte.

"I am bringing this to your attention because I believe that someone in the Administration was targeting and attempting to intimidate us," wrote Graham, the son of evangelist Billy Graham. "This is morally wrong and unethical—indeed some would call it 'un-American.'"

A Treasury Department inspector general recently determined that "inappropriate criteria" were used by the IRS

when considering the applications of Tea Party and other organizations that were applying for tax-exempt status.

“I do not believe that the IRS audit of our two organizations last year is a coincidence—or justifiable,” wrote Graham, who last year apologized to the president for seeming to question Obama’s Christian faith.

He said his organizations learned after the fall election that they could continue to be tax-exempt. But Graham said the audits “wasted taxpayer money” and “precious resources.”

The White House and the IRS did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In a Tuesday statement, President Obama called the findings of the Treasury watchdog’s report “intolerable and inexcusable” and said he wants those responsible to be held accountable.

Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State said after last year’s electoral endorsements by the Grahams, Franklin Graham has no grounds to complain.

“Franklin Graham is now complaining to the media that he was targeted by the IRS. Well, in light of those ads he should have been,” Boston said. “My only regret was that the IRS didn’t yank his ministries’ tax-exempt status.”