

IRS Apologizes for Assault on Tea Party Movement

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has apologized to the tea party movement.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which represents nearly 30 tea party organizations nationwide against an IRS assault, calls the apology a “significant victory for free speech and freedom of association.”

The ACLJ began representing tea party groups after the IRS launched an effort to intimidate tea party organizations by demanding information that is outside the scope of legitimate inquiry and violated the **First Amendment**. The IRS demanded that groups reveal the internal workings of their organizations—including the identification of members, how they are selected, who they associate with and even what they discuss.

The Associated Press reported that Lois Lerner, who heads the IRS unit that oversees tax-exempt groups, issued an apology and said that practice was initiated by low-level workers in Cincinnati and inappropriately focused on groups that included the words “tea party” or “patriot” in their applications for tax-exempt status, singling them out for additional reviews. Today she says the practice was wrong and should not have occurred.

“We knew from the very start that this intimidation tactic was coordinated and focused directly on specific organizations,” says Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the ACLJ. “This admission by the IRS represents a significant victory for free speech and freedom of association. There was never any doubt that these organizations complied with the law and applied for tax-exempt status for their activities as Americans have done for

decades. And for the many tax-exempt groups we represent, this is an important day—and underscores the need to stand up and defend your constitutional freedoms.”

The ACLJ represents 27 groups in more than 18 states across the country. To date, 14 groups have been granted tax-exempt status by the IRS. The others are pending, and no organization has been denied.

“The IRS admission and apology should have come much sooner,” says Sekulow. “It took the threat of legal action to get the IRS to make this admission. And while many of the organizations we represent have finally been granted tax-exempt status, we demand the IRS immediately approve the pending applications for the remainder of our clients.”

The ACLJ says the IRS information demands that were sent to the tea party groups are not in response to complaints of wrongdoing, but instead in response to applications by the organizations for 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) tax-exempt status.

Sekulow, who served as a trial lawyer with the Office of the Chief Counsel for the IRS earlier in his career, says many of the questions were simply inappropriate and fall well outside the scope of legitimate IRS inquiry.

The ACLJ also called for congressional oversight hearings on this issue, having heard from more than 50,000 Americans urging Congress to conduct hearings concerning the IRS actions in this matter.