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OPINION

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IRS Scandal Reinforces Need for Tax Reform

By Lieutenant Governor Brad Little

Like most Americans, I was troubled by the news that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) was targeting certain conservative groups for extra scrutiny and unwarranted delay when these organizations filed for lawful federal tax exemption status.

This scandal compels Americans to be vigilant and insist on limited, accountable, and transparent government.

The most troubling aspect of this— in addition to the un-American actions of government officials monitoring and scrutinizing the activities and reading lists of lawful, private organizations— is the targeting of specific groups of citizens. The targeting of partisan opponents is the tactic of autocratic and tyrannical political systems. One distinct and proud feature of America's unique constitutional safeguards is that all Americans are guaranteed free speech, especially the right to offer dissenting voices.

Using the power to tax to undermine free speech and association is counter to the principles of our Republic.

This alarming IRS scandal underscores a point I have been making for many years: good tax policy must be fair, simple, predictable, and competitive.

Folks instinctively cry out for reform of a 4 million word federal tax code, requiring businesses and individuals to spend more than 6 billion hours a year complying with filing requirements— the equivalent of 3 million people working full-time, year-round. This lack of fairness, predictability, and simplicity empowers federal agencies like the IRS, making it less accountable to the American people and in return fosters greater control over our economy.

Today's perception of unfair and arbitrary actions on the part of the IRS undermines our tax code. Instead of working to rebuild this broken trust, the recent IRS congressional testimony and lack of plausible answers thus far from the Obama Administration further deteriorates Americans' confidence in this voluntarily tax system.

Ronald Reagan once famously pointed out that even Albert Einstein needed help on his 1040 form. A renewed focus and energy in Congress to reform the U.S. tax code will hopefully be a silver lining from this whole mess.

The federal government is too complicated and too big. Idahoans want a federal government that is efficient with a reformed tax code that is both fair and competitive. There has never been a better time for a national debate on the size and role of the federal government.

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