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Kelley Calls On IRS to Prevent Its Contractors From Using Taxpayer Political Information

Washington, D.C.—The leader of the union representing Internal Revenue Service (IRS) employees today called on the IRS to take steps to ensure its private contractors will not access or use inappropriate taxpayer information, including political party affiliation.

In a follow-up letter to the head of the agency, President Colleen M. Kelley of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), said the agency should refuse to enter into any contract with a private collection agency “unless there is a binding and legally enforceable agreement” that the contractor will not access such information in the course of tax collection duties.

Kelley’s letter to IRS Commissioner Mark Everson comes on the heels of an earlier letter from the union leader raising the concerns of NTEU members at the IRS that an agency contractor had been supplying taxpayer political party affiliation in materials gathered for use in tax collection.

After Kelley raised the issue, the IRS said it intends to block this kind of information from databases used by IRS employees.

“If it is inappropriate for IRS employees to access this information in the course of tax collection efforts, it is clearly inappropriate for contract employees to access it.” Kelley wrote in her follow-up letter to Everson.

(MORE)

Kelley Wary of Contractor Use of Political Data—Add One

The fact that such personal information is commercially available “does not mean that it is appropriate for those entrusted with exercising the enormous power of the federal government’s taxing authority to use it,” the NTEU leader said.

In the next month, the IRS is planning to hire a number of private debt collection companies to seek payment of tax debts in exchange for a bounty of up to 25 percent of the money they collect. NTEU continues to strenuously oppose the program on several bases, including the serious risk to private and sensitive taxpayer information and the fact that a study by the IRS itself shows that agency employees could accomplish the same task with far better results at far less costs.

President Kelley reminded Commissioner Everson that he has said repeatedly in congressional testimony that tax collection contract employees will be subject to the same rules and standards as IRS employees. She added: “I am asking you to ensure that at least the same rules are in place” on the vital subject of taxpayers’ political affiliations. In fact, the law states that contractors must follow the same rules as IRS employees.

After the matter was brought to light as a result of concerns raised by NTEU members at the IRS, Kelley said the incident “illustrates why tax collection is an inherently governmental function that should not be performed by profit-making companies.”

NTEU is the largest independent federal union, representing some 150,000 employees in 30 agencies and departments, including 94,000 IRS employees.

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