



NEWS RELEASE

1750 H St., NW • Washington, DC 20006 • (202) 572-5500 • www.nteu.org

For Immediate Release
September 14, 2006

Contact: Dina Long,
(202) 572-5500

TIGTA Report Highlights Importance Of Resources for IRS Customer Service

Washington, D.C.—A recent report by the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) underscores the critical importance of providing the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) with sufficient resources to be able to appropriately fund both customer service and compliance functions, the leader of the union representing IRS employees said today.

“Any way you look at it, cutting back on the ability of IRS employees to provide taxpayers with high-quality customer service is counter-productive,” said President Colleen M. Kelley of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU).

President Kelley offered that assessment in the wake of a TIGTA analysis showing that a significant number of tax returns done by volunteer preparers contained critical errors for a variety of reasons, including the inability of volunteers to gather the right taxpayer information; and their failure to refer to resource guides or review their work.

The finding is important, Kelley said, because the IRS has made clear its intention to rely increasingly on volunteer tax preparers provided by a variety of public service organizations and businesses even as it seeks to reduce its own customer service operations.

In the last 18 months, NTEU has led successful fights against IRS efforts to cut back sharply the number of its Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TACs) across the nation and reduce the number of hours that telephone help is available to taxpayers.

Such steps by the IRS, President Kelley said, would be particularly damaging to vulnerable segments of the population, including the elderly, those for whom English is not their first language and those without access to the Internet or with only limited experience with electronic communications. The IRS is seeking to force taxpayers to its web site for the help and forms they need.

NTEU has also been leading the efforts to cancel an IRS program that this month began turning over taxpayer records to private debt collection agencies for the collection of back taxes. “This is another area of work that is best done by trained and accountable IRS employees who are able to

(MORE)

TIGTA Report Underscores IRS Resource Needs--Add One

balance the responsibility of taxpayers to pay what they owe against the need of the government to collect what is due,” Kelley said. Debt collection companies, on the other hand, will be paid a bounty of up to 24 percent of what they collect encouraging that aggressive collection tactics will be used against thousands of taxpayers, if the program continues to unfold.

The TIGTA report on the use of volunteers is in line with the views expressed by the IRS National Taxpayer Advocate Nina Olson, who has warned that excessive reliance on volunteer tax preparers could impede the agency’s ability to meet its taxpayer service responsibilities.

President Kelley noted the widespread agreement with the notion that quality customer service and enforcement carry equal weight in efforts to increase taxpayer compliance. “As the tax code has gotten more and more complex,” she said, “the importance of providing taxpayers with the help they need to meet their tax obligations cannot be overstated.”

She called on Congress to provide sufficient funding for IRS customer service and enforcement functions and to use its oversight authority to ensure the agency doesn’t duck its responsibilities to assist taxpayers in meaningful and helpful ways.

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

--30--