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THE TAX LAWYER

TAXES 10/26/2015

Obama Administration Learned From Lois, Dodging IRS Scandal

Deny, stonewall, deny. For a time, the IRS scandal looked serious, enough for heads to roll. But with a dogmatic and unwavering narrative, the administration made it go away. It was aided by Lois Lerner's refusal to testify, generous bonuses and pension. You have to hand it to the administration for pulling off a tour de force that could have brought a lesser administration down. Disagreeing with any of it can sound like being against recycling.

President Obama always fervently denied there was *any* IRS problem, [not even a smidgen of corruption](#). Any missteps were innocent, entirely the fault of [bonehead decisions in local IRS offices](#). On his final Daily Show appearance, the President capped his 'no targeting' mantra. There was no targeting. Emails show there was no directive about targeting. Sorry, it turns out some of our emails are missing? Well, hard drives crash. We recycle them—which helps the environment. Besides, liberals got targeted too. There's no smidgen of corruption. Cash bonuses? Those are unrelated. And the latest in the long line of excuses: it was all the Republicans' fault.

On Jon Stewart's Daily Show, Mr. Obama denied that the IRS did anything wrong, blaming Republicans:

- 6 You've got this back office, and they're going after the Tea Party. Well, it turned out, no, Congress had passed a crummy law that didn't give people guidance in terms of what it was they were trying to do. They did it poorly and stupidly. The truth of the matter is that there was not some big conspiracy there. They were trying to sort out these conflicting demands. You don't want all this money pouring through non-for-profits, but you also want to make sure everybody is being treated fairly."



President Barack Obama, left, talks with Jon Stewart, host of "The Daily Show" during a taping on July 21, 2015, in New York. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

With all this unwavering devotion to mission, there could be no other conclusion. It was no surprise that the current Justice Department wrote [a letter to members of Congress](#) announcing that Lois Lerner will face no criminal charges. If you worried about the email's sent from Ms. Lerner's [dog's email account](#), don't be, the dog is safe too. The most the DOJ would say was that there was *mismanagement* down at the IRS. Hey, perhaps *some poor judgment, even institutional inertia*, but that was it.

Stay on mission. It may have *looked* like targeting. But the DOJ said there was *no* evidence that *any* IRS official acted based on political, discriminatory, corrupt, or other inappropriate motives. Not even Ms. Lerner, despite her history, including at the Federal Election Commission, [before she moved on to IRS targeting](#). Disparate impact on the tea party? That was just mishandling.

Ms. Lerner was handsomely rewarded [while she presided over alleged discrimination against conservative nonprofits](#). In fact, [records](#) revealed that she received [\\$129,000 in bonuses](#) between 2010 and 2013, averaging \$43,000 a year—on top of her regular salary. Ms. Lerner came off as a kind of folk hero in the DOJ report, stepping forward to bring this whole issue up! The fact that Ms. Lerner planted and then answered her staged question made her a kind of whistleblower.

President Obama's testy "not even a smidgen of corruption" remark to was convincing, despite the [Government Accountability Office](#) report that [internal controls for exempt organization audit selection should be strengthened](#). The GAO said organizations can be picked for examination in an unfair manner, based on religious, educational, political, or other views. [Inconveniently, IRS documents](#) revealed Lois Lerner's [email](#) warning IRS staffers of the pitfalls of revealing too much information to Congress. Forget email, use instant messaging system that automatically deletes. House Oversight Committee [documentation](#) suggests that IRS officials used it *deliberately* to evade public scrutiny.

Ms. Lerner professed her innocence and then [took the Fifth](#). When she [broke her silence to Politico, she said she did nothing wrong](#), claiming *she* was the victim. Staying on mission was key, even though Ms. Lerner had met with the DOJ about *prosecuting* conservative groups. [Former IRS Commissioner Shulman testified](#) there was "absolutely no targeting" of conservative or Tea Party organizations. Ms. Lerner admitted targeting, calling it "absolutely incorrect, insensitive, and inappropriate."

Four days later, on May 14, 2013, the Inspector General [issued a report](#) confirming the targeting. Ms. Lerner professed her innocence, then [took the Fifth](#). She was placed on [administrative leave](#), and shortly thereafter retired with full pension. The House held Ms. Lerner in contempt. Only then—on June 13, 2014, did the IRS *first* say it lost Lerner's emails from 2009 to 2011, destroying hard drives and backups.

Eventually, the IRS said it spent millions to try to recover them. Republicans were repeatedly accused of wasting money on this, since the IRS was above reproach. The narrative saying the Republicans were just wasting money sure turned out to be right. There was no smidgen of corruption, after all.

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