

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Ranking Member Katie Porter

Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services

Joint Hearing on “Oversight of the Internal Revenue Service”

October 24, 2023

Have you heard of “death by a thousand cuts?” It’s how to get rid of something by subtly attacking it over and over until finally it’s gone.

For years, too many Washington politicians have worked to gut the Internal Revenue Service. And they’ve found creative ways to cut—and sometimes deeply slash—the IRS time and again.

They start by attacking its credibility. Look, I know the agency that collects our taxes isn’t easy to love. Believe me, opportunistic politicians know that too. So they go on TV and give the IRS a verbal slash, falsely suggesting to the American people that the IRS is spying on us, targeting us for our political beliefs, or going after us to pay more money than we owe.

Even if their claims lack evidence, we might be inclined to believe some of these negative things about an agency that collects our taxes. These politicians easily succeed in creating and spreading hostility, making it even easier to slash again.

Cue phase two: full-on partisan investigations and attacks on the hardworking employees at the IRS. Look no further than the last time that Committee Republicans went hard after the IRS. Under the Obama Administration, Republicans falsely claimed the IRS was unfairly targeting conservative organizations more than progressive organizations applying for tax-exempt status. The IRS spent \$20 million and produced one million pages of documents in response. Ultimately, Republicans didn’t prove their point—they instead used it as a launching pad to justify diverting essential resources from IRS customer service, IT, and enforcement.

But I guess that’s what opportunistic politicians really wanted: to turn people against the IRS, divert its resources so the agency can’t do its job, and then take one last slash.

That brings us to phase three: budget cuts. When politicians tell us that our tax collector is after us, no one wants to fund the collector. Sadly, that’s exactly what’s happened. Opportunistic politicians succeeded in cutting IRS staffing 20 percent lower than it was in 2010 even though the country has grown by 7 percent since then. The agency has been so battered in recent years that we’ll need 52,000 new IRS employees just to meet the agency’s needs.

That’s how bad it’s gotten, folks, after years and years of politicians taking slashes at the IRS. Opportunistic politicians haven’t succeeded in totally killing the IRS by 1000 cuts, but make no mistake—the cuts have gotten deep, and the agency is badly wounded. Who suffers from all of this? We all do.

When we need help with our taxes, and no one is available at the IRS to pick up the phone, blame a politician who slashed the IRS.

When we want the IRS to make tax filing easier or our information more secure, but the IRS can't invest in technology with adequate cybersecurity, blame a politician who slashed the IRS.

When we pay our fair share of taxes and just want the IRS to make billionaires do the same, but they don't have the staff or resources to do it, blame a politician who slashed the IRS.

Our current House Republican majority has too many of these politicians who love to slash government institutions to their breaking points. As we sit in yet another Republican-led hearing to attack the IRS instead of making it work better, other Republicans are off slashing Congress at the same time.

They've stopped Congress from electing a Speaker of the House or passing any legislation. The most opportunistic Republicans have spent so long attacking our government that now, Republicans don't even trust each other.

But that's what the opportunists wanted. A weak Congress. A weak IRS. It's what they call "small government." In reality, it's a federal government that can't serve its people. Right now, the opportunists are creating that reality. A bipartisan coalition of reasonable members can stop them.

Today, everything we say and do matters. Before my colleagues whack the IRS, consider that your whack might be one of the thousand cuts over time that weakens our government and hurts the American people.

Instead, we should all use today to determine what the IRS needs to serve the American people and how Congress can be an effective partner—that is, if we ever elect a Speaker and pass another bill.

I yield back.

###

Contact: Nelly Decker, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181