

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Markup of H. Res. 737—Resolution Condemning and Censuring John A. Koskinen, the Commissioner of Internal Revenue

June 15, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me start by saying this. Every single Member of this Committee knows how much I respect you. You know I consider you a friend. You also know, I think, that I try at every opportunity to work with you in a bipartisan manner.

Yesterday, we hit an amazing milestone here on the Oversight Committee. We signed our 600th bipartisan letter since you and I began serving as Chairman and Ranking Member together. We send a lot of letters, but this has to be a record for any Committee in a single Congress. And it's a sea change from how things used to be run around here.

We have done serious investigations, such as the Secret Service investigation. We have also worked on bipartisan legislation, like the landmark FOIA Improvement Act the House passed this week and sent to the President, as well as the Postal Reform bill we are unveiling later today.

So it really, sincerely pains me when we press forward with bogus issues like the one we are discussing today. Mr. Chairman, I say this as your friend—you are completely and totally wrong on this one. The Department of Justice disagrees with you. The Republican Inspector General disagrees with you. Even Senator Hatch, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, disagrees with you.

There was no politically motivated targeting at the IRS. There was no lying to Congress. There was no obstruction of justice. It simply did not happen. After three years and more than \$20 million, it is finally time to put these baseless conspiracy theories to rest.

This resolution is a waste of time, it is going nowhere, it has no practical effect, and—as respectfully as I can say this—it is time to give this up. It is now undermining the credibility and the integrity of this Committee and the work we do.

Our Committee is at its best when we work together on broad, productive reforms. I went to the House floor on Monday and praised you for your leadership on proactive legislation. That is the kind of work we should be doing.

John Koskinen is an honorable man. He came out of retirement to take on a difficult and thankless job. The actions that occurred at the IRS happened before Commissioner Koskinen even arrived. He has testified before our Committee more often than any other agency head over the past three years, and he has answered question after question about all of the allegations in this resolution.

Your core accusation against Commissioner Koskinen is that he was deceitful, that he misled Congress. But you completely disregard the difference between a misstatement and a lie. You ignore the fact that Commissioner Koskinen testified before us based on what he knew at the time. You suggest this distinction does not matter, but it does.

As a case in point, I will be offering an amendment today to correct basic errors and inaccuracies in this censure resolution. There are a number of them. Mr. Chairman, I want to make clear that I am not suggesting that you deceived the House when you included these inaccuracies in this resolution. I am not alleging that you were dishonest. I recognize that you were likely relying on what others told you. The same is true of Commissioner Koskinen.

We will also be offering a second amendment to recognize the findings of the Republican Inspector General of the IRS, Russell George. Mr. George identified no political targeting of any group, no order to destroy any emails, and no obstruction of any investigation. Republicans may want to ignore these findings, but they are right here in black and white.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me close by making one final observation. On the Committee's official website, there is a section called "Getting Results." It lists 20 government employees you have called on to resign or be fired. Commissioner Koskinen's name is on that list with a "TBD" next to it.

Creating a hit list to knock off federal officials is not something to be proud of, and publicly defaming a public servant who came out of retirement to take the helm of an agency in turmoil is not a positive result. It is a travesty.

We can and should be proud of the bipartisan, proactive reforms we have worked on together and will continue to work on. I hope we can return to focusing on those issues that have the potential to deliver real results to the people who sent us here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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