Testimony of
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House Committee on Oversight & Government Reform

"The IRS Targeting Investigation: What is the Administration Doing?"

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Catherine Engelbrecht. I am the Chairwoman of True the Vote, a nonprofit election integrity organization; the Founder of King Street Patriots, a citizen-led liberty group; and President of Engelbrecht Manufacturing.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story with you today, though at the outset it must be said that it is a story with a central theme shared by countless thousands of other Americans who haven't yet been heard from, though I pray they will be. It must be made publicly known that across this country citizens just like me are being targeted by an administration willing to take any action necessary to silence opposition.

I am an average American who, prior to 2009, had never been active in the processes of government; but, after volunteering to work at the polls in Texas in the 2009 elections I saw fundamental procedural problems that I felt could not go unaddressed. So, I started True the Vote, an organization that grew into a national movement to ensure that every American voter has an opportunity to participate in elections that are free and fair.

My life before I spoke out for good government stands in stark contrast to the life I now lead. As a wife, a mother, and small businesswoman working with my husband, raising our children and participating in my church and PTA, the government collected my taxes and left me and my family in peace. But when I helped found and led True the Vote and King Street Patriots, I found myself a target of this federal government.

Shortly after filing IRS forms to establish 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) tax-exempt organizations, an assortment of federal entities – including law enforcement agencies and a Congressman from Maryland, Elijah Cummings – came knocking at my door. In

nearly two decades of running our small business, my husband and I never dealt with any government agency, outside of filing our annual tax returns. We had never been audited, we had never been investigated, but all that changed upon submitting applications for the non-profit statuses of True the Vote and King Street Patriots. Since that filing in 2010, my private businesses, my nonprofit organizations, and family have been subjected to more than 15 instances of audit or inquiry by federal agencies.

- In 2011, my personal and business tax returns were audited by the Internal Revenue Service, each audit going back for a number of years.
- In 2012, my business was subjected to inspection by OSHA, on a select occasion when neither my husband nor I were present, and though the agency wrote that it found nothing serious or significant, it still issued fines in excess of $20,000.
- In 2012 and again in 2013 the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms conducted comprehensive audits at my place business.
- Beginning in 2010, the FBI contacted my nonprofit organization on six separate occasions – wanting to cull through membership manifests in conjunction with domestic terrorism cases. They eventually dropped all matters and have now redacted nearly all my files.

All of these incursions into my affairs began after filing applications for tax-exemption. There is no other remarkable event, no other reason, to explain away how for decades I went unnoticed, but now find myself on the receiving end of interagency coordination into and against all facets of my life, both public and private.

Bear in mind, distinguished ladies and gentlemen of this sub-committee, these events were occuring while the IRS was subjecting me to multiple rounds of abusive inquiries, with requests to provide every Facebook and Twitter entry I'd every posted, questions about my political aspirations, and demands to know the names of every group I'd ever made presentations to, the content of what I'd said, and where I intended to speak for the coming year. The answers to these sorts of questions are not of interest to the typical IRS analyst, but they are of great interest to a political machine that puts its own survival above the civil liberties of any private citizen.

This government attacked me because of my political beliefs, but I refuse to be cast as a victim; not to the IRS, not to the FBI, not to OSHA, not to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, or to any other government agency. I am not a victim, because to be a victim is to accept that I have no options. I do have options and I intend to use them all to the fullest extent of my capabilities.

As an American citizen, I am part of a country that still believes in freedom of speech, and so I will continue to speak out; here in Congress and all across this country, I will continue to press in every legal way possible, as I did by filing suit against the Internal Revenue Service. No American citizen should be willing to accept a government that uses its power against its own people.

I also refuse to let a precedent be set that allows Members of Congress, particularly the Ranking Member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, to misrepresent this governing body in an effort to demonize and intimidate citizens. Three times, Representative Elijah Cummings sent letters to True the Vote, demanding much of the same information that the IRS had requested. Hours after sending letters, he

would appear on cable news and publicly defame me and my organization. Such tactics are unacceptable. It is for these reasons that immediately after this hearing I am filing a formal complaint with the House Office of Congressional Ethics and asking for a full investigation.

After all the tyranny, all the things that have been done to my organizations, to my family and to me; many people would have quit. And, Mr. Chairman, many Americans have quit. I have heard, over and over, that people are afraid to tell their stories because of what has or might happen to them and their families at the hands of our own government.

But know this, my experiences at the hands of this government in these last five years have made me more determined than ever to stand before you and America and say I will not retreat. I will not surrender. I refuse to be intimidated. I will not ask for permission to exercise my Constitutional rights.

I come before you today Mr. Chairman, on behalf of Americans just like me, asking for a solution to end this ugly chapter of political intimidation. There was a time when people of goodwill were encouraged to participate in the processes of government; not targeted because of it. I applaud Congressman Issa and Jordan's request of the Internal Revenue Service to withdraw a proposed regulation limiting political speech by nonprofit organizations. That action should be taken quickly and without fail, because if allowed to pass, these new regulations will effectively codify into law the very practices that bring me here today. If those regulations pass, non-profit organizations across the country will be destroyed. No American, regardless of their political affiliation, should support the silencing of political speech.

There is a must-pass debt ceiling increase bill coming up shortly, it may be Congress' only chance to stop the regulations that are intended to silence conservative voices from being heard. I urge each of you to go to the Speaker and urge him to draw a line in the sand by putting language into the debt ceiling law that negates the IRS regs. I'm standing up against this abuse of power - will you join me?

Beyond ending the proposed IRS regulations, I ask you - I implore you – as representatives to the people of this great nation, to pass a law that protects all citizens of this country from the increasing use of such abusive practices.

Pass a law that exposes government officials who trample on the rights of ordinary citizens. Do not allow them to continue to cower behind a veil of secrecy, abuse, unethical and unfair behavior. Send the President a bill that makes public, at the option of persons and entities regulated, all communication between government agencies and those they regulate. No restricted, redacted, selectively released files; give us a truly transparent process. Stop hiding behind privacy rules meant only to protect the government. Protect the people. Restore liberty to the people. We will not be silenced.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Committee Members for allowing me this opportunity to share my testimony with you today.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine Engelbrecht