

Testimony: Becky Gerritson, President Wetumpka, AL
June 4, 2013

Congressman Camp,

Thank you for inviting me here to speak today.

I'd like to begin with a brief statement. I know that you are primarily interested in hearing about the abuses of the Internal Revenue Service. But I believe that it is critically important that you and your constituencies know, not just what those abuses were, but what exactly the IRS was trying to stifle. In order to paint a clear picture, I need to explain how the Wetumpka Tea Party came into being.

My husband and I had never been involved in politics before 2008. We've always been patriotic and deeply proud of our country. We've always felt that the United States IS the greatest country on earth.

In Sept 2008, when we had our first seven hundred billion dollar bailout, we along with millions of Americans were VERY concerned! It seemed to be confirmation that our government was out-of-control.

But just a few months later, in January of 2009, we learned that that our government was going to spend 787 billion more. This money went to foreign nations, failing banks, unproductive industries, and selected businesses. We were worried and knew we had to do something to sound the alarm! We knew that the government had gone far beyond its habitual deficit spending. The government was mortgaging America's future. And we knew that Washington wasn't going to stop by itself.

In the spring of 2009, we learned others were organizing "tea party" events around the nation to educate and empower concerned citizens who believed their government was out of control, so we made our plans.

My husband and I filled out a permit to meet at a local park in our small town. My daughter and I walked through neighborhoods handing out flyers for the on April 15th event. When the day arrived, we were blown away by the large crowd. A few politicians came also, but they didn't speak. We wanted to give ordinary people a chance to air their concerns.

Our event had no party affiliation. I could not tell you if attendees were Republicans, Democrats or independents – it did not matter. The only political notion expressed was the one we collectively felt: That our "representative government" had failed us.

And that was the birth of the Wetumpka Tea Party. There are no dues, no price for memberships. Our events are mostly educational. Whatever expenses are incurred are paid from donations and t-shirt sales.

In Wetumpka, we are patriotic Americans. We peaceably assemble. We petition our government. We exercise our right to free speech.

And we don't understand why our government tried to stop us.

I am not here today as a serf or a vassal. I am not begging my lords for mercy.

I am a born-free, American woman – wife, mother and citizen – and I'm telling **MY** government that you have forgotten your place. It is not your responsibility to look out for my well-being or monitor my speech. It is not your right to assert an agenda. The posts you occupy exist to preserve American liberty. You have sworn to perform that duty. And you have faltered.

The abuses I will discuss today occurred on your watch. It is your responsibility to make sure it doesn't happen again.

FACTS OF MY CASE:

We applied for our 501(c)4 in October 2010. Our \$850.00 application fee was cashed seven days from the date our application was mailed. We received a letter dated Nov, 2, 2010 stating that our application and user fee payment had been received. It stated that we could expect to be contacted within 90 days.

The IRS did not initiate ANY contact with us for another four hundred and fifty nine days. That was when I received a letter from the Cincinnati office dated February 3rd 2012. The letter stated that they could not complete our 501(c)4 application until we filled out the enclosed questionnaire which requested approximately 90 pieces of additional information or data about our organization.

The questionnaire stated that if the additional information was not returned by Feb 24th that our case would be closed.

The demands for information in the questionnaire shocked me, as someone who loves liberty and the first amendment. I was asked to hand over my list of donors, including the amounts that they gave and the dates on which they gave them. 501c4 organizations do NOT have to disclose donor information. I knew that. Why didn't they?

Among the demands that I found alarming and inappropriate were:

- They wanted us to identify our volunteers.
- They wanted to know if any of our donors or volunteers had run or would be running for office in the near future, remember this was an election year, and they wanted us to identify the office they would be running for.
- They wanted us to provide detailed contents of all speeches or forums, names of speakers, or panels and their credentials.
- Provide copies of the written communications and contents of other forms of communications to legislators.
- Information regarding our voter education activities, including dates, times and locations of our events.

On March 6th, we retained the council of the ACLJ to represent us in this matter.

I received a letter from Lois Lerner, dated March 16th 2012, asking that I provide the previously requested information.

We received a letter dated July 9, 2012 that received our 501c4 status. 635 days after we applied.

In conclusion, the Wetumpka TEA Party filed a complete application. Our organization fell within the boundaries of receiving a 501c4 status. Our application was singled out solely because we had "TEA Party" in our name. Government agents made invasive and excessive demands for information that they were not entitled to.

Congressman Camp and members of the committee, this was not an accident. This is a willful act of intimidation intended to discourage a point of view.

What the government did to our little group in Wetumpka, Alabama is un-American. This isn't a matter of firing or arresting a few individuals. The individuals who sought to intimidate us were acting as they thought they should in a government culture that has little respect for its citizens.

Many of the agents and agencies of the federal government do not understand that they are servants of the people. They think they are our masters. And they are mistaken.

I'm not interested in scoring political points. I want to protect and preserve the America I grew up in, the America that people across oceans and risk their lives to become a part of. And I'm terrified that it's slipping away.

TIME LINE OF EVENTS WETUMPKA TEA PARTY (AL):

- Oct. 12, 2010 501(c)4 application sent to IRS.
- Oct. 19, 2010 \$850. 00 user fee payment was cashed.
- Nov. 2, 2010 Letter dated Nov, 2, 2010 from Robert Choi, Director, EO Rulings & Agreement, states IRS received 501(c)4 application and fee payment. Letter also stated that we could expect to be contacted within 90 days of this notice.
- Apr. 22, 2011 10:45am phone call made to IRS by Loretta Wakefield-Short, (President at the time.) She spoke with employee ID#1001808928, said application was assigned to Ronald Bell phone number 513-263-3660.
- Apr. 22, 2011 11:14am phone call made by Loretta Wakefield-Short to Mr. Bell. He said “application is still under review”. No other information-just wait and we will be notified.
- Feb. 8^{ish}, 2012 We received a letter dated Feb. 3, 2012 from Specialist Stephen Seok, Cincinnati office, stating application could not be process until enclosed questionnaire was completed by Feb 24th. If information requested was not completed by the response date (Feb 24, 2012) then they would close our case. Below are just **some** of the approximately 90 pieces of information they wanted:
- Donor names, volunteers names, and the amounts that they gave and the dates in which they gave them.
 - Wanted to know if any of them had run or would be running for office in the near future, and to identify the office they would be running for.
 - Time, location and detailed description of every event or program we’ve ever had.
 - Copies of all newsletters, flyers, brochures, pamphlets, voter guides or class handouts ever given.
 - Provide detailed contents of all speeches or forums, names of speakers, or panels and their credentials.
 - Copies of web pages, presentations, and other web pages such as social networking sites and blog sites.
 - Provide copies of the written communications and contents of other forms of communications to legislators.
 - Have you or will you conduct voter education activities? If so, what is the date time and location of the event.
 - Who on the organization’s behalf, have conducted or will conduct the voter registration or get out the vote drives?
- Mar. 1, 2012 Phone call made to Stephen Seok. I asked “what would happen if I did not have the information need to complete the questionnaire.” He stated that if I “didn’t have the information, just to write, ‘Don’t have info.’” He said I “did not have to give names unless they were politicians”.

Mar. 6, 2012 Retained Council from the *American Center for Law and Justice*

Mar. 22ish, 2012 Received a letter from Lois Lerner, Director EO, stating that I must complete the previously sent request for more information within 60 days of the date of this letter, or our application would be placed in suspense. Letter stated that if they do not hear from us within 90 days then our case would be closed.

July 13ish, 2012 Received notification that we had received our 501(c)4 status, dated July 9, 2012.