

employees until the agency comes up with a customer service strategy approved by the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration.

Customer service is critical. But how can you come here and complain about customer service when you have cut the IRS budget \$1 billion in the last 5 years? That is 13,000 fewer full-time employees.

At the same time—listen to this, Mr. Chairman—there have been 9 million more tax returns being filed. Think about that just for a second: 9 million more tax returns, 13,000 fewer employees, \$1 billion less in appropriations. I mean, that is not rocket science. It is simply arithmetic.

Your budgets have consistently starved the IRS of the resources it needs to do its job, and, true to form, this bill expressly forbids any additional appropriations to carry out this mandate.

Here is the reality. The IRS customer service didn't decline because of lazy employees. It declined because of significant budget cuts. This year, thanks to an extra \$290 million in funding, it has rebounded to about mediocre, still a disservice to many Americans who need help.

So I agree with the ranking member when he says to look in the mirror and you will see who is responsible.

Instead of helping the struggling people of Puerto Rico or Flint, Michigan, or passing a budget—tax day passed a few days ago—this Congress is fiddling with weakening the IRS. You can't deny that all these attempts to harm the IRS are really harming taxpayers.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Chairman, let me take a moment just to be responsive to a couple of things.

In point of fact, I don't think that I could have had a better setup for the real issues here than the very arguments that have been made by my colleagues because, in fact, when you look behind what is actually going on, you see the scheme that is taking place here, which has put the IRS and the service that it gives to taxpayers right in the middle of the conflict.

What they have done is created a circumstance in which, if you purposely starve the very thing that will relate to the taxpayers, you can get the taxpayers worked up to come back to scream for more money for the Service. Let's blame this on Congress.

But let's talk about what is actually going on here, Mr. Chairman. There may have been budget cuts, as there have been budget cuts all across the government.

One of the budget cuts related to the \$50 million that the IRS has used for conferences. And so, just like every other agency in government, just like the 14 percent cut we have taken in our own offices, there have been cuts at a time in which our government doesn't have money.

But that is not the issue. Because what has happened here has been the

diverting of funding. What nobody is saying is that this same agency has been hit with \$1.7 billion of diverted expenditure to service the Affordable Care Act, the healthcare law that was pushed on us and pushed on all America; \$1.7 billion has been diverted, will be dedicated this year, but never accounted for when that program was created.

They put this responsibility, another unfunded mandate put on the agency by this law. What they have done is divert the attention. Take the resources away and then use it as a way to compel to see if we can force Congress to get pulled into this debate.

Our thing is very, very simple. Again, it is not a funding issue. It is a service issue. We are not getting into that with this particular bill. It is a very simple thing that says: Create a plan for how you do it.

I am glad that the gentleman from New Jersey, who I respect enormously, has been able, Mr. Chair, to touch on the very point that was also made, this idea that somehow we have been unresponsive and starved this agency. Mr. Chairman, \$290 million just sent purposely for this issue, \$290 million.

So in addition to saying to give us a plan, we are saying: Here is \$290 million of focused funding to say this is behind the plan. Tell us how you are going to use it.

This whole thing is a smokescreen on the part of the other side to create the tension when, in fact, we are asking for a very simple thing that we have already funded.

Mr. Chairman, I have no other speakers at this time.

I reserve the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. KELLY of Mississippi). The Committee will rise informally.

The Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HOLDING) assumed the chair.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed bills of the following titles in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 1252. An act to authorize a comprehensive strategic approach for United States foreign assistance to developing countries to reduce global poverty and hunger, achieve food and nutrition security, promote inclusive, sustainable, agricultural-led economic growth, improve nutritional outcomes, especially for women and children, build resilience among vulnerable populations, and for other purpose.

S. 2012. An act to provide for the modernization of the energy policy of the United States, and for other purposes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Committee will resume its sitting.

BAN ON IRS BONUSES UNTIL SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY DEVELOPS COMPREHENSIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

The Committee resumed its sitting.

□ 1030

Mr. PASCARELL. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, just in response to my friend from the Keystone State, the implementation of the Affordable Care Act is not an IRS slush fund. There are mandates within the Affordable Care Act which necessitate, obviously, the involvement of the IRS agency. So any attempts to make it or create a slush fund in people's minds is totally, totally inaccurate.

That is not the issue. The issue is we have cut \$5 billion. This year we restored \$290 million. Again, do the math. We have 13,000 less employees. So that means a lot of those 13,000 less employees came to the end, perhaps, of their career, but were never replaced. It had nothing to do with the budget. It was beyond the budget, even, or within the budget.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Chairman, I have no other speakers at this time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PASCARELL. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Seven former IRS Commissioners wrote, and we need to take a look at it because obviously they weren't all Democrats and they weren't all Republicans, but seven former IRS Commissioners have said: "Over the last 50 years, none of us has ever witnessed anything like what has happened to the IRS appropriations over the last 5 years and impact these appropriations reductions are having on our tax system."

The percentage of callers able to reach a live person at the IRS in the 2015 filing season was just 43 percent. The average wait time was 28 minutes. At one point during the filing season, the Taxpayer Protection Program line, which answers calls for victims of identity theft—a growing issue day by day—was not answering 90 percent of the calls.

That is not acceptable to your side. It is certainly not acceptable to our side, but your solution is, by no means, the solution. If you were truly concerned about improving customer service at the IRS, you would fully fund the agency. And we would support that. Penalizing the IRS is misguided and, in the long run, the consequence hurts the taxpayer.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

The Acting CHAIR (Mr. KELLY of Mississippi). Members are again reminded to direct their remarks to the Chair.

Mr. MEEHAN. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself the balance of my time.

In closing, I want to once again actually appreciate the comments that were made by the other side in the entirety of this debate because they really speak to, in essence, what they are trying to do.