

Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen Sends Letter to IRS Commissioner in Support of Funding for IRS to Improve Taxpayer Service & Combat Evasion By High Income Earners and Corporations

August 10, 2022

WASHINGTON – Today, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen sent a letter to the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Charles P. Rettig in support of the much needed funding to the IRS to improve taxpayer service, modernize outdated technological infrastructure, and increase equity in the tax system by enforcing the tax laws against those high-earners, large corporations, and complex partnerships who today do not pay what they owe.

Secretary Yellen also reaffirmed the Administration’s commitment to not increasing audit rates relative to recent years on Americans making under \$400,000 a year, noting that they will actually see a lower likelihood of audit due to improved technology and customer service.

“Specifically, I direct that any additional resources—including any new personnel or auditors that are hired—shall not be used to increase the share of small business or households below the \$400,000 threshold that are audited relative to historical levels. This means that, contrary to the misinformation from opponents of this legislation, small business or households earning \$400,000 per year or less will not see an increase in the chances that they are audited.”

The full text of the letter is also available below. 

August 10, 2022

Charles P. Rettig
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner:

The Inflation Reduction Act includes much-needed funding for the IRS to improve taxpayer service, modernize outdated technological infrastructure, and increase equity in the tax system by enforcing the tax laws against those high-earners, large corporations, and complex partnerships who today do not pay what they owe.

These crucial investments have been a focus of the Biden Administration since the President's first day in office, and I was heartened to see the legislation pass the Senate this weekend.

Notwithstanding the changes that arose because of Republican challenges during the Byrd process, I write today to confirm the commitment that has been a guiding precept of the planning that you and your team are undertaking: that audit rates will not rise relative to recent years for households making under \$400,000 annually.

Specifically, I direct that any additional resources—including any new personnel or auditors that are hired—shall not be used to increase the share of small business or households below the \$400,000 threshold that are audited relative to historical levels. This means that, contrary to the misinformation from opponents of this legislation, small business or households earning \$400,000 per year or less will not see an increase in the chances that they are audited.

Instead, enforcement resources will focus on high-end noncompliance. There, sustained, multi-year funding is so critical to the agency's ability to make the investments needed to pursue a robust attack on the tax gap by targeting crucial challenges, like large corporations, high-net-worth individuals and complex pass-throughs, where today the IRS has resources to initiate just 7,500 audits annually out of more than 4 million returns received.

This is challenging work that requires a team of sophisticated revenue agents in place to spend thousands of hours poring over complicated returns, and it is also work that has huge revenue potential: indeed, an additional hour auditing someone making more than \$5 million annually generates an estimated \$4,500 of additional taxes collected. This is essential work that I know the IRS is eager to undertake.

For regular taxpayers, as you emphasized last week, the result of this resource infusion will be a lower likelihood of audit by an agency that has the data and technological infrastructure in place to target enforcement resources where they belong—on the high end of the income distribution, where the top 1% alone is estimated to not be paying \$160 billion in owed taxes each year. That's important as a matter of revenue-raising, but it's also essential as a matter of fairness.

Crucially, these resources will support a much-needed upgrade of technology that is decades out-of-date, and an investment in taxpayer service so that the IRS is finally able to communicate with taxpayers in an efficient, timely manner. I look forward to working with you on creating new digital tools to allow taxpayers to get information from the IRS instantaneously and on improving taxpayer service, so the agency is well-equipped to answer calls when they come in.

This historic investment in our tax system will accomplish two critical objectives. It will raise substantial revenue to address the deficit; and it will create a fairer system, where those at the top who do not today comply with their tax obligations find it far less easy to do so, and where all taxpayers receive the service from the IRS that they deserve, and that your dedicated workforce is eager to deliver. The importance of the work ahead cannot be overstated.

Sincerely,

Janet L. Yellen

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