Beat: Miscellaneous

Acting IRS chief ousted over tax scandal as Obama vows change

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USPA News - U.S. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew on Wednesday ousted the acting head of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) over a widening scandal in which several IRS employees deliberately targeted conservative groups which sought tax-exempt status. President Barack Obama made the announcement during an early evening news conference from the White House, saying his administration is determined to hold the responsible parties accountable.

"Today, Secretary Lew took the first step by requesting and accepting the resignation of the acting commissioner of the IRS," Obama said. Obama was referring to Steven Miller who has presided over the nation`s tax system since November 2012, when Doug Shulman`s term in office ended. Miller had previously served as deputy commissioner for Services and Enforcement, providing direction and oversight for all major decisions affecting the four taxpayer-focused IRS Divisions. Obama made the comments after reviewing a Treasury Department watchdog`s report about the scandal, calling the misconduct inexcusable. "It`s inexcusable, and Americans are right to be angry about it, and I am angry about it," he said. "I will not tolerate this kind of behavior in any agency, but especially in the IRS, given the power that it has and the reach that it has into all of our lives." According to an internal report, the watchdog believes at least two employees in Cincinnati, Ohio, using inappropriate criteria, were responsible for deliberately targeting tea party and other conservative groups that were seeking tax-exempt status. It is believed the misconduct began in early 2010 and continued for more than 18 months. "It should not matter what political stripe you`re from -- the fact of the matter is, is that the IRS has to operate with absolute integrity," Obama said during Wednesday`s press conference. "The government generally has to conduct itself in a way that is true to the public trust. That`s especially true for the IRS." Obama said he directed Lew to follow up on the watchdog`s report to see how the misconduct was able to take place and who is responsible. "We`re going to put in place new safeguards to make sure this kind of behavior cannot happen again," he said. "I`ve directed Secretary Lew to ensure the IRS begins implementing the IG`s (inspector general`s) recommendations right away." The president said his administration will also work with Congress as it performs its oversight role over the agency, which collects approximately $2.4 trillion in tax revenue that funds most government operations and public services. The commissioner manages about 90,000 IRS employees and a budget of more than $12 billion, touching every facet of American society. "I`ll do everything in my power to make sure nothing like this happens again by holding the responsible parties accountable, by putting in place new checks and new safeguards, and going forward, by making sure that the law is applied as it should be - in a fair and impartial way," Obama stressed. "And we`re going to have to make sure that the laws are clear so that we can have confidence that they are enforced in a fair and impartial way, and that there`s not too much ambiguity surrounding these laws."

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