

IRS Probes NAACP Speech Criticizing Bush

Written by Westside ID278

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The NAACP's chairman says the group's tax-exempt status is under review by the government in an investigation he contends stems from a speech he gave that criticized President Bush.

The head of the Internal Revenue Service did not confirm that his agency was investigating the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization, but he strongly rejected the idea the agency would conduct an audit for political reasons.

Documents provided to The Associated Press on Thursday by the office of Julian Bond, chairman of the Baltimore-based National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said IRS agents were investigating his keynote address July 11 at the NAACP's annual convention in Philadelphia.

In that speech, Bond said of the Bush administration: "They preach racial neutrality and practice racial division. They've tried to patch the leaky economy and every other domestic problem with duct tape and plastic sheets. They write a new constitution of Iraq and they ignore the Constitution here at home."

For an organization to keep its tax-exempt status, "leaders cannot make partisan comments in official organization publications or at official organizational functions," according to an Oct. 8 letter to the NAACP from the IRS office in Louisville, Ky.

The NAACP had until last Saturday to respond but was granted an extension until next week, Bond said. He criticized the IRS for trying to limit the group's ability to express its opinions.

"Coming just weeks before the election, what other reason could there be," Bond said in a telephone interview Thursday. "We have always been nonpartisan, but we are not noncritical."

He charged that the investigation amounted to a "blatant political use of the IRS."

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Federal law bars the IRS from commenting on investigations into specific tax-exempt organizations such as the NAACP. But the agency's commissioner said any investigations are based on decisions by career civil servants and not political appointees.

``Any suggestion that the IRS has tilted its audit activities for political purposes is repugnant and groundless,`` Mark Everson said in a statement.

Bond said his remarks in Philadelphia were in line with previous speeches from NAACP leaders who have criticized and praised Republican and Democratic administrations. The organization has not endorsed a candidate in this year's presidential race.

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry spoke at this year's convention; Bush declined. The White House has accused the group's leaders of growing more partisan since the 2000 campaign.

At the convention, Bond criticized Bush's judicial appointments and placed blame for the federal budget deficit ``squarely on the tax giveaways for the rich.``

Bond encouraged blacks to vote, adding, ``We know that if whites and nonwhites vote in the same percentages as they did in 2000, Bush will be re-defeated by 3 million votes,`` according to a transcript provided by NAACP aides.

The NAACP questioned whether timing of the audit was designed to suppress turnout of blacks and Hispanics in Tuesday's presidential election.

On the Net:

NAACP: <http://www.naACP.org/index.html>

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Internal Revenue Service: <http://www.irs.gov/>

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