

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

February 16, 2023

The Honorable J. Russell George  
Inspector General for Tax Administration  
Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration  
901 D Street, SW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Inspector General George,

As Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, I write to relay my expectations for your handling of the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) egregious and unprecedented leak of confidential taxpayer information.

Nineteen months ago, the media outlet ProPublica revealed a massive leak of confidential tax information that the IRS is charged with keeping secure. At that time, ProPublica published a significant amount of legally protected taxpayer information and stated that it "obtained a vast trove of Internal Revenue Service data on the tax returns of thousands of the nation's wealthiest people, covering more than 15 years."<sup>1</sup> A series of articles followed, targeting numerous American taxpayers using tax information that the IRS is tasked with keeping confidential and secure.

U.S. Department of the Treasury Secretary Yellen stated at the time that this was a "very serious situation" and that the issue was referred to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA).<sup>2</sup> She also indicated that she would keep Congress updated on the matter. Yet, nineteen months after this outrageous leak, Congress and, more importantly, the American people have no idea how this betrayal of taxpayer confidentiality happened or whether anyone has been held accountable.

A detailed status of this review is necessary to ensure TIGTA is conducting a comprehensive investigation that will be completed in a timely manner. This issue also must be addressed publicly at the appropriate time in a way that complies with 26 U.S.C. § 6103. This leak of taxpayer information cannot be ignored, and TIGTA as well as the IRS can be confident that the Ways and Means Committee will work tirelessly to ensure accountability. Congress and the American people should not have to wait years to get answers.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesse Eisinger, et al., *The Secret IRS Files: Trove of Never-Before-Seen Records Reveal How the Wealthiest Avoid Income Tax*, PROPUBLICA (June 8, 2021), <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-secret-irs-files-trove-of-never-before-seen-records-reveal-how-the-wealthiest-avoid-income-tax>.

<sup>2</sup> Naomi Jagoda, *Yellen: Disclosure of tax data to ProPublica a 'very serious situation,'* THE HILL (June 16, 2021), <https://thehill.com/policy/finance/558720-yellen-disclosure-of-tax-data-to-propublica-a-very-serious-situation/>.

Therefore, I request that TIGTA commit in writing that it will complete the following actions:

1. Conduct a comprehensive and timely investigation.
2. Produce a report that summarizes TIGTA's investigation with findings and recommendations.
3. Provide me with a full copy of TIGTA's unredacted report.
4. Make as much of that report public as possible, consistent with 26 U.S.C. § 6103.

Until an investigation and report are complete, I request that TIGTA provide designated members of my staff with regular updates about the status of the investigation.

Please contact Sean Clerget to provide a commitment in writing to the four items listed above and to arrange the first update on TIGTA's investigation into the ProPublica leak by March 2, 2023. Thank you in advance for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Jason Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on Ways and Means