

Investigations abuse the power of the IRS

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Letters to the Editor, Baltimore Sun

Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s instigation of an Internal Revenue Service investigation of the NAACP when he was a member of Congress didn't simply do damage to nonprofit advocacy groups such as the NAACP that are engaged in constitutionally protected free speech ("Ehrlich defends 2001 IRS inquiry," May 20).

Mr. Ehrlich and other House and Senate Republicans, who hid behind constituents' requests to explain their calls for an investigation of the NAACP, also did damage to the Internal Revenue Service itself.

If there's any federal agency that should be protected from political manipulations, it's the IRS.

Unfortunately, there have been a number of IRS investigations launched that look like the inquiry into the NAACP, notably the reviews of the U.S. affiliates of Greenpeace for their criticism of corporate policies that exacerbate global warming and of an Episcopal church on the West Coast because of a former rector's imagined debate between President Bush, Sen. John Kerry and Jesus.

And after the election of Mr. Bush, the IRS somehow was able to quickly abandon an investigation into two foundations that were linked to former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who had been charged with using the resources of a tax-exempt foundation to support the work of his political action committee.

When the likes of Mr. Ehrlich try to turn the IRS into a tool to attack perceived critics, what they end up doing is chipping away at the public confidence that the IRS can do the job it is

supposed to do.

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