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TERRORISM
ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND NONPROLIFERATION

September 16, 2020

The Honorable Charles P. Rettig
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner Rettig,

I write to express deep concerns regarding the significant delay in the issuance of tax refunds and the incomplete and inconsistent responses to my inquiries concerning the backlog and current processing status of both electronic and paper tax returns.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) shuttered most of its physical processing sites in March 2020. This move, while necessary to protect the health and safety of IRS employees, has resulted in significant backlogs of refunds. The IRS informed my office that all paper returns and correspondence would be stored in secure facilities and processed in the order in which the return was received. This implies that the returns would be stored by date received.

The delays in processing income tax returns and issuing refunds is adding to the financial hardship being experienced by countless taxpayers throughout our nation. These hard-working individuals have already suffered significantly from lost wages and closed businesses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. People desperately need these refunds to help pay their rent or mortgages and provide the basic necessities for their families.

I was encouraged by information circulated by an IRS liaison that as of Monday, June 15, 2020 several centers would reopen, albeit with reduced staff, including the sites that process returns and correspondence from the Commonwealth of Virginia. In this same notification it was stated that:

“Barring any setbacks, the IRS will open operations in four more states (not yet named) and Puerto Rico the week of June 29 and in all other states by July 13.”

Additionally, an IRS press release on July 16, 2020 noted:

“The IRS continues to process electronic and paper tax returns, issue refunds, and accept payments.”

As of Friday, September 11, 2020, the IRS website that provides information on where to file a return states:

“Due to staffing issues, processing paper tax returns could take several weeks longer...”

This information is not consistent with the experiences of many of my constituents and my office. For example, while some constituents who e-filed have received their refunds, many still have not – especially in the cases in which additional information was requested by the IRS. Additionally, several weeks ago my office asked an IRS liaison what date was currently being processed. Regrettably the agency response was that those details were not available. This week, in response to an inquiry concerning a paper return, the Taxpayer Advocate Service informed my office that the units responsible for handling paper returns had not yet reopened and that therefore no paper returns are being processed at this time.

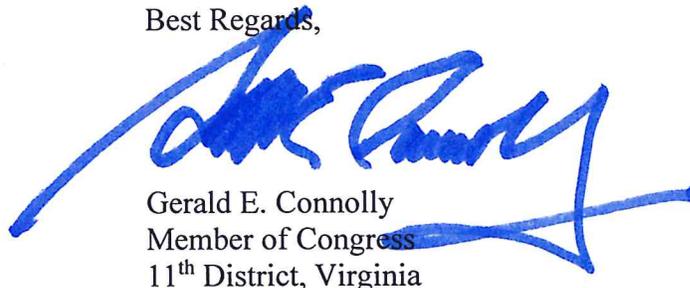
This is clearly contradictory to information on the IRS website and provided through routine updates received from an IRS liaison.

Due to the incomplete and sometimes contradictory information my office has received, please provide my office with answers to the following questions by September 25, 2020.

1. What is the current volume of the IRS return backlog for e-filed and paper returns? When does the IRS anticipate eliminating the existing backlog?
2. Which IRS locations are currently processing returns? What are the staffing levels at each of these locations? What is the weekly processing capacity of each of these locations?
3. How many e-filed and paper returns have been processed to date? What return date of submission is currently being processed?

The processing of tax returns including those filed on paper and issuance of refunds are essential functions and must be resumed as expeditiously as possible. I thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and look forward to receiving your response.

Best Regards,



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress
11th District, Virginia