

# GOP just wants to check whether anybody likes the IRS

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For the last several months, Congress has been debating an overhaul of the IRS. The House just approved a taxpayer “bill of rights”, and similar legislation will next be taken up by the Senate. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich is now proposing that a 14-question voluntary response survey be mailed to every taxpayer next year. While the total cost of the plan—estimated at \$30-35 million—seems excessive to some critics, Gingrich points out that it comes to less than 50 cents a return, a small price to pay for the chance to tell the Government how the IRS is doing.

Democrats counter that Congress already commissioned a professional poll on attitudes towards the IRS, and it cost only \$20,000. Forty-eight percent of respondents rated customer service by the IRS as excellent or good, compared with 44% who found it not so good or poor. Fifty eight percent said tax forms were difficult to complete because of complexities in the tax code, while only 10% attributed their difficulties to IRS inefficiency.

In a letter to the House Appropriations Committee, Treasury official Linda Robinson criticized the Gingrich plan, arguing that it “would ill serve the American taxpayer to spend an inordinately large amount of money on an unscientific survey whose results could provide misleading guidance on how to improve the tax system.”

## Discussion Questions

1. Gingrich is certainly savvy enough to know voluntary response won't give accurate results. Why might Republicans nevertheless want to back such a plan?
2. What do you think of the findings from the poll? Do you think the quality of “customer service” provided by the IRS is people's biggest concern with the US tax system?