

IRS Director Blasted By Three Former Aides

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Washington

Three former career officials of the Internal Revenue Service have told the chairman of a congressional subcommittee that they were pressured into retirement after clashing with IRS Commissioner Donald Alexander.

In separate letters to Representative Charles Vanik (Dem-Ohio), head of the House Ways and Means oversight subcommittee, the three men sharply criticized Alexander's management of the tax agency and reported widespread dissatisfaction among IRS officials and employees.

A.J. O'Donnell Jr., who retired last summer as one of the IRS' seven regional commissioners, accused Alexander of either "a conscious effort to emasculate intelligence and investigative activities or ... the most inept management I had ever observed."

Edward J. Vitkus, who filed for retirement as Southeast regional intelligence chief, said he now wants his job back, contending he has become "a living example of a monumental abuse of official power."

G. Troy Register Jr., who said he was forced into early retirement as Florida intelligence director, said the IRS needs a new commissioner "who is emotionally stable and capable of giving strong leadership" to the agency.

The views of O'Donnell, Vitkus and Register were sought by the House subcommittee as part of an inquiry into reports that Alexander has stifled dissent and caused morale problems in the IRS. Copies of their letters were obtained by The Los Angeles Times after they were sent to subcommittee members and to IRS headquarters.

An IRS spokesman declined immediate comment on the letters.

The three men, who had a combined total of 90 years IRS service, traced their troubles to disagreements with Alexander over alleged abuses in Florida intelligence-gathering operations.

They said the commissioner, without determining the facts, over-reacted to press reports that IRS agents had spied on the personal lives of prominent Florida politicians.

O'Donnell also said pressures on the three men came after they had received allegations that Alexander might be involved in improper activities.

Referring to an informant's report that Alexander had planned a secret meeting with a convicted swindler, O'Donnell said:

"I was subsequently visited by representatives from Inspection (Division), whose main concern seemed to be who knew about the allegations."

Alexander has denied that he ever planned to meet with ex-convict Mark Kroll to discuss Kroll's tax problems. The charges are among those being examined by federal grand juries in Miami and Washington.

O'Donnell also said that "the names of some of Mr. Alexander's former law partners were found among records of Castle Trust," a Bahamian bank under scrutiny by IRS intelligence agents as part of operations Tradewinds and Project Haven.

"On at least two occasions, I asked Deputy Commissioner (William E.) Williams if Mr. Alexander was aware of this information, and both times was brushed aside with statements to the effect that Mr. Alexander was out of the matter and I should not be concerned about it."

O'Donnell said he concluded "that anyone and everyone connected with intelligence activities in Florida, specifically Miami, during the investigation of political corruption, Tradewinds, Haven and others, was being sacrificed on someone's altar for reasons still obscure to me."

Vitkus said that after he disagreed with Alexander and defended the Florida intelligence operations he was pressured into submitting retirement papers effective on his 50th birthday — next Friday.

He is now seeking to withdraw those papers and regain his intelligence post. Vitkus said yesterday that his efforts had been rebuffed by the national office.

In his letter, Vitkus said there was "a determined effort to silence every voice of protest remaining in the organization."

"There has been a loss of personal pride among many of the service officials," he said. "They have been intimidated, they have been left no room to differ, they have been forced to compromise their basic beliefs in an unhealthy climate of distrust."

Vitkus added that "the service and our tax system may take years to recover. The American taxpayers will be the ultimate losers in this process."

Register wrote Vanik that "it is difficult for me to understand ... what justification Commissioner Alexander used in pressuring me and others into early retirement."

He said it was important that the head of IRS be "interested in the constitutional rights of everyone, an individual who is emotionally stable and capable of giving strong leadership to an organization which is so vital to our country."