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BY U.S. SENATOR

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Big scandals start off as small stories. The controversy engulfing the Internal Revenue Service seems to grow bigger every day. What began as what the Obama administration said was a handful of "rogue agents" in a local Cincinnati office has turned into a scandal that runs all the way to the highest levels of the IRS and maybe beyond. The question every American should be asking is this: Just how far does this story go, and when is President Barack Obama going to do something about it?

In the run-up to the last election, I started receiving troubling reports from conservative groups in Ohio about alleged mistreatment by the IRS. In response, in March 2012, I spearheaded a Senate letter to the IRS demanding answers. Six weeks later IRS officials assured us that only legitimate criteria were used to evaluate tax-exempt groups. That assurance proved false, and instead of correcting the record when they say they learned the truth a week later, the IRS remained silent. The truth was uncovered only when the press began to report on the agency's ideological targeting.

But the cover-up didn't end when IRS misconduct became public. Initially, the IRS sought to explain away its political targeting as a "shortcut" to deal with a "surge" in tax-exempt applications. But the record soon revealed that tax-exempt applications actually declined the year the targeting began. Then the IRS claimed that any misconduct could be attributed to a handful of "rogue" employees from a regional office, rather than at the direction of senior officials in Washington, D.C. But investigators soon found letters targeting Tea Party groups signed by Lois Lerner, the Washington-based IRS official who led the division that carried out the targeting policy. Ms. Lerner refused to answer questions from a congressional committee investigating this issue, choosing instead to invoke her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

Now an IRS whistle-blower has confirmed what many had suspected but could not prove — the misconduct involved not only Ms. Lerner and the Washington office generally, but specifically included the IRS chief counsel, one of only two Obama political appointees in the entire agency. Several news outlets have now reported that the chief counsel may have met with the president at the White House on April 23, 2012, just two days before the IRS issued a revised set of "be on the lookout" instructions to IRS agents reviewing tax-exempt applications that appear to target Tea Party groups for more stringent review. Perhaps most troubling, the White House's timeline of events — who knew what and when — has changed repeatedly since news of improper targeting first became public.

And the scope of the scandal is growing. Just a few days ago, congressional investigators released emails suggesting that staff at the Federal Election Commission were engaged in conservative targeting of their own, perhaps with improper help from Ms. Lerner and the IRS. Now evidence is mounting that one of the most powerful agencies of the federal government — the Securities and Exchange Commission — has also engaged in political targeting. In a letter to the chairwoman of the SEC, congressional leaders revealed that documents produced for the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform "indicate that the SEC has been under immense pressure from elected officials and special interest groups as part of a government-wide effort to stifle political speech."

With each new revelation we discover more incompetence, and more examples of politicized enforcement of the law — all enemies of good governance. And while the Obama administration has voiced outrage about government misconduct, it has failed to provide the American people and congressional investigators with critical information and promised transparency. Outrage has not led to action.

Instead, the president and his administration have ignored requests for more information — including multiple specific requests from me. They also have not fully answered a bipartisan investigation by the Senate Finance Committee of which I am a member. In total opposition to the words and assurances of the White House, the IRS, which answers to the president, has simply failed to comply with many of the committee's requests.

Based on its conduct, the position of the Obama administration seems to be that if they ignore these scandals long enough, they will simply go away. The White House has gone so far as to refer to the outrage surrounding revelations about the IRS as a "phony scandal." That's a shame. This pattern of misconduct represents everything that is wrong with Washington, and it is behavior like this that has shattered the trust of the American people in their government.

If the Administration does not come clean soon, the stain from this scandal will not just be on the IRS, but on the Administration as a whole.