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CONGRESSMAN KENDRICK B. MEEK

April 6, 2005

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Mr. Mark W. Everson
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW
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Dear Commissioner Everson:

A recent Miami Herald news article and editorial reported that the IRS is investigating whether the tax-exempt status of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Miami, Florida was violated last fall because of a visit by Senator John Kerry last fall along with black leaders including Reverend Al Sharpton, Reverend Jesse Jackson and myself. In addition, the St. Petersburg Times reported last September that the First Baptist Church of College Hill in Tampa, Florida was also under investigation by the IRS because of a visit in 2002 by Janet Reno.

Both of these churches serve predominantly black congregations. Black churches have long been at the center of religious life and community communication, dating back long before the voting rights and equal education battles of the 1950's and 1960's, in which these churches played an essential role.

For these reasons, I am concerned that that these IRS investigations, in addition to an IRS inquiry of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People because of a speech given by its chairman, Julian Bond, have had a chilling effect on black churches throughout Florida. Many people feel that these churches in Florida have been unfairly and disproportionately singled out or targeted for government scrutiny because of routine church activities that have been a part of the black community for generations.

I, therefore, request a breakdown by predominant ethnicity, including but not limited to black, Caucasian, and Hispanic, of the Florida churches that are presently under investigation or the subject of an IRS inquiry or other action because of alleged political activity. Because the IRS is prohibited by law from commenting on an investigation, I am asking only for this generalized information and not for specific information about any case.

I look forward to your response and thank you for your kind attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kendrick B. Meek".

KENDRICK B. MEEK
Member of Congress