

## IRS probe: 2 distinct approaches

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They share the same goal: getting to the bottom of the Internal Revenue Service scandal.

But House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) and Dave Camp (R-Mich.), chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, are taking very different approaches to their investigations of the embattled agency.

From his perch, Issa is making waves on Sunday television and releasing loaded snippets of interviews conducted with IRS employees that Democrats say are misleading. Camp, meanwhile, is proceeding with more caution, avoiding political firestorms and working with the top Democrat on his panel to make requests that have turned up millions of documents at the IRS.

Norm Ornstein, an expert on Congress, said different investigative styles could harm the probes if they're not coordinated.

[\(PHOTOS: 8 key players in IRS scandal story\)](#)

"You'll have investigators crawling around all over the place and bumping into each other," he said. "You could have people who are interviewed multiple times by different investigators and may find that the stories they give are used or distorted in different ways."

The contrasting approaches reflect the significantly different personalities of the two chairmen. While Issa is one of the most visible House Republicans with a reputation as the Obama administration's chief inquisitor, Camp is a more straightforward Midwesterner who enjoys good relationships with some Democrats and has spent the past several years building a lawyerly case to overhaul the Tax Code.

A month into the scandal, the tension between the two committees is bubbling to the surface.

[\(PHOTOS: 10 slams on the IRS\)](#)

The biggest example: Issa's decision earlier this month to release selected excerpts of interviews with IRS staffers to make the case that employees in Washington orchestrated the practice of targeting conservative groups applying for a tax exemption.

Rep. Charles Boustany of Louisiana, a senior Ways and Means Republican who chairs the panel's Oversight subcommittee, criticized Issa's tactics, saying the release of partial

transcripts could “adversely alter our ability to get future information from other IRS employees.”

“Just simply from a process standpoint, you don’t want to do that and alter what others might say,” Boustany told POLITICO. “I really am concerned that it could tip this into the political realm rather than a true detailed investigation to get the facts out.”

He added: “A lot of this has to be done quietly, obviously, as we piece together what has happened, and once we piece it together and get the firm proof, then you can come out” and say what happened.

Issa, on the other hand, believes his panel has a responsibility to take a more public role.

“Chairman Issa has a philosophy that the public has a right to know,” said Frederick Hill, an Issa spokesman. “Sometimes we do have to balance that with the interest of an ongoing investigation.”

In other instances, it appears the committees have crossed their wires. Issa, for example, told reporters in mid-May that he planned to hold a hearing in which groups targeted by the IRS could tell their stories. Camp announced a hearing on the same topic a week later.

Aides to both panels wouldn’t say whether it was a joint decision to allow Camp to take the lead on the hearing.

The clashing philosophies could be on display again as soon as the committees decide how to haul Lois Lerner, the former leader of the scandal-plagued IRS division with oversight of tax-exempt groups, back to Capitol Hill. An Oversight source said Lerner, who was subpoenaed by Issa but took the Fifth Amendment, would have to appear before the committee in public if lawmakers want to question her on the claim of innocence she made before the panel last month before refusing to answer questions.

Ways and Means members, on the other hand, aren’t ruling out the possibility of interviewing the controversial civil servant in private away from the cameras.

Both chairmen want to talk to her, leaving the question of who gets to bring her in — and whether to question her in public or private — unanswered. There are concerns that the optics wouldn’t be good if both chairmen brought her in, which could leave the impression that Lerner is being bullied.

Ultimately, the IRS scandal is forcing the Ways and Means and Oversight committees to work together more closely than they have in years. That requires a level of coordination that some lawmakers say isn’t yet evident.

“There is collaboration but also competition — and someone has to referee the situation,” said a Republican lawmaker familiar with the investigation, who did not wish to be

identified. “The chairmen do talk, yes, but there’s also competition when chairs want to assert their jurisdiction.”

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) who sits on the Oversight Committee, said the “cultural gap” in the two panel’s legislative styles is “so great that it would preclude cooperation” in the IRS investigation.

The committee staffs and chairmen are talking to each other. Issa and Camp met last week to discuss how to move the investigation forward and the panels maintain a joint list of people they want to question. Committee staffers touch base every day to talk about the probe.

In one of their most coordinated efforts, both panels are jointly interviewing front-line Cincinnati-based IRS employees, who were part of the targeting program to ensure questions aren’t asked multiple times.

“We have coordinated on interviews and hearings to move this issue forward in a way that one committee couldn’t do on its own,” Issa said in a statement to POLITICO.

“We have been working collaboratively,” said Sarah Swinehart, a Ways and Means spokeswoman. “Both committees are working toward the same goal of finding out how this happened and how we can prevent it from occurring again.”

Rep. Pat Tiberi, who chairs the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures, says the rub between two committees in investigations like this is natural.

“Part of what some like to look at as conflict is a natural process when you have two different committees investigating the same thing,” the Ohio Republican said. “I don’t think — knowing Darrell and knowing Dave — that there’s any space between the two in terms of the ultimate goal of trying to get to the bottom of this scandal.”

A number of lawmakers told POLITICO that the two panels could make an effective team if they’re able to work together.

“The strengths of both committees are going to fit perfectly: Government Reform has an experienced team of investigators; Ways and Means has a team that’s very knowledgeable about ... the IRS specifically,” said Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, a senior Republican on Ways and Means. “That’s a pretty powerful competition.”

In some ways, the committees have options that could complement each other as the investigation unfolds.

Oversight, for instance, has broad subpoena authority, an army of lawyers and a huge staff to support a complex probe. And it has experience with wide-ranging investigations ranging from Solyndra to the Benghazi attack.

Camp, meanwhile, is the only committee chairman in the House who can demand access to restricted IRS information shielded from the public eye because of privacy laws — a unique power he's already wielding behind closed doors.

"There's so much there to investigate to keep both committees plenty busy," Brady said.

*CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story misidentified Rep. Gerry Connolly's party affiliation. He is a Democrat.*