

The IRS now has the power to revoke your passport



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By: [Jelisa Castrodale](#) | January 6, 2016 9:40 am

When you're making a To Do list before your next international trip, somewhere between "Alert credit card company" and "Pack phone charger," you'll probably want to write "Pay taxes." In December, Congress passed a new highway funding bill and, if you turn to page 1,113, you'll find that it also added a new section to the Internal Revenue Code. That addition, cleverly titled "Revocation or Denial of Passport in Case of Certain Tax Delinquencies," does exactly what it says: it allows the State Department to "revoke, deny or limit passports" for any U.S. citizen who has a tax debt of \$50,000 or more.

The idea of giving the IRS that kind of power over our passport booklets isn't new. It has been considered since 2011, when the Government Accountability Office (GAO) [was asked to investigate](#) the overlap between the individuals who had applied for passports during the 2008 fiscal year and those who had outstanding tax debts. After presumably coloring the bulging center of their Venn diagram, the

GAO recommended that Congress “may consider taking steps to enable [the Department of] State to screen and prevent individuals who owe federal taxes from receiving passports.”

According to [Forbes](#), the administrative details on how this new rule will be enforced have not yet been explained. But the list of citizens who, ah, qualify to have their passports yanked away will be compiled by the IRS. Forbes columnist Robert Wood explains that those who are currently contesting a tax bill or paying their debt in pre-approved installments would not be penalized, and there is an exception for those who need a passport to travel for emergency or humanitarian reasons.

The criticisms of the new regulation have included those who say that limiting travel is unconstitutional and those who worry that the IRS isn't infallible, and may mistakenly revoke the passports of those who aren't, say, trying to skip out on a tax bill. [Fox News](#) writes:

“But given the fact that the IRS collection unit has at times not been so state of the art, given the mistakes the IRS has already made in wrongfully emptying bank accounts and seizing assets, does anyone really think it's okay for unelected bureaucrats to seize passports, blocking a basic freedom, that is freedom of movement?”

Someone will have the dubious distinction of becoming the first person whose passport is pulled by the IRS, and it may be sooner than they think.