IRS Congressional Update

News for members of Congress and their staffs .....February 2020

Free tax return preparation by volunteers

With filing season 2020 in full swing, taxpayers are examining their options for tax preparation. Please help us spread the word about free IRS tax preparation programs.

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program has offered free tax preparation for over 50 years. Taxpayers can generally qualify for VITA if they earn $56,000 or less. People with disabilities, senior citizens, Native Americans and those for whom English is a second language may also qualify.

Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) sites also offer free tax help with priority assistance to people who are 60 years of age and older. TCE volunteers specialize in questions about pensions and retirement issues unique to seniors.

The IRS forges partnerships with national and community groups across the country. These partners operate VITA/TCE sites at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls and other convenient locations. Free tax help is also available for servicemembers at military bases in the U.S. and abroad.

IRS-certified volunteers at these sites prepare, review and electronically file the tax returns. Some VITA/TCE sites also offer facilitated self-assistance, where taxpayers can learn to prepare their own tax returns with the support of a volunteer.

Millions of Americans rely on these long-standing programs. Your constituents can find more information – including a site locator – at **IRS.gov/VITA**. The **IRS2Go** mobile app also includes a site locator.

What to expect regarding refunds this year

The IRS issues more than 9 out of 10 refunds in less than 21 days. However, it's possible your tax return may require additional review and take longer. The **Where's My Refund?** tool has the most up-to-date information available about your refund. The tool is updated daily so you don't need to check more often.

> **Where's My Refund?** You can use the tool to start checking on the status of your return within 24 hours after we have received your e-filed return or 4 weeks for a mailed paper return. Where's My Refund? has a tracker that displays progress through 3 stages: 1) Return Received, 2) Refund Approved, and 3) Refund Sent.

You will get personalized refund information based on the processing of your tax return. The tool will provide an actual refund date as soon as the IRS processes your tax return and approves your refund.

Those who claim the Earned Income Tax Credit, or the Additional Child Tax Credit may experience a refund hold. By law, the IRS cannot issue these refunds before mid-February. The IRS expects the first EITC/ACTC-related refunds to be available in taxpayers' bank accounts or on debit cards by the first week of March if they chose direct deposit and there are no other issues with their tax return. Check Where's My Refund for a personalized refund date.

Our phone and walk-in representatives can research the status of your refund if it's been 21 days or more since you filed electronically, more than 6 weeks since you mailed your paper return, or if the Where's My Refund? tool directs you to contact us.

Remember, the easiest way to check a tax refund is by using Where's My Refund? on IRS.gov and the IRS2Go app.

Faster refunds result from direct deposit

Join the taxpayers who get their refunds faster by using e-file and direct deposit. It's the safest, simplest, fastest way to receive your refund. Just select it as your refund method through your tax software and type in the account number and routing number. Or, tell your tax preparer you want direct deposit. You can even use direct deposit if you are one of the few people still filing by paper. Be sure to double check your entry to avoid errors.

Your refund should only be deposited directly into accounts that are in your own name; your spouse's name or both if it's a joint account. No more than three electronic refunds can be deposited into a single financial account or pre-paid debit card. Taxpayers who exceed the limit will receive an IRS notice and a paper refund.

Whether you file electronically or on paper, direct deposit gives you access to your refund faster than a paper check.

Target your refund by adjusting your withholding

The IRS has launched a **new and improved Tax Withholding Estimator** designed to help workers target the refund they want by having the right amount of federal income tax taken out of their pay.

The Tax Withholding Estimator, now available on IRS.gov, incorporates the changes from the redesigned **Form W-4, Employee's Withholding Certificate** that employees can fill out and give to their employers this year.

The IRS urges everyone to see if they need to adjust their withholding by using the Tax Withholding Estimator to perform a Paycheck Checkup. If an adjustment is needed, the Tax Withholding Estimator gives specific recommendations on how to fill out their employer's online Form W-4 or provides the PDF form with key parts filled out.

How to get IRS forms, instructions and publications

Nine out of ten individual taxpayers use tax software or a paid professional to prepare and file their tax returns. Those taxpayers probably won't need IRS forms, instructions and publications. However, not everyone has online access and there are people who simply prefer to prepare their return on paper and mail it in.

Paper filers with online access can:

- View and download tax forms, instructions and publications at **IRS.gov/forms-instructions**, or
- **Order them online** for delivery by mail. Allow at least 10 days for the forms to arrive. For tax professionals ordering online, remember there is a limit of 100 each for forms and five copies each for instructions and publications. (One copy of the corresponding instructions is automatically included with forms orders.)

Paper filers without online access can:

- Order printed IRS materials by calling the IRS toll free at 1-800-TAX-FORM (800-829-3676). The forms will be delivered by mail. Allow at least 10 days for the forms to arrive.

Limited quantities of commonly used forms, instructions and publications are stocked at IRS Taxpayer Assistance Centers. To search for the nearest IRS Assistance Center by using your zip code, **use this link**.

Libraries and senior centers may have a supply of forms and instructions. And many have computer rooms where taxpayers can get help finding what they need online and printing it out.

Some office supply stores and other retail outlets may offer certain business-related forms for sale.

If your office would like to have a supply of forms and instructions available, it's best to order them by phone at the 800 number above. Quantities are limited for online orders.

Congressional offices can also join the IRS's Tax Forms Outlet Program. Under the program you'll submit an annual order for tax products in advance and they'll be delivered to your office in time for the filing season. More information on the program is available on the **Tax Forms Outlets page of IRS.gov**.

National Taxpayer Advocate delivers Annual Report to Congress: focuses on Taxpayer First Act implementation, taxpayer service, and IRS funding

Acting National Taxpayer Advocate Bridget Roberts released her **2019 Annual Report to Congress** on Jan. 8, 2020. Key challenges highlighted in the report include implementation of the Taxpayer First Act, inadequate taxpayer service, and limited funding of the agency. Roberts also released the third edition of the **National Taxpayer Advocate's "Purple Book,"** which presents 58 legislative recommendations designed to strengthen taxpayer rights and improve tax administration.

For more details, see **IRS News Release IR-2020-03**.

Get up-to-date information with redesigned IRS e-News Subscriptions

With the 2020 tax season in full swing, the IRS encouraged taxpayers, businesses, tax professionals and others to take advantage of a variety of **improved e-mail subscription services**.

The e-News Subscription Service has been redesigned and updated in recent months to make it easier to subscribe to specific areas that people and organizations are interested in. Among others, the IRS offers subscription services tailored to individual taxpayers, with Tax Tips offering short, easy-to-read information to help people during tax time. The latest developments on emerging tax scams and identity theft are available on IRS Newswire. Other subscriptions focus on tax professionals, tax exempt and government entities as well as small and large businesses. Currently the IRS has 20 registration-based e-News options.

Note: IRS Congressional District Liaisons will continue to share IRS tax news directly with local congressional aides in their territory.

Brief History of IRS

The roots of IRS go back to the Civil War when President Lincoln and Congress, in 1862, created the position of Commissioner of Internal Revenue and enacted an income tax to pay war expenses. Check out some of these facts about IRS:

- In 1930, the main section of the Internal Revenue building at 1111 Constitution Ave. in Washington, D.C., was completed and occupied.
- In March 1931, elusive Chicago gangster Al Capone was indicted for income tax evasion. The division in charge of the investigation was the Intelligence Unit, the precursor to today's IRS Criminal Investigation.
- In 1948, the agency took the first step in using modern data processing equipment when it introduced punch card equipment to process notices.

- An Internal Revenue Manual system was established in 1952 in a revisable, loose-leaf style to provide a single, authoritative compilation of the policies and procedures affecting IRS work. Now, the IRM is online and searchable.
- In 1952, the agency officially changed the name from Bureau of Internal Revenue to Internal Revenue Service.
- In 1958, the title "collection officer" was changed to "revenue officer". Currently, the IRS employs more than 5,000 revenue officers.
- In 1965, the IRS instituted the first toll-free telephone site.
- In 1968, the IRS introduced Form 1040X, Amended U.S. Individual Income Tax Return to allow taxpayers to file an amended return.
- In 1972, the IRS began to provide tax information in Spanish.
- In 1977, the IRS created a special Problem Resolution Program aimed at helping taxpayers resolve their concerns and to bring attention to persistent taxpayer problems and complaints not resolved through normal channels. Today, this program is known as Taxpayer Advocate Service.
- Shirley D. Peterson became the first female commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service on Feb. 3, 1992.

Read more about the History of IRS at - **https://www.irs.gov/irs-history-timeline**

IRS helps workers, businesses with new Gig Economy Tax Center

The new **Gig Economy Tax Center** on IRS.gov helps people in this growing area meet their tax obligations through more streamlined information.

Reminders

- **Farmers and Fisherman Tax Tip**
- **How to Report Gambling Income**
- **"Internal Revenue Service Progress Update/Fiscal Year 2019 – Putting Taxpayers First"**, provides an overview of operations across taxpayer service, compliance, support areas and implementation of new tax laws including the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act and the Taxpayer First Act.
- IRS has a new tax form designed especially for seniors. See the new **Form 1040-SR**
- **How to pay your taxes**
- **IRS issues standard mileage rates for 2020**
- **IRS continues enforcement efforts in conservation easement cases following latest Tax Court decision**

If you have feedback on IRS reorganization or other components of the **Taxpayer First Act of 2019**, please share written information with your regular IRS contact, or send it to **TFAO@irs.gov** and it will be shared with the TFA office.

Help on IRS.gov

Filing – Payments – Refunds – Credits & Deductions – Forms & Instructions – Tax Questions

IRS in other languages

Spanish - Chinese - Korean - Russian - Vietnamese - ASL (YouTube)

IRS on social media

YouTube – Twitter – Instagram - Facebook

IRS2Go is the official mobile app of the IRS, available in both English and Spanish.

The *IRS Congressional Update* is a monthly newsletter, prepared by IRS Legislative Affairs. For information on resolving taxpayer account issues, visit Taxpayer Advocate Service.

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