



The Huntsville Times

Bill on tax preparation unnecessary

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By **HOWARD CAIN**

For The Times

Several recent articles and editorials on tax preparation had the obvious intention of getting the state involved. One of those, the Feb. 1 Times article by Stephen Foster Black, was so factually incorrect that I must respond.

Whether tax preparation would be improved by requiring a license (no!), certification (we already do that) or otherwise raising the cost of such preparation is questionable, but trying to build a case based on falsehoods or incorrect information is unethical.

Fact: It takes 8 to 15 days to receive a refund. Never in five days or even a week.

Fact: Refund Anticipation Loans are loans for 8-15 days, not a week.

Fact: The percentage rate for a RAL at H&R Block is under 36 percent, not 50 percent to 80 percent.

Fact: Tax preparation fees at Block are based on the forms and schedules needed to fix the return, not a percentage of the refund.

Fact: Block does not target poor taxpayers, nor does it try to talk people into bank loans. Tax preparers at Block do not receive any fees from a RAL, so there is no incentive to push them. Whether the loans are good or not, they are a choice by the client, and they are the only option for some.

Block guarantees the best legal refund for any client, or no fee is charged.

I proudly work for an H&R Block franchise in Scottsboro. I would gladly match the ethics of Block tax professionals against those of any other profession, including editors. Block employees receive better training than most IRS or Alabama Department of Revenue employees do.

Scottsboro's Block franchise prepared more than 500 tax returns for free last year so that the poor and elderly could qualify for the stimulus payments. The owner ate the cost, even paid for stamps, no help from anyone. We get a little offended when politicians, writers and others question our integrity or honesty.

Do you trust your tax return to a student or a volunteer with four hours' training? If you are audited, want a volunteer worker with four hours training on your side? Fine if you do, but don't assume everyone else does.

Block often checks tax returns prepared by others and finds errors in four of every five returns. Most of my clients have used my services for years. They trust me. We are backed up by the best tax research department in the country.

No tax preparation fee is based on the amount of the refund; it is based on the forms and schedules needed to fix the return.

The numerous Times articles about preparers doing false returns look like a deliberate attempt to sway public opinion. To find 11 or fewer problems out of 13 (surely the good professor studied hundreds of cases) speaks quite well for the tax preparation industry. If the professor looked at 13 cases, a biased sample resulted.

Sure, there are incompetent tax preparers, and I am not opposed to efforts to weed them out, but this proposed law would not do that. I am confident that the Block training and certification is better than any program that would be developed under the proposed law. It sure would be cheaper and more efficient.

Howard Cain of Pleasant Groves is also a retired federal employee.

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