

Federal probe clears NAACP of wrongdoing

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In an October 8 letter, the IRS said the NAACP "distributed statements in opposition of George W. Bush for the office of the presidency." The letter also said that Bond's speech "condemned the administration policies of George W. Bush on education, the economy and the war in Iraq."

Among the audit-related documents obtained by the NAACP during the investigation and released to the public was a letter from then-Rep. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. asking the IRS to respond to a complaint about the NAACP from political donor

Richard Hug. Ehrlich is now governor of Maryland.

The documents also included letters calling for an investigation of the NAACP from Sens. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine); then-Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) U.S. Reps. JoAnn Davis (R-Va.) and Larry Combest (R-Texas).

Marcus S. Owens, an attorney with the Washington, D.C., firm Caplin & Drysdale, and the NAACP's representative during the audit, said he's still perplexed about the IRS's rationale for the audit and the investigation's timing.

"I find it extremely unusu-

al, the circumstances under which the audit was begun — the timing of it, the nature of the allegations," said Owens, who led the IRS's exempt organizations division for 10 years.

While conservative organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute were "pumping out press releases" in support of the president's policies during the 2004 election season, Owens said, the NAACP was singled out for an audit.

"It just leaves a bad taste in one's mouth," Owens said. "Something was not right here."



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