



Intel community targets Americans – what I learned from FBI's 'assessment' of me, my organization

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President Reagan famously said, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'" We can all chuckle, but a darker question lurks behind that joke.

What happens when the government is weaponized against citizens or even domestic civil institutions for political purposes?

It turns out the CATO Institute has been looking into that very issue via Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and shocker, Concerned Women for America (and me as its president) was targeted by the Obama-Comey Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 2016 for an "assessment."

As background: Concerned Women for America (CWA) is the nation's largest conservative public policy women's organization with hundreds of thousands of engaged Christian women activists in every state. We boast a robust volunteer base, including our fast-growing Young Women for America collegiate chapters.

Our public policy focus encompasses seven core issues: protecting the sanctity of life, support for marriage and family, supporting parental control of education, standing firm for religious freedom, standing for our national sovereignty, fighting against the sexual exploitation of women and children, and support for the nation of Israel.

We have a storied history of speaking truth to power, including every U.S. president beginning with our founder's support for Ronald Reagan at our inception in 1979.

Our women are active at the local, state and national levels through prayer and education of our peers and leaders. Many of our members are current or former military families. My son is

currently an ROTC scholar who will serve a minimum of six years as an officer in the Army upon his college graduation.

We have throughout our history supported respectful civil engagement and are full-throated supporters of law enforcement.

This makes the unveiling of the FBI's secret "assessment" of CWA all the more disappointing.

As a rule of law kind of woman, I have always assumed that if the FBI looked into someone, they had probable cause. But unfortunately, due to a 2008 rewrite by Republican Michael Mukasey of the Attorney General's Guidelines on Domestic FBI Operations, that is no longer the case.

The rule now allows the agency to spy on American citizens without a criminal predicate or even a complaint. The Brennan Center Fact Sheet tells us that an "assessment" is not an investigation, but regardless the government can without any probable cause "recruit informants to monitor the subject, question people without revealing the agent's identity, search commercial and government databases and conduct physical surveillance of the person's public movements."

Well, is that all?!

The FBI's documented reason for CWA's "assessment" was that we were listed with two stars under Charity Navigators. Seriously?

This surprising revelation has awakened CWA to the fact that, according to The New York Times, between 2009 and 2011, the FBI opened 82,325 assessments, eventually moving forward for an official investigation of only 3,315. Of course, most or maybe all of those did not result in convictions.

The agency has refused to provide CATO Institute with updated numbers. How many assessments have taken place in the past 10 years without Americans even knowing they are being targeted?

This policy change was purportedly made to monitor terrorists. So, why was an organization of God-fearing, freedom-loving, hard-working, taxpaying women scrutinized?

The FBI's documented reason for CWA's "assessment" was that we were listed with two stars under Charity Navigators. Seriously? Is this what the FBI has been reduced to, searching online for charity ratings?

For the record, CWA has three stars with Charity Navigators, an unblemished record with Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) and clean audits every single year since our founding. Our financial record is spotless.

We will probably never know why this really happened but the timing, June of 2016, would suggest that it may have had something to do with my personal support for then-presidential candidate Donald Trump. It is an undisputed fact that the FBI circumvented the law in their zeal to get information on President Trump.

In the end and unsurprisingly, the "assessment" of CWA was closed without any finding of wrongdoing, but that's not the point. We should not have been targeted in the first place.

We should all be worried about the ability and hubris of a politicized FBI to invade and target American citizens and organizations out of favor with those in power. A citizen's engagement in the political process, support for a presidential candidate, or a trip to Trump Tower should not draw the ire of the FBI.

We call on Congress to clamp down on the trampling of our civil liberties using perhaps well-intentioned but overly indulgent rules. The American people deserve better. We demand better.