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## Would You Settle For Flowers In Place Of Help From The IRS?



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Reports from the U.K. over the New Year holiday weekend detailed how the British government's tax authority, HM Revenue & Customs, has been sending flowers to apologize to taxpayers it has wronged. According to the *Daily Mail*, we're not talking about a lot of flowers really – something like 100 bouquets since 2009. I don't know about you, but I'd be a little freaked out if I got flowers from the tax collector.

According to an HMRC spokesman, "When we let a customer down, we always apologize and put matters right." Apparently, HMRC screws up a lot – which is something that does not divide our two nations (all apologies to George Bernard Shaw).

This got me to thinking. For months we've heard that U.S. taxpayers may be in for one of the most challenging tax return filing seasons in recent memory. And most of those warnings have been coming from the IRS itself. The leader of the better-watch-out-chorus has been none other than IRS Commissioner John Koskinen himself. I understand that he has an extremely tough job and that his agency has faced several budget cuts (unfair in my opinion), but he grouches about his budget worse than a Dallas Cowboys fan grumbles about being behind in a playoff game.

One of the commissioner's [direst warnings](#) is that IRS employees may not be there to answer the phones when taxpayers call with questions about filing their returns this year. Considering that ours is a self-assessment individual income tax system, a little help that way from the tax collector is the least we should expect. Unfortunately, answering the phone is not something the IRS has ever been stellar at, so to think it will get even worse is not great news. But maybe flowers are a less expensive alternative to good customer service. Taking — and expanding on — a page from our friends across the pond, we could call them the "Insult to Injury Bouquet" from your government — and adding a bill for taxes owed with the card would be a nice touch as well.

The Brits also have challenges providing taxpayer assistance over the phone, but have come up with an innovative solution. Again according to the *Daily Mail*, an HMRC spokesman noted: "HMRC receives around 70 million calls a year and we

**know that some of our customers can struggle to get through on our helplines at very busy times ... customers can get help with general self-assessment queries by tweeting us.” What a great idea – it’s nice to know that we are not the only ones to have a tax system with the likes of Lois Lerner doing our thinking for us. I think that if you can explain your tax problem to the IRS in 140 characters or less, then you deserve more than a bunch of pansies. You, dear taxpayer, deserve a government citation personally delivered by the IRS commissioner himself.**

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