

IRS promises fix to stimulus check problem

by JIM SALTERS
AP Writer

ST. LOUIS —The Internal Revenue Service says overdue economic stimulus checks will soon be mailed to about a quarter of a million married couples who had been denied the money because a spouse's married name and Social Security number didn't match.

When a couple marries and a spouse—usually the woman—changes names, the couple is supposed to alert the Social Security Administration. But tens of thousands have failed to do so and were unaware of the consequences until this year, when they didn't cash in on the rebate package. The package, enacted in February, resulted in payments to taxpayers of mostly \$600-\$1,200.

In an interview with The Associated Press last month, an Internal Revenue Service spokesman affirmed that stimulus checks would be sent only to those whose names and Social Security numbers matched.

But on Oct. 8, without fanfare, the IRS updated the question-and-answer section on its Web site to say it will mail economic stimulus payments this month to an additional 260,000 married taxpayers whose names did not match Social Security numbers.

"During the processing of the 2007 returns for these taxpayers, the IRS was able to determine that the person listed on the return actually

was the person associated with the SSN," the Web site reads.

Those people should be getting letters within days telling them how much they'll get. The checks should arrive by the end of the month, according to the IRS.

The IRS blamed itself for the problem, saying married taxpayers whose names and Social Security numbers didn't match "were inadvertently omitted from the initial economic stimulus payments."

"The IRS regrets the inconvenience for these affected taxpayers and will continue to work hard to deliver stimulus payments to qualifying taxpayers," the Web site reads.

An IRS spokesman declined interview requests, and would not say if the re-evaluation was prompted by inquiries from The Associated Press or other news organizations. It was also unclear if the recent economic downturn played a role in the decision as a means of giving a boost to more people.

Either way, the news was welcomed by Sam and Elaine Vilardo, both 51, of Sinking Spring, Pa. After the couple married in 2001, she failed to register her name change with the Social Security Administration. When they called the IRS several months ago, they were told they'd have to wait until next year for the stimulus money because of that oversight.

Not anymore.

"It's great news," Sam Vilardo said Oct. 13. "We've already spent the

money, so we might as well get the check."

Vilardo blamed procrastination for failing to get his wife's name change registered.

"After you get married you have all those paper changes," said Vilardo, a mechanical machine designer at a steel company. "You just drop the ball."

The problem with the checks affected mostly those who filed tax returns on paper rather than electronically, said Jackie Perlman, senior tax researcher for H&R Block's Tax Institute in Kansas City.

"If you e-file and have a name discrepancy you will get an immediate rejection," and thus be aware of the need to fix it, Perlman said.

The system works differently for paper returns, Perlman said. If the name and Social Security number don't match, the paper return is stamped "invalid," but is accepted. And the taxpayer isn't informed.

Perlman said the Social Security Administration and the IRS both stress through community outreach efforts the need to file name changes. Even with the checks on the way, she encouraged any married couple who has not filed for a name change to do so to avoid future headaches.

Affected couples may want to act sooner than later. A second stimulus package is being considered in Washington, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has not ruled out proposing another round of rebates. ■

Propositions 101

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61 percent of California voters who supported Proposition 22. While affirming traditional marriage, Prop. 8 does not eliminate any of the rights, privileges or benefits given to same-sex registered domestic partners.

However, allowing same-sex couples to marry does not diminish the sanctity of traditional marriage, but extends the rights and responsibilities of marriage to more people. Also, domestic partnerships are not afforded the same dignity and respect as marriage, and partners don't have the same rights as spouses in many situations, including medical emergencies and when life-and-death decisions are made.

The California Constitution guarantees equal protection under the law to everyone, and should not be amended to single out one group for different treatment.

• **Prop. 9 Laws governing treatment crime victims and parole procedures**

This proposition will guarantee crime victims' rights to justice and due process, putting those rights in the state Constitution. It will also protect crime victims by requiring that the safety of victims and their families be considered in bail decisions and by mandating that victims be notified when offenders are released.

Some say the State Constitution is not the appropriate place for a detailed listing of victims' rights; they belong in state statutes. California is already strict on parole—for the past 20 years, the annual parole rate for inmates convicted of second degree murder or manslaughter has been less than 1 percent of those eligible.

• **Prop. 10 Promotes use of alternative fuels (Environment)**

The Alternative Fuel Vehicles and Renewable Energy. Bonds will reduce our dependence on foreign oil, develop new clean energy industries in California, and create thousands of well-pay-

ing jobs. This measure will give consumers alternatives to high priced gasoline by giving them the choice to buy vehicles that run on cleaner fuels or on electricity from renewable sources.

On the downside, Prop. 10 will cost taxpayers nearly \$10 billion that could be used for needed programs and services, while duplicating existing clean fuel and alternative energy programs.

• **Prop. 11 Independent commission to draw legislative district boundaries (election reform)**

Redistricting, or Prop. 11, will eliminate the current conflict interest legislators have in drawing their own districts. Instead of politicians selecting their voters, the latter will be empowered to select their elected officials and hold them accountable. It will also help reduce or eliminate the partisan gridlock that is keeping the Legislature from effectively dealing with the state budget, health care, the environment and other crucial issues.

However, Prop. 11 will leave power in the hands of politicians

reform)

and bureaucrats, not the voters. Bureaucrats will select the redistricting commission and seats will be set aside for partisan members of the two biggest political parties. This measure creates a powerful, unelected redistricting commission but does not ensure that its 14 members will reflect the gender, racial, or geographic diversity of the state's 36 million people.

• **Prop 12 \$900 million in bonds for home, farm purchasing assistance for vets (Bond issue)**

The Cal-Vet loan program has

helped hundreds of thousands of veterans invest in homes and farms in California at no expense to taxpayers. This program is good for the economy, generating millions of dollars in housing-related jobs.

But with home prices declining, state taxpayers could be liable if homebuyers cannot make payments or sell their homes. This program has indirect costs to taxpayers, since the tax-deductible interest paid to bondholders reduces state tax revenue. (With research by Billy De La Cruz) ■

The richest of them all

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public real estate firms, Filinvest Development, Filinvest Land; also privately held East West Bank. Going into biofuels; bought 2 sugar mills and a plantation in June in a deal worth \$215 million. Children Jonathan and Josephine run daily operations; Gottianun chairman emeritus.

#8 Enrique Razon Jr.
Networth: \$820 million
Age: 47
Marital Status: Married, 2 children

Chairs International Container Terminal Services, which buys, develops, manages container ports and terminals worldwide. Has operations in 9 countries including the Philippines, China, Ecuador. Enjoys golf, helped save

Philippine Open this year from near cancellation.

#9 Tony Tan Caktiong & family

Networth: \$790 million
Age: 57
Marital Status: Married, 3 children

Fast-food king heads Jollibee, now with more than 1,500 locations and 7 brands. Bought out partner in Shanghai fast-food chain Yonghe King, acquired Chinese restaurant chain Hongzhuangyuan for \$50 million in September, opened store in Las Vegas.

#10 Oscar Lopez & family
Networth: \$775 million
Age: 77
Marital Status: Married, 8 children

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