

## Time for the IRS to Quit Tinkering with the Tax Forms

Leonard E. Burman

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Document date: March 18, 2005

Released online: March 18, 2005

Len Burman is an Urban Institute senior fellow and co-director of the [Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center](#).



### **CHERYL GLASER, anchor:**

Hey, got those tax forms yet? You have exactly four weeks left to fill them out. It probably won't be any easier than last year. In fact, commentator and tax expert Len Burman says the IRS has changed the 1040 tax form yet again. And he says it's time for the tinkering to stop.

### **LEN BURMAN:**

I detest the 'What's New' section of my IRS tax instructions.

Maybe I'm an ingrate. After all, what's new is lots of new tax goodies—new credits and deductions. This year, I can "deduct state and local general sales taxes instead of state and local income taxes on Schedule A." I can pick one or the other.

But who knew to keep every receipt from Wal-Mart last year? And then how does the average person know what's better, sales or income tax deductions? Or whether to use the optional table they provide to estimate your sales taxes based on your income level without those receipts?

Last year, among the boatload of goodies was a new lower tax rate for "qualifying dividends." Sounds great. But you had to fill out a cryptic 29-line worksheet to get that baby.

You may be thinking "So why cry about a little extra paperwork if you can save money at tax time?" Because if we just cut taxes across the board, we could tally up those tax breaks a lot easier. That doesn't happen because politicians like to pander to special interests. Those interests don't feel so special if tax breaks go to everybody.

There's an adage in tax circles: An old tax is a good tax. It means that if the tax law survives long enough, we might just figure it out.

So here's my modest proposal. Leave the tax law alone for a while. Sure, adjust rates to hit the amount of money the government needs to collect, but otherwise just say no.

You know, the other thing is those tax cuts aren't worth anything. We're paying for them with borrowed money. It's no more a gift from the government than a credit card is a gift from your bank.

And if Congress fails to enact real tax reform this year, let's just skip the 'What's New' section for a while, like maybe the next decade.

### **GLASER:**

Len Burman is co-director of the [Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center](#).

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