A Preference For Deference: The Benefits of the First Circuit's Customized Standard of Review for Collection Due Process Appeals in Dalton v. Commissioner

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“It is not our role . . . to determine whether the IRS applied the correct rule of law. . . . [W]e need only determine whether the IRS applied a reasonable view of what the law is or might be.”

I. Introduction

Typical hardworking Americans pay their taxes on time and in full. Some citizens even do so because they view paying taxes as a civic duty. Unfortunately, not all people pay the tax they owe, which places a higher burden on the law-abiding, compliant taxpayers. A significant portion of compliance rates are reported by the IRS. In 2009, approximately 116 million tax returns were filed with reported income from salaries and wages. See Internal Revenue Serv., Estimated Data Line Counts Individual Income Tax Returns 9 (2009), available at http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/09inlinecount.pdf (showing estimated number of tax returns filling out selected line items on return).

3. See Kevin Drawbaugh, Taxes Not Just Certain, They’re Right Thing To Do-Survey, Tax Break (Jan. 31, 2012), http://blogs.reuters.com/taxbreak/2012/01/31/taxes-not-just-certain-theyre-right-thing-to-do-survey/ (“Most Americans believe strongly that it’s a civic duty to pay their ‘fair share’ in taxes, that cheating on taxes is wrong and that cheaters should be held accountable . . . ”); see also Internal Revenue Serv., IRS Oversight Board: 2011 Taxpayer Attitude Survey 1 (2011), available at http://www.treasury.gov/irsob/reports/2012/IRSOB-Taxpayer%20Attitude%20Survey%202012.pdf (noting 84% of public feels it is “not at all acceptable to cheat on one’s income taxes,” while 72% feel it is their civic duty to pay taxes).

4. See 2006 Taxpayer Advocate Report, supra note 2, at 6 (noting each compliant taxpayer was assessed effective subsidy of $2,200 because of costs from noncompliant taxpayers). The subsidy amount was calculated by dividing the estimated uncollected tax amount by the number of individual income tax returns filed. See id. (calling “surtax” on compliant taxpayers “an extraordinary burden to expect the average taxpayer to bear”).

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uncollected tax is attributable to businesses failing to pay the payroll taxes they withheld from employees.5 Every uncollected tax dollar adds to the already rising federal deficit.6 As a result, politicians have called for some Americans to pay their “fair share” of income tax to help reduce the deficit.7 Furthermore, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is under pressure to collect more tax during periods of budget deficits.8 The current uncollected amount is substantial: at the end of 2010, there was approximately $359 billion of uncollected tax.9


7. See, e.g., Editorial, The State of the Union in 2012, N.Y. Times, Jan. 25, 2012, at A28. President Obama has called for wealthy Americans to pay their “fair share” in taxes. See id. (describing President Obama’s state of union address stating that “any credible plan to wrestle down the deficit must include the wealthy paying a fairer share of taxes”). Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney disagrees with President Obama’s definition of fairness. See Michael D. Shear, Obama vs. Romney: Battles of Fairness Doctrines, The Caucus (Apr. 27, 2012, 7:26 AM), http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/obama-vs-romney-battle-of-the-fairness-doctrines/ (describing definition of fairness in various contexts as key campaign issue). This Note argues that a fairness distinction should be drawn between compliant and delinquent taxpayers, and delinquent taxpayers who owe the government taxes should pay their “fair share.” For a discussion of the distinction between these two groups, see infra note 12. This Note argues that judicial review of tax collection should be configured to allow the government to collect the “fair share” of taxes owed from all citizens if it uses reasonable methods. For a discussion of how a de novo standard of review can create unfairness in tax collection, see infra notes 153–62 and accompanying text.

8. See 1 Internal Revenue Serv., National Taxpayer Advocate: 2008 Annual Report to Congress viii (2008), available at http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/08_tas_arc_intro_toc_msp.pdf (“On the other hand, as the budget deficit grows, the IRS comes under subtle pressure to collect more federal revenue and close the tax gap.”); Marilyn E. Phelan, Taxpayers’ Procedural Rights Can Clash With Aggressive Tax Enforcement, 56 J. TAX STRATEGIES 149, 149 (2009) (“A concern with the tremendous and ever-increasing federal budget deficit (estimated to be in the trillions given the enormous projected costs of the recently enacted financial rescue and economic stimulus plans) may lend continuing support for the Treasury Department’s current more aggressive tax enforcement policy.”).

Given the importance of tax collection in periods of budget deficits, a well-functioning tax collection system must be fair and efficient. A fair tax system treats similarly situated taxpayers the same, a concept known as horizontal equity. To treat everyone fairly in the collection context, the IRS must try to collect from delinquent taxpayers, otherwise law-abiding, compliant taxpayers would be at a disadvantage. An efficient tax system collects taxes as quickly and inexpensively as possible. However, collecting unpaid tax is not cheap: the IRS spent over $5 billion on enforcement in 2011.

Because collecting tax revenue is of great importance, Congress historically allowed the IRS to collect taxes with no court interference prior to IRS-UTL/vol_2_tasresearchandrelatedstudies2010arc.pdf (noting unpaid assessments increased thirty-three percent from fiscal year 2009 to 2010).


11. See David Elkins, Horizontal Equity as a Principal of Tax Theory, 24 Yale L. & Pol’y Rev. 43, 43–44 (2006) (explaining concept of horizontal equity and declaring it is “universally accepted as one of the more significant criteria of a ‘good tax’”). Accordingly, any “[v]iolation of horizontal equity, while not necessarily fatal, is nevertheless considered a serious flaw in any proposed tax arrangement.” Id. at 44. See also Cords, Administrative Law, supra note 10, at 430 (“A high rate of voluntary compliance requires, in part, that the tax system be equitable.”); see generally Brian Gale, Tax Fairness, 65 Wash. & Lee L. Rev. 1525 (2008) (explaining concept of horizontal equity and advocating for its adoption into tax system based on theoretical and practical justifications).

12. See 2006 Taxpayer Advocate Report, supra note 2, at 6–7 (explaining that compliant taxpayers help support shortcomings of delinquent taxpayers and in part that IRS enforcement against delinquent taxpayers could help collect more tax). For the purposes of this Note, a delinquent taxpayer refers to a taxpayer with a properly assessed tax liability that does not pay the amount owed to the IRS. A compliant taxpayer is a taxpayer who pays their tax liability in full and on time.


to collection. However, some members of Congress grew concerned about the IRS’s “nearly unlimited collection discretion.” This prompted Congress to pass the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998 (“RRA”), which gave taxpayers limited pre-collection rights. These rights are referred to as the Collection Due Process (“CDP”) rights.

CDP provides taxpayers with the right to a pre-collection administrative hearing to raise challenges to the proposed IRS collection action.

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15. See Danshera Cords, How Much Process Is Due? I.R.C. Sections 6320 and 6330 Collection Due Process Hearings, 29 VT. L. Rev. 51, 56 (2004) (hereinafter Cords, How Much Process Is Due?) (“Historically, due process has not entitled a taxpayer to pre-deprivation review of IRS decisions to collect assessed, unpaid taxes.”). Before 1998, a taxpayer generally had no right to protest collection actions until after collection. See id. at 57 (describing no pre-assessment review as justified “because of the significant hardship the government would suffer without the ability to promptly collect taxes owed”). Judicial review over tax collection was traditionally limited to post-collection refund claims in either the United States District Court or the Court of Federal Claims. See id. at 58 (explaining how administrative request for refund needed to be made and denied before filing refund suit).


18. Hereinafter referred to as “CDP,” “CDP rights,” or “CDP regime.” See I.R.C. §§ 6320, 6330 (2006) (providing rights for notice of federal tax lien and rights for notice of intent to levy). Some commentators have criticized the CDP regime for unnecessarily slowing collection. See Bryan T. Camp, The Failure of CDP, Part 2: Why It Adds No Value, 104 Tax Notes 1567, 1569–70 (2004) (describing collection process as deciding whether delinquent taxpayer is classified as “can’t pay” or “won’t pay” and arguing CDP does not generate any new information to help with that decision); see also Book, supra note 16, at 1188–89 (arguing CDP is too broad because it allows taxpayers too many opportunities to challenge underlying tax liability); Cords, How Much Process Is Due?, supra note 15, at 99–100 (arguing CDP hearing procedures should be revised to create uniformity). This Note does not take a position on the merits of the CDP regime, but rather argues that the standard of review for subsidiary determinations should be for reasonableness in order for the current CDP regime to work as well as possible. For an argument as to how a deferential standard of review benefits the tax system, see infra notes 127–76 and accompanying text.

19. See I.R.C. § 6330(c)(2) (allowing taxpayer to raise spousal defenses, raise challenges to collection action, and propose collection alternatives). The taxpayer can also challenge the underlying tax liability if the taxpayer did not have a previous opportunity to do so. See id. § 6330(c)(2)(B) (providing opportunity for challenge if taxpayer did not receive “statutory notice of deficiency for such tax liability”).
Taxpayers can also make an offer-in-compromise to settle the tax debt.\textsuperscript{20} These CDP rights also include the ability to appeal unfavorable collection decisions to the Tax Court.\textsuperscript{21} Since 2003, appeals from collection due process hearings are one of the most commonly litigated issues in Tax Court.\textsuperscript{22}

In \textit{Dalton v. Commissioner},\textsuperscript{23} the First Circuit dealt with an issue of first impression: whether subsidiary determinations made during a CDP hearing—such as legal ownership of an asset—should be reviewed de novo or under a more deferential standard of review.\textsuperscript{24} In a typical case, an appellate court reviews all questions of law de novo, giving no deference to legal conclusions made by lower courts.\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Dalton} held the opposite to be true, stating that in CDP appeals, all subsidiary determinations are reviewed for reasonableness, not correctness.\textsuperscript{26}

This Note analyzes how the \textit{Dalton} standard of review departs from the Tax Court’s previous de novo approach, and argues that the deferential review benefits the tax system because it treats taxpayers fairly and allows the IRS proper deference to collect taxes in an efficient manner.\textsuperscript{27} Part II provides a brief background of the CDP process, with an emphasis on the offers-in-compromise issue discussed in \textit{Dalton}.\textsuperscript{28} Part II also describes the standard of review that past courts have used in CDP appeals, \textsuperscript{20}For a further discussion of the offer-in-compromise procedure, see infra notes 42–44 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{21}See § 6330(d)(1) (providing Tax Court with jurisdiction for appeals within thirty days of determination).

\textsuperscript{22}See 2011 TAXPAYER ADVOCATE REPORT, supra note 14, at 619 (analyzing significant CDP cases decided during year).

\textsuperscript{23}682 F.3d 149 (1st Cir. 2012).

\textsuperscript{24}See id. at 151–52 (acknowledging that “no court has had the occasion to parse that standard and analyze how it plays out with respect to subsidiary factual and legal determinations made by the IRS during the CDP process”); see also Tax Court Collection Due Process Standard of Review Upended by the First Circuit, TAX TRIALS (June 25, 2012), http://taxtrials.com/?p=1346 (suggesting \textit{Dalton} decision “could dramatically change collection due process”). This Note refers to the subsidiary factual and legal determinations that are made before the final CDP determination simply as “subsidiary determinations.” For a further explanation of subsidiary determinations in the CDP context, see infra notes 45–46 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{25}See Pierce v. Underwood, 487 U.S. 552, 558 (1988) (describing typical standards of review); 5 AM. JUR. 2D Appellate Review § 646 (2013) (“An appellate court freely reviews a trial court’s decision concerning an issue of law and no deference is owed to the views of the trial court in this context.”).

\textsuperscript{26}See \textit{Dalton}, 682 F.3d at 156 (“In sum, a court’s job is not to review the IRS’s CDP determinations afresh. Rather, its job is twofold: to decide whether the IRS’s subsidiary factual and legal determinations are reasonable and whether the ultimate outcome of the CDP proceeding constitutes an abuse of the IRS’s wide discretion.”).

\textsuperscript{27}For a discussion of how \textit{Dalton} departs from the Tax Court’s previous approach, see infra notes 110–26 and accompanying text. For a discussion of the reasons why the \textit{Dalton} standard benefits the tax system, see infra notes 127–76 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{28}For a discussion of the CDP process and relevant statutory background, see infra notes 36–49 and accompanying text.
as well as how the standard has been applied to subsidiary legal determinations. Part III describes the factual and procedural background of the *Dalton* case and analyzes the First Circuit’s reasoning. Part IV argues that the First Circuit reached the correct result because the *Dalton* standard of review increases efficiency and fairness, and is consistent with the purpose of CDP. Part V concludes by urging Congress to expressly incorporate this standard into the CDP statutes because of the likelihood that the Tax Court will not apply the standard in cases appealable to the other circuits.

II. A Peculiar Process: A Brief Overview of CDP and Its Traditional Abuse of Discretion Standard of Review

CDP gives taxpayers the right to an administrative hearing to dispute a proposed collection action. An important part of the regime is the ability to appeal unfavorable administrative decisions to the Tax Court, which generally uses an abuse of discretion standard of review. The Tax Court has also used a de novo review of certain subsidiary determinations that are made before the final CDP determination.

A. CDP: What Are Your “Rights” Before Collection?

The IRS can assess a tax liability in one of two ways: (1) through an underpayment, when a taxpayer files a tax return showing a balance due and does not pay; and (2) through the deficiency process, when the IRS claims that the taxpayer should have paid more tax than was paid on the finalized return. Once the IRS properly assesses a tax liability, it can

29. For a discussion of the standard of review the Tax Court uses in CDP cases and how it has been applied in certain circumstances, see infra notes 50–62 and accompanying text. For a discussion of the standard of review the Tax Court used to review subsidiary determinations in prior CDP cases, see infra notes 63–75 and accompanying text.

30. For a discussion of *Dalton* and an analysis of the First Circuit’s decision, see infra notes 76–106 and accompanying text.

31. For a discussion how the *Dalton* standard increases efficiency in the tax system, see infra notes 131–52 and accompanying text. For a discussion of how it increases fairness in the tax system, see infra notes 153–62 and accompanying text. For a discussion of how the standard adheres to CDP’s purpose, see infra notes 163–76 and accompanying text.

32. For a discussion of why Congress should codify the *Dalton* standard of review, see infra notes 177–82 and accompanying text.

33. For a general overview of the CDP process, see infra notes 36–49 and accompanying text.

34. For a discussion of judicial review of CDP decisions, see infra notes 50–62 and accompanying text.

35. For a discussion of the standard of review the Tax Court used in past cases involving subsidiary determinations, see infra notes 65–75 and accompanying text.

36. See Book, supra note 16, at 1150 (explaining how IRS properly assesses tax liabilities). If a taxpayer does not pay after a valid assessment, an automatic lien in favor of the IRS arises on all of a taxpayer’s property. See id. (explaining lien is in amount of tax liability and includes potential interest and penalties).
exercise its “powerful administrative collection powers.” The IRS has two main collection powers affected by CDP: tax liens and tax levies. After an assessment of liability and demand for payment, the IRS can levy a taxpayer’s property to satisfy the debt if the tax remains unpaid.

Under CDP, after the IRS files a Notice of Intent to Levy or a Notice of Federal Tax Lien, it must inform a taxpayer of their right to request a CDP hearing with the IRS Office of Appeals. At the hearing, the taxpayer can propose collection alternatives. One common collection alter-

37. Id. at 150–52 (providing background on tax liens and levies); see also Cords, *How Much Process Is Due?*, supra note 15, at 54 (describing assessment as “first step” in collection process).

38. See I.R.C. § 6331(b) (2006) (“The term ‘levy’ as used in this title includes the power of distraint and seizure by any means.”); see also Bryan T. Camp, *Failure of Collection Due Process, Pt. 1: The Collection Context*, 104 TAX NOTES 969, 970 (2004) [hereinafter Camp, *Collection Context*] (providing explanation of all three collection powers but noting ability to offset liabilities with refunds not relevant to CDP because RRA did not address it). Tax liens arise automatically after the IRS assesses a tax liability. See I.R.C. § 6321 (providing lien arises “upon all property and rights to property, whether real or personal, belonging to such person”); see also Camp, *Collection Context*, supra, at 970 (describing lien as “virtual sticky note[ ] claiming ‘Pay Me’ on all property the taxpayer has or acquires”). The lien is misunderstood because the IRS does not file for a lien like a typical creditor would, but instead files the notice of the lien. See id. (explaining lien already exists because of automatic trigger from Code). The IRS must file a Notice of Federal Tax Lien to give notice of the lien to third parties. See id. (explaining lien is effective tool for real property because lien is paid off when property is sold). Although only one lien exists, the IRS can file multiple notices of the lien depending on where the taxpayer has assets. See id. (noting IRS can enforce lien through “either inquisitorial process (levy) or adversarial process (court action)” if lien is not paid off when property sold).

39. See I.R.C. § 6331(a) (delegating authority to Secretary of Treasury to collect tax through levy power). The IRS must give thirty days notice before levying property. See id. § 6331(d)(2) (providing notice must be in person, left at dwelling or usual place of business, or sent by certified mail); see also Camp, *Collection Context*, supra note 38, at 971 (describing levy as another misunderstood tool and as statutory power to take property to settle tax debt). The levy must be asserted against a specific piece of property, unlike a lien that “attaches to all future acquired property as well as current property.” Id. (noting liens and levies can be used together even though they are separate collection tools).

40. See I.R.C. §§ 6320(a)(1), 6330(a)(1) (providing for tax liens and tax levies). The hearing must be conducted by an IRS agent with no previous connection to the taxpayer’s case. See id. § 6330(b)(3) (allowing taxpayer to waive impartial officer requirement). The hearing is informal in nature. See Cords, *How Much Process Is Due?*, supra note 15, at 65–70 (describing various ways hearings are conducted, including telephone, face-to-face, correspondence only, or combination of all three). Taxpayers must submit a request for a hearing in writing, and are encouraged to use Form 12273 “Request for a Collection Due Process Hearing.” See Treas. Reg. § 301.6320-1(c)(2) (as amended in 2006) (describing alternative steps to properly request CDP hearing and detailing written requirement important for evidentiary purposes to ensure timely request).

41. See I.R.C. § 6330(c)(2)(A)(iii) (allowing taxpayer to raise “offers of collection alternatives, which may include the posting of a bond, the substitution of other assets, an installment agreement, or an offer-in-compromise”). Although the Code lists these issues that can be raised, it is not a fully inclusive list. See Cords,
native is the offer-in-compromise ("OIC"), a procedure in which a taxpayer offers to settle a tax liability for less than the full amount.42

Before deciding whether to accept or reject an OIC, the IRS first calculates a taxpayer’s reasonable collection potential ("RCP"), or what it expects the taxpayer could reasonably pay in tax.43 The IRS calculates the RCP by analyzing the taxpayer’s expected income, estimated living expenses, assets, and liabilities.44 The IRS's initial conclusions on the tax-

How Much Process Is Due?, supra note 15, at 89 (explaining legislative history of RRA shows list was not meant to be limited). Taxpayers are generally excluded from raising any issue that was "raised in a prior proceeding in which the taxpayer meaningfully participated . . . ." Id.

42. See I.R.C. § 7122(a) (2006) (authorizing Secretary of Treasury to "compromise any civil or criminal case arising under the internal revenue laws prior to reference to the Department of Justice for prosecution or defense"). A taxpayer must submit Form 656: Offer in Compromise, describing the taxpayer’s circumstances and why the IRS should accept, along with at least a 20% payment of the offer amount. See Shu-Yi Oei, Getting More by Asking Less: Justifying and Reforming Tax Law's Offer-In-Compromise Procedure, 160 U. PA. L. REV. 1071, 1077–81 (2012) (describing OIC procedure in detail); see also MICHAEL I. SALTZMAN & LESLIE BOOK, IRS PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE ¶¶ 15.07[3][a]-[b] (2010) (listing advantages and disadvantages to taxpayer of making offer-in-compromise); see generally I. Jay Katz, An Offer in Compromise You Can’t Confuse: It Is Not the Opening Bid of a Delinquent Taxpayer to Play Let’s Make a Tax Deal with the Internal Revenue Service, 81 MISS. L.J. 1673, 1681 (2012) (offering detailed history of development of OIC process and analyzing major developments in law). The regulations provide three reasons why the IRS would exercise its discretion and accept an OIC: (1) doubt as to liability; (2) doubt as to collectability; and (3) the promotion of effective tax administration. See Treas. Reg. § 301.7122-1(b)(iii) (2002) (prohibiting compromise if it would "undermine compliance by taxpayers with the tax laws"); see also Oei, supra, at 1078–80 (describing all three grounds for compromise and circumstances in which IRS would accept OIC under each). The OIC procedure has several policy goals:

- Effect collection of what can reasonably be collected at the earliest possible time and at the least cost to the government.
- Achieve a resolution that is in the best interests of both the individual taxpayer and the government.
- Provide the taxpayer a fresh start toward future voluntary compliance with all filing and payment requirements.
- Secure collection of revenue that may not be collected through any other means.

Oei, supra, at 1078. The IRS most often accepts an OIC because of doubt as to collectability. See id. (detailing IRS’s procedure for determining taxpayer’s ability to pay).

43. See Oei, supra note 42, at 1078 (commenting that IRS must calculate RCP to "determine the taxpayer’s ability to pay"). The Internal Revenue Manual, a non-binding guide for IRS employees, defines RCP as "the amount that can be collected from all available means, including administrative and judicial collection remedies." IRM 5.8.4.3(2) (June 1, 2010).

44. See Oei, supra note 42, at 1079 ("Essentially, in determining whether a doubt-as-to-collectability offer should be accepted, the IRS has to analyze the taxpayer’s assets, expenses, and liabilities."). The RCP calculation accounts for the taxpayer’s expected future income after taking into account necessary living expenses." Id. (commenting that IRS uses national and local standards for calculating living expenses). The RCP calculation considers the “net realizable equity” in assets. See id. at 1079 n.24 (noting net realizable equity is calculated using “quick
payer’s financial circumstances—such as whether the taxpayer owns certain assets—can be referred to as subsidiary determinations. They are subsidiary determinations because the IRS must make these decisions before making the final determination of whether to accept the OIC.

Although the IRS has complete discretion to accept or reject an OIC, the IRS will almost always reject an OIC if it calculates a RCP that is higher than the taxpayer’s offer. The Appeals Officer issues a final written determination as to whether the collection action can proceed after the officer reviews the proposed action and any proposed collection alternatives. The taxpayer then has thirty days to appeal an unfavorable CDP determination to the Tax Court.

sale value,” or value if taxpayer had to sell within ninety days). The calculation also includes a taxpayer’s “income or assets that are available to the taxpayer but beyond the reach of the IRS, such as property held abroad.” Id. at 1079.

45. See Dalton v. Comm’r, 682 F.3d 149, 152 (1st Cir. 2012) (describing IRS’s conclusions as to taxpayer’s legal ownership of certain assets before deciding whether to accept OIC as subsidiary determinations). Although these issues could be referred to as underlying legal or factual issues, for the purposes of this Note they will be called subsidiary determinations to be consistent with the First Circuit’s language in Dalton. See id. (describing IRS’s decision on underlying ownership issue as “subsidiary determination”). Whether a taxpayer wrongly dissipated an asset prior to making an OIC is another example of a subsidiary determination. See, e.g., Tucker v. Comm’r, 101 T.C.M. (CCH) 1307, 1315 (2011) (affirming IRS’s decision to include value of taxpayer’s stock trading losses in RCP because it determined taxpayer disregarded tax liability and could have used money to pay outstanding taxes). If the IRS determines the taxpayer wrongly dissipated an asset without regard to an outstanding tax liability, it will include the asset’s value in the RCP. See id. at 1314 (noting that although inclusion of dissipated assets does not increase actual collection potential, inclusion rule deters “delinquent taxpayers from wasting money that they owe and should pay as taxes”). Therefore, an asset dissipation issue is a subsidiary determination because the IRS must first determine whether the dissipated asset should be included in the RCP before deciding whether to accept or reject the OIC. See IRM 5.8.5.16 (Oct. 16, 2010) (giving instructions to IRS employees to consider asset dissipation prior to ruling on OIC). Another example of a subsidiary determination is when the IRS determines whether a taxpayer’s liabilities were discharged in bankruptcy before ruling on a proposed collection action. For a discussion of the Tax Court’s standard of review of subsidiary determinations for bankruptcy issues, see infra notes 63–75 and accompanying text.

46. See Oei, supra note 42, at 1078 (explaining OIC requires IRS to first determine taxpayer’s RCP to facilitate comparison with offer amount).

47. See IRM 5.8.4.3(2) (June 1, 2010) (“[T]he decision to accept or reject usually rests on whether the amount offered reflects the reasonable collection potential (RCP).”); Oei, supra note 42, at 1074 (“The taxpayer must meet certain requirements and conditions in order to qualify, and the IRS has the discretion to accept or deny the offer.”).

48. See I.R.C. § 6330(c)(3) (2006) (requiring officer to consider valid issues raised by taxpayer before making final determination). The Appeals Officer must also consider whether the “proposed collection action balances the need for the efficient collection of taxes with the legitimate concern of the person that any collection action be no more intrusive than necessary.” Id. § 6330(c)(3)(C).

49. See id. § 6330(d)(1) (giving Tax Court exclusive jurisdiction for appeals). The Tax Court is an Article I court of record that only has jurisdiction over cases
B. Judicial Review of CDP Appeals

The Internal Revenue Code (the “Code”) does not set the standard of review for collection due process appeals. Instead, the Tax Court looks to the legislative history of the RRA for guidance on the proper standard. The Tax Court uses an abuse of discretion review when the underlying tax liability is not in dispute. Under the abuse of discretion standard, the Tax Court will only reverse the IRS’s final determination if it finds the decision “arbitrary, capricious[, or] without sound basis in fact or law.” Circuit courts that have considered the issue have all ruled that abuse of discretion is the proper standard of review.

While the final IRS decision is reviewed for abuse of discretion, in Robinette v. Commissioner the Tax Court held that it could consider new evidence that was not part of the administrative record to determine whether the IRS abused its discretion. Consideration of new evidence Congress specifically assigns to it by statute. See SALTZMAN, supra note 42, at 1.06[1] (explaining history of Tax Court and noting that it “adjudicates cases in the same manner as a federal district court judge sitting without a jury”). The Tax Court is a single court located in Washington D.C. that travels around the country in designated cities to conduct trials. See About the Court, U.S. TAX COURT (last updated May 25, 2011), http://www.ustaxcourt.gov/about.htm (giving general background of Tax Court). It is comprised of nineteen judges that are appointed by the President. See id. (explaining appointed judges are experts in tax law).

50. See I.R.C. §§ 6320, 6330 (presenting provisions for CDP, but not judicial review).


52. See id. at 610 (“Where the validity of the tax liability is not properly part of the appeal, the taxpayer may challenge the determination of the appeals officer for abuse of discretion.”).


54. See Schwartz v. Comm’r, 348 F. App’x 806, 808 (3d Cir. 2009) (noting parties did not dispute that rejection of OIC was reviewed for abuse of discretion); Salazar v. Comm’r, 338 F. App’x 75, 77–78 (2d Cir. 2009) (finding IRS did not abuse discretion in rejecting OIC); Keller v. Comm’r, 568 F.3d 710, 716 (9th Cir. 2009) (“Like the Tax Court, our review of the decision by the Commissioner whether to accept an offer-in-compromise is for an abuse of discretion.”); Poindexter v. Comm’r, 321 F. App’x 771, 773 (10th Cir. 2009) (applying abuse of discretion review to IRS administrative determinations); Marshall v. United States, 300 F. App’x 636, 638 (11th Cir. 2008) (applying abuse of discretion review to IRS decision that taxpayer’s ability to pay exceeded OIC); Murphy v. Comm’r, 469 F.3d 27, 32 (1st Cir. 2006) (holding abuse of discretion review of administrative determination appropriate in collection due process appeal when underlying tax liability not in dispute); Orum v. Comm’r, 412 F.3d 819, 820 (7th Cir. 2005) (citing Jones and noting “[j]udicial review of [IRS determinations] is deferential”; Living Care Alts. of Utica, Inc. v. United States, 411 F.3d 621, 625–26 (6th Cir. 2005) (looking to legislative history for guidance on applying abuse of discretion review when tax liability is not in dispute); Jones v. Comm’r, 338 F.3d 463, 466 (5th Cir. 2003) (stating courts review IRS administrative determinations for abuse of discretion).

55. 123 T.C. 85 (2004), rev’d, 439 F.3d 455 (8th Cir. 2006).

56. See id. at 95–96 (holding Administrative Procedure Act not applicable and therefore court could consider new evidence in abuse of discretion review).
under an abuse of discretion standard of review is referred to as a de novo scope of review. The Tax Court stated that it reviewed the IRS’s final decision for abuse of discretion, but effectively held a trial de novo by considering new evidence. The de novo scope of review allowed the Tax Court to substitute its judgment for that of the IRS because the court considered evidence that the IRS did not, creating a standard of review that was similar to de novo. Under the rule of Golsen v. Commissioner, the Tax Court follows the law of the circuit court to which an appeal would follow. Therefore, although the Eight Circuit expressly overturned the Robinette decision, the Tax Court continues to follow Robinette in cases appealable to circuits that have not yet ruled on the issue.

C. The Decision Before the Decision: Standard of Review for Subsidiary Determinations in Past Tax Court Cases

Whereas the final CDP determination is reviewed using an abuse of discretion standard of review, the IRS must first make several subsidiary determinations. Each determination is reviewed by the Tax Court under a standard of review that varies depending on the type of determination. The standard of review refers to the level of deference an appellate court will give to a lower court’s findings; the scope of review refers to whether the court will consider new evidence or not. If a reviewing court considers new evidence, it is referred to as a de novo scope of review. Under the rule of Golsen v. Commissioner, the Tax Court follows the law of the circuit court to which an appeal would follow. Therefore, although the Eight Circuit expressly overturned the Robinette decision, the Tax Court continues to follow Robinette in cases appealable to circuits that have not yet ruled on the issue.
factual and legal determinations before making the final CDP determination and the issue of which standard of review applies to these determinations has arisen in past Tax Court decisions. In *Swanson v. Commissioner*, the Tax Court held that if the IRS committed an error of law, it was an automatic abuse of discretion. The court, analyzing a subsidiary bankruptcy law issue, never stated under which standard of review it would analyze the subsidiary determination of law. Nevertheless, the standard of review resembled de novo because the Tax Court performed its own analysis of the law and substituted its own view without any mention of the IRS’s interpretation.

The Tax Court addressed the issue again in *Kendricks v. Commissioner*, stating that the outcome regarding the subsidiary determination of law was the same—whether reviewed de novo or for abuse of discretion—because erroneous views of the law cannot stand under either standard. The Tax Court relied on its previous decision in *Swanson* and the

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63. For a discussion of the subsidiary decisions that the IRS must make before deciding whether to accept or reject an OIC, see *supra* notes 45–46 and accompanying text. For a discussion of cases addressing the issue of the standard of review for subsidiary determinations, see *infra* notes 64–75 and accompanying text.

64. 121 T.C. 111 (2003).

65. *See id.* at 119 (“If [the IRS]’s determination was based on erroneous views of the law . . . then we must reject [the IRS]’s views and find that there was an abuse of discretion.”); *see also* Freije v. Comm’r, 125 T.C. 14, 36 (2005) (holding that IRS error of law was “accordingly an abuse of discretion”).

66. *See Swanson*, 121 T.C. at 119 (declaring that it would be abuse of discretion if IRS determination was erroneous view of law, but not stating how appellate court would review that determination). In *Swanson*, the taxpayer argued that the collection action should not proceed because the taxpayer’s liabilities were discharged in a bankruptcy proceeding. *See id.* at 120–25 (analyzing whether taxpayer’s tax liability was “dischargeable debt” under bankruptcy law). Under bankruptcy law, all of a debtor’s debts are generally discharged. *See id.* at 120 (describing general rule for debts incurred prior to filing). Although the bankruptcy court’s order discharged the debtor from all “dischargeable debts,” the order did not address whether the debtor’s tax liabilities were discharged. *See id.* at 121 (commenting that record was unclear whether specific tax liabilities were included in bankruptcy court discharge order).

67. *See id.* at 125 (“Accordingly, we hold that pursuant to [the Bankruptcy Code], the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Texas did not discharge petitioner from his unpaid liabilities . . . .”). The court did not discuss the IRS’s determination, but merely declared its own judgment—a review similar to de novo. *See id.* at 120–25 (analyzing bankruptcy law issue without reference to IRS’s conclusions).

68. 124 T.C. 69 (2005).

69. *See id.* at 75 (“When faced with questions of law . . . the standard of review makes no difference. Whether characterized as a review for abuse of discretion or as a consideration ‘de novo’ (of a question of law), we must reject erroneous views of the law.”). In *Kendricks*, the question of law turned on whether the taxpayer had an opportunity to contest the tax liability at the taxpayer’s bankruptcy proceeding. *See id.* at 73 (describing taxpayer’s request for CDP hearing to dispute underlying tax liability). The court analyzed the Bankruptcy Code, the Tax Code, and case law to hold that the taxpayer did have the opportunity to dispute the liability in
Supreme Court’s decision in *Cooter & Gell v. Hartmarx Corp.* for the principle that errors of law cannot stand under an abuse of discretion review. The *Hartmarx* Court noted that an abuse of discretion would always occur if the ruling was based “on an erroneous view of the law or on a clearly erroneous assessment of the evidence.”

*Swanson* and *Kendricks* consistently support the proposition that a clearly erroneous view of the law is an abuse of discretion. However, neither court addressed the issue of how an appellate court should review subsidiary determinations of law for unsettled legal areas—where any view of the law is unlikely to be clearly erroneous. The First Circuit addressed exactly that scenario in *Dalton*.

### III. *Dalton*: The First Circuit Creates a Customized Standard of Review for CDP Appeals

The First Circuit in *Dalton* ruled on the issue of how to review subsidiary determinations in CDP appeals. The reasonableness of the IRS’s final collection determination turned on the subsidiary issue of whether the taxpayer’s primary residence should be considered in the Daltons’ reason-
able collection potential. In ruling for the IRS, the First Circuit created a deferential, customized standard of review for CDP appeals.

A. Telling the IRS That You Do Not Own Your Home to Escape a Tax Liability: Background and Procedural History of Dalton

The Daltons were married taxpayers whose former business—like many other businesses—owed the IRS payroll taxes withheld from their employees’ paychecks, but never paid to the IRS. The Daltons were personally liable for $400,000 of unpaid tax from their business. The IRS filed a notice of intent to levy, seeking the Daltons’ equity interest in their primary residence (the “Property”). Before the Daltons’ tax trouble started, legal title in the Property was transferred to a trust for little consideration. The Daltons did not request a CDP hearing to dispute the amount of tax owed, but to propose an offer-in-compromise (OIC) to settle their debt for pennies on the dollar.

At the hearing, the Daltons argued that they would never be able to pay their full tax debt because they did not own the Property and had insufficient income. The Daltons made an OIC to settle their $400,000

77. For a discussion of the facts and procedural background of the Dalton case, see infra notes 79–93 and accompanying text.
78. For an analysis of the Dalton decision and a discussion of why the court held for the IRS, see infra notes 95–106 and accompanying text.
79. See Dalton v. Comm’r, 682 F.3d 149, 152–53 (1st Cir. 2012) (describing tax debt that arose from unpaid payroll taxes from taxpayer’s former business). Unpaid payroll taxes represent a significant portion of the total unpaid, assessed tax. See T. Keith Fogg, In Whom We Trust, 43 CREIGHTON L. REV. 357, 361 (2010) (acknowledging small businesses account for higher portion of unpaid payroll taxes than large businesses and how concentration is problematic because of high failure rate for small businesses); Fogg, supra note 5, at 7–9 (giving example of how companies usually “borrow” payroll taxes withheld for current cash needs instead of paying to IRS).
80. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 153 (noting taxpayers were personally liable for company’s tax debt under Code provision).
81. See id. (noting taxpayers had substantial equity interest in residence).
82. See id. at 152 (giving background of trust transaction). In 1983, the Daltons sold the Property to Mr. Dalton’s father for $1, who then transferred the Property to a trust. See id. The father was originally the trustee before his death, when Mr. Dalton named his brother-in-law, Robert Pray, the successor trustee. See id. at 152–53. The Daltons’ children were the primary beneficiaries of the trust; however, the Daltons acted as the Property’s owners. See id. at 152 (noting Daltons granted mortgage interest in Property and signed mortgage documents as owner). Certain legal formalities associated with trusts were not observed, such as legal paperwork being forwarded to the Daltons instead of the trustee. See id. at 153 (calling efforts to comply with legal formalities “less than scrupulous”). In addition, the Daltons also used the Property as their primary residence and paid all of its expenses. See id. at 152–53 (noting trustee Pray claimed to control trust Property).
83. See id. (noting hearing requested under Section 6330(b)).
84. See id. at 153 (noting that “based on their assets and income, [the Daltons] could never come close to satisfying their total tax liability”). For a dis-
debt for $10,000. The IRS calculated that the Daltons’ reasonable collection potential was higher than the $10,000 OIC because it considered the Property among the Daltons’ assets, and therefore rejected the offer. The IRS analyzed federal nominee law to conclude that the Daltons legally owned the Property, not the trust. The Daltons appealed the determination to the Tax Court, which held that the IRS abused its discretion by not considering state nominee law and remanded the case back to the IRS. On remand, the IRS analyzed Maine law and again concluded that the Daltons owned legal title and therefore rejected the OIC a second time.

Hearing the case again, the Tax Court reviewed the subsidiary ownership issue de novo, but reviewed the IRS’s final decision to reject the OIC for abuse of discretion. The Tax Court performed a lengthy analysis of state and federal nominee law and held that the Daltons did not own the Property. Therefore, the court held that the IRS abused its discretion by rejecting the OIC. The IRS appealed the decision to the First Circuit.

Discussion of scenarios in which the IRS accepts OICs, including doubt as to collectability, see supra note 38 and accompanying text.

85. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 153 (noting Daltons asserted OIC should be accepted because of doubt as to collectability). The offer represented less than 3% of the total liability. See id. (stating that total liability was $400,000 and Daltons’ offer was $10,000).

86. See id. at 153–54 (commenting that taxpayer’s equity interest in Property could be liquidated to provide more funds than current $10,000 offer).

87. See id. (noting IRS determined “trust . . . held naked legal title purely for [the taxpayers’] convenience” and therefore trust was nominee for taxpayer). A nominee is “an ‘individual who holds legal title to property of a taxpayer while the taxpayer enjoys full use and benefit of that property.’” Stephanie Hoffer et al., To Pay or Delay: The Nominee’s Dilemma Under Collection Due Process, 82 Tul. L. Rev. 781, 807 (2008) (quoting IRM 5.17.2.5.7.2(1) (Mar. 27, 2012)) (explaining that nominee determination requires “facts and circumstances analysis[,]” with no one factor being determinative). Among the factors listed in the Internal Revenue Manual are whether the taxpayer retains possession or control of the property, whether the nominee paid little or no consideration for the property, and whether the taxpayer pays all or most of the property’s expenses. See id. (noting “federal tax lien extends to property ‘actually’ owned by the taxpayer even though a third party holds ‘legal’ title to the property as nominee” (quoting IRM 5.17.2.5.7.2(1) (Mar. 27, 2012))).

88. See Dalton v. Comm’r, 96 T.C.M. (CCH) 3, 8 (2008) (reasoning court could not conclude whether IRS abused discretion because it did not consider nominee issue under state law); Saltzman, supra note 42, ¶ 14.15 (noting that state law can decide whether nominee exists and listing factors courts consider).

89. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 154 (explaining IRS concluded Maine court would look to federal law for nominee issue and therefore it followed its original legal conclusion under federal law).

90. See id. (“Reviewing the IRS’s ownership finding de novo, the [Tax] court determined that the trust was not a nominee of the taxpayers under Maine law.”).


92. See id. at 423 (concluding trust not taxpayer’s nominee under federal law).

93. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 154 (“This timely second-tier appeal ensued.”). The IRS issued a Chief Counsel Advisory disagreeing with the Tax Court’s decision.
B. The First Circuit: “One Size Does Not Fit All”\textsuperscript{94} for CDP Standards of Review

The court first noted that the proper standard of review for subsidiary determinations the IRS makes during a CDP hearing was an issue of first impression.\textsuperscript{95} To resolve the issue, the court created a two-step, customized standard of review for CDP: first, a reviewing court must determine whether the IRS’s subsidiary determinations were reasonable using evidence in the administrative record; second, it must determine whether the final determination constituted an abuse of discretion.\textsuperscript{96}

The court gave three reasons for its decision.\textsuperscript{97} First, the deferential standard of review carried out the purpose of CDP: to ensure that IRS collection decisions are not arbitrary.\textsuperscript{98} CDP was meant as an oversight of IRS decisions, not as a means to adjudicate individual collection actions.\textsuperscript{99} The court stated that erroneous views of the facts or law would be unreasonable and therefore always constitute an abuse of discretion.\textsuperscript{100} A de novo review was inappropriate because it “would result in the courts ‘inevitably becom[ing] involved on a daily basis with tax enforcement details that judges are neither qualified, nor have the time, to administer.’”\textsuperscript{101}

Second, the court found that the customized, deferential standard of review in *Dalton* and directed agents to look at the decision to see “how complex the [nominee] question may become.” I.R.S. Chief Couns. Advisory 201211023 (Mar. 16, 2012).

94. *Dalton*, 682 F.3d at 154 (“In the exercise of powers of judicial review, one size does not fit all.”).

95. See id. at 151–52 (“[N]o court has had the occasion to parse that standard and analyze how it plays out with respect to subsidiary factual and legal determinations made by the IRS during the CDP process. We grapple with that issue today.”). Although past courts “had the occasion” to analyze how the standard applied to subsidiary determinations, the First Circuit was the first to explicitly rule on the issue. For a discussion of past Tax Court cases addressing this issue, see supra notes 63–75 and accompanying text.

96. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 156 (summarizing new standard of review). Both components of the two-step, customized standard of review will hereinafter be referred to collectively as the “*Dalton* standard.” The first part of the standard—review of subsidiary determinations—when referred to alone will be called the “reasonableness standard.” The second part of the standard—review of the final CDP determination—when referred to alone will be called the “abuse of discretion standard.”

97. See id. at 154–56 (justifying decision that courts should use deferential standard of review over subsidiary determinations).

98. See id. at 155 (explaining judicial review must be “tailored” to CDP’s purpose of ensuring IRS decisions are not arbitrary).

99. See Book, supra note 16, at 1195–96 (arguing de novo review “tends to become more of a judicial substitution of judgment, rather than a mechanism for external control of agency practice—the very rationale for CDP in the first place”).

100. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 159 n.6 (“Of course, an absurd factual determination or a legal determination that flies in the face of settled precedent will never be reasonable and, thus, will always constitute an abuse of the IRS’s discretion.”).

101. Id. at 155 (quoting Olsen v. United States, 414 F.3d 144, 150 (1st Cir. 2005)).
view made sense because of the informal nature of CDP hearings and the likelihood the administrative record would be incomplete. 102 Lastly, the court noted that a de novo standard of review would create judicial inefficiencies by allowing the taxpayers “two bites at the cherry.” 103

Once the court established the customized, deferential standard of review, it ruled that the IRS did not abuse its discretion by rejecting the Daltons’ OIC. 104 The court found that the IRS took a reasonable view of state and federal nominee law—a complex and unsettled area of law—to determine the Daltons legally owned the property. 105 The IRS therefore did not abuse its discretion by rejecting the OIC because it reasonably determined the Daltons had the ability to pay more than their offer. 106

IV. UNDERSTANDING DALTON’S CUSTOMIZED STANDARD OF REVIEW AND HOW IT BENEFITS THE TAX SYSTEM

The First Circuit’s customized standard of review for CDP benefits the tax system for several reasons. 107 The Dalton standard of review departs from the Tax Court’s previous de novo review of subsidiary determinations made during that process. 108

102. See id. at 155–56 (explaining that because Congress knew of possibility of limited record to review, it never intended for courts to “undertake de novo review of subsidiary determinations made during that process”).

103. See id. at 156 (noting if taxpayers lost, Commissioner would have to litigate the ownership issue at proceeding with trust joined as party). In this case, the “cherry” was the issue of who owned the property. See id. (explaining that deciding ownership issue would adjudicate rights of third party).

104. See id. at 158 (concluding IRS’s view of nominee law was reasonable—because IRS reasonably concluded Daltons legally owned property and could afford to pay more—and therefore IRS did not abuse discretion by rejecting Daltons’ offer).

105. See id. at 157–59 (“In this instance, we believe that the IRS acted reasonably in looking to case law from other jurisdictions to fill the void and illuminate Maine’s nominee doctrine.”). The court agreed with the IRS’s adoption of a balancing test that weighed several factors to analyze the nominee issue. See id. at 158 (“Viewed against this backdrop, the IRS’s decision to apply a balancing test to resolve the nominee question appears reasonable.”). The court further agreed that the IRS’s application of the test to conclude the Daltons legally owned the property was reasonable. See id. (discussing various nominee factors and noting most factors weighed against Daltons). The court noted that the application of nominee law was not an easy decision. See id. at 159 (commenting that some factors weighed in favor of Daltons, but true question was not who owned property, but “whether the IRS’s determination, correct or not, falls within the wide universe of reasonable outcomes”). For a further discussion of nominee law and the relevant factors, see supra note 87.

106. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 158 (implying that IRS included Property in Daltons’ RCP, and therefore Daltons’ $10,000 offer fell well below their RCP). For a discussion on what information the IRS uses to calculate a taxpayer’s RCP, see supra note 44.

107. For a discussion of how a deferential review of subsidiary determinations made during a CDP hearing benefits the tax system, see infra notes 127–76 and accompanying text.
tions, which essentially gave taxpayers a new trial. The First Circuit's more deferential standard of review benefits the tax system because it (1) increases efficiency for both the government and courts; (2) promotes fairness for taxpayers; and (3) is consistent with the purpose of CDP.

A. Saying "No" to De Novo: How the Dalton Standard Differs From the Tax Court's Approach

The Dalton decision provided new guidance for the Tax Court because it explicitly analyzed the proper standard of review in CDP appeals when the IRS decides subsidiary questions of law and fact. Specifically, Dalton dealt with a subsidiary question involving an unsettled area of law. The First Circuit and the Tax Court previously agreed that erroneous views of the law constituted a per se abuse of discretion. This principle found support in Dalton. Dalton, however, provided further guidance by holding that a reasonable view of the law should be affirmed under its customized reasonableness standard, not analyzed de novo.

The decision in Dalton departs from the Tax Court's unarticulated de novo standard used in prior cases because it held that a subsidiary legal issue is reviewed for reasonableness. It also implicitly conflicts with the Tax Court's assertion that the standard of review for subsidiary legal ques-

108. For a discussion of how the First Circuit's decision departed from the Tax Court's previous approach for subsidiary determinations in CDP hearings, see infra notes 110–26 and accompanying text.
109. For a discussion of the efficiencies promoted by the Dalton standard, see infra notes 131–52 and accompanying text. For a discussion of how the standard increases fairness in the tax system, see infra notes 153–62 and accompanying text. For a discussion of how the standard reinforces CDP's purpose, see infra notes 163–76 and accompanying text.
110. For a discussion of how Dalton presented an issue of first impression for the First Circuit, see supra note 24 and accompanying text.
111. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 159 (“Whether an IRS determination reached during the CDP process rests upon a purely factual question, a purely legal question, or a mixed question of fact and law, a reviewing court’s mission is the same: to evaluate the reasonableness of the IRS’s subsidiary determination.”). The court implies that the nominee issue was an unsettled issue of law, and therefore it was unlikely that any view of the law could be erroneous. See id. at 157 (noting IRS acted reasonably to look at other jurisdictions for law to fill “void” in Maine law).
113. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 159 n.6 (acknowledging erroneous views of law would be unreasonable and therefore constitute abuse of discretion).
114. See id. at 156 (“[A] court’s job is not to review the IRS’s CDP determinations afresh.”).
115. See, e.g., Swanson, 121 T.C. at 125 (reviewing subsidiary bankruptcy law issue “afresh” by giving no deference to IRS conclusions, but failing to state exact standard of review). For a discussion of the Dalton reasonableness standard of review for subsidiary determinations, see supra note 96 and accompanying text.
tions “makes no difference.” 116 Undeniably, if the IRS took an erroneous view of the law, it should be reversed under either standard of review. 117 Conversely, if the IRS took a reasonable view of the law—albeit a view with which the Tax Court disagreed—it would be upheld under the Dalton reasonableness standard, but reversed in a de novo review. 118

Dalton is also consistent with the Supreme Court’s general guidance in Hartmarx because the Dalton standard of review also gives the original reviewing body, the IRS, proper deference. 119 The IRS is in a better position to make collection decisions and carry out policy goals than the Tax Court. 120 Just as in Hartmarx, Dalton allows for the opportunity for an appellate court to overturn “absurd” legal or factual conclusions under an abuse of discretion standard. 121

The Dalton court avoided turning an abuse of discretion review of the final determination into a de novo trial. 122 A de novo review of subsidiary determinations, paired with an abuse of discretion review of the final determination, would convert the analysis into a de novo trial because the court’s review would give no deference to the IRS’s judgment. 123 Effe-

116. Kendricks v. Comm’r, 124 T.C. 69, 75 (2005) (“Whether characterized as a review for abuse of discretion or as a consideration ‘de novo’ (of a question of law), we must reject erroneous views of the law.”).

117. See, e.g., Dalton, 682 F.3d at 159 n.6 (discussing in dicta that absurd views of law would always be unreasonable and constitute abuse of discretion); Kendricks, 124 T.C. at 75 (rejecting erroneous views of law under either de novo or abuse of discretion standard).

118. Compare Dalton, 682 F.3d at 159 (“[T]he IRS acts within its discretion as long as it makes a reasonable prediction of what the facts and/or the law will eventually show.”), with infra note 123 (discussing courts taking independent view and substituting their judgment in place of IRS under de novo review).

119. See Cooter & Gell v. Hartmarx Corp., 496 U.S. 384, 404 (1990) (deciding proper standard of review for Rule 11 determinations). In Hartmarx, the Supreme Court noted that the district court was in a better position to make decisions on Rule 11 than an appellate court, and therefore it should be afforded more deference, even on legal issues. See id. (noting deference would conserve court resources). Similarly, Dalton recognized that the IRS, not courts, should be making collection decisions, and therefore the IRS should be afforded more deference. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 155 (finding stricter standard of review would result in courts, not IRS, enforcing collection actions that “judges are neither qualified, nor have the time, to administer” (quoting Olsen v. United States, 414 F.3d 144, 150 (1st Cir. 2005))).

120. See Cords, Administrative Law, supra note 10, at 467 (arguing that courts should give deference because it is IRS’s responsibility to make collection decisions).

121. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 159 n.6 (stating “absurd” legal or factual determination would be unreasonable and therefore is de facto abuse of discretion).

122. For a discussion of how the Dalton decision avoided de novo trials by providing a deferential standard of review, see infra notes 123–26 and accompanying text.

123. See Book, supra note 16, at 1194–97 (arguing that when Tax Court substitutes its judgment for IRS in abuse of discretion review, it resembles de novo review). A de novo review of subsidiary determinations and Robinette’s de novo scope of review that allows new evidence both allow courts to substitute their judgment for that of the IRS. See supra notes 55–62 and accompanying text (discussing Robinette).
tively, the de novo review of subsidiary determinations would swallow the abuse of discretion standard because it would allow courts to substitute their judgment for the IRS’s. 124 In Dalton, the entire question of whether the IRS abused its discretion in rejecting the Daltons’ OIC turned on the subsidiary issue of whether the Property should be included in the Daltons’ reasonable collection potential. 125 Therefore, the de novo review of the subsidiary ownership issue would effectively usurp an abuse of discretion review of the final decision of rejecting the OIC. 126

B. A Preference for Deference: The Benefits of Dalton’s Customized Standard of Review

The Dalton standard benefits the tax system for three reasons. 127 First, it increases both collection efficiency and judicial efficiency because it reduces delay in collection and allows the IRS to be the primary decision-maker. 128 Second, it promotes fairness in collection by discouraging noncompliance. 129 Third, it is consistent with the purpose of CDP because deferential review is sufficient to ensure the IRS’s collection actions are reasonable. 130

1. Efficiency: Let the IRS, Not Courts, Handle Day-To-Day Tax Collection

The Dalton standard of review benefits the tax system because it promotes two types of efficiency: collection efficiency and judicial efficiency. See infra notes 127–76 and accompanying text (discussing benefits of deferential review of IRS decisions).


125. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 159 (commenting that IRS does not abuse its discretion if it reasonably determines taxpayer can pay more than offer amount). If the valuable Property is included in the amount the Daltons could reasonably pay, the Daltons $10,000 offer is much lower than what they could pay. See id. (noting IRS acted within its discretion by rejecting Daltons’ offer).

126. For a discussion of how de novo review of evidence, paired with abuse of discretion review of final decisions, allows courts to substitute their judgment for the IRS’s, see supra notes 58–59 and accompanying text.

127. For a discussion of the reasons the Dalton standard benefits the tax system, see infra notes 131–76 and accompanying text.

128. For a discussion of how the Dalton standard promotes efficiency, see infra notes 131–52 and accompanying text.

129. For a discussion of how the Dalton standard encourages fairness in tax collection, see infra notes 153–62 and accompanying text.

130. For a discussion of why the Dalton standard is consistent with the purpose of CDP, see infra notes 163–76 and accompanying text. 
First, the standard increases efficiency in tax collection for both the government and taxpayers because it reduces delay. Second, the standard increases efficiency for courts by entrusting the day-to-day collection responsibilities to the IRS.

**Collection Efficiency: How Dalton’s Deferential Standard Reduces Collection Costs**

A de novo review of subsidiary determinations would result in delayed collection, costing both taxpayers and the government. For example, in *Dalton*, if the court performed a de novo review of the ownership issue and found that the taxpayer owned the property, the IRS would need to re-litigate the issue in another proceeding with the trust. Giving taxpayers such as the Daltons a second "bite at the cherry" through de novo review further delays collection because of the lengthy nature of adjudicating issues in court. CDP cases already represent one of the most litigated issues in tax court, and judicial review that potentially creates more litigation only further burdens the IRS.

Collection that is further delayed through additional layers of judicial review also costs the government money because of the decreased likelihood of collection.

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131. For a discussion of how the Dalton standard enhances efficiency in the tax collection system, see infra notes 134–52 and accompanying text.

132. For a discussion of how the Dalton standard of review reduces delay and increases efficiency for taxpayers and the government, see infra notes 134–44 and accompanying text.

133. For a discussion of how the Dalton standard of review increases judicial efficiency, see infra notes 145–52 and accompanying text.

134. For a discussion of how de novo review of subsidiary determinations delays collection and how that costs taxpayers and the government, see infra notes 135–44 and accompanying text.

135. See *Dalton v. Comm’r*, 682 F.3d 149, 156 (1st Cir. 2012) (explaining that de novo review would give Daltons multiple opportunities to contest ownership issue).

136. See id. ("Such a duplication of effort would both undermine the significant public interest in the speedy and efficient resolution of disputes and open the door to inconsistent decisions.").

137. Id. See also I.R.C. § 6330(e)(1) (2006) (suspending collection during CDP hearing and ensuing appeals pending). Resolving CDP cases in court can take up to “300–400 days or more.” Bryan T. Camp, *The Costs of CDP*, 105 TAX NOTES 1445, 1446 (2004) (analyzing sample of Tax Court cases to determine length of time between CDP notice and final court decision). In *Dalton*, the IRS first issued a CDP notice in 2004; the final court decision was filed in 2012. See *Dalton*, 682 F.3d at 153 (detailing history of case and notice of intent to levy sent in 2004). The original tax liability was from 1996. See id. (explaining that tax liability increased with accrued interest).

138. See 2011 TAXPAYER ADVOCATE REPORT, supra note 14, at 619 ("Since 2005, CDP has been one of the federal tax issues most frequently litigated in the federal courts . . ."); FY 2013 BUDGET, supra note 14, at 9 (requesting over $4.8 billion for enforcement activities).
hood of collection the longer the process is prolonged. A de novo review of subsidiary determinations could add years in litigation before a final court decision. Those years of litigation increase the chance that, even if the IRS eventually proves its collection action was reasonable, it could collect nothing.

Delay also hurts the delinquent taxpayer because of accumulated interest and penalties that must be paid if the IRS eventually wins. In some cases, the accumulated interest can exceed the original tax liability. A de novo standard of review that encourages more litigation and delay could lead to taxpayers unnecessarily owing more money to the government.

b. Judicial Efficiency: Easing the Burden on the Tax Court’s Already Heavy Docket

A deferential review of subsidiary determinations promotes efficiency because it allows for minimal court interference in tax collection. A de novo review of IRS subsidiary determinations would place an even higher hurdle on collecting taxes, risking courts becoming “involved on a daily basis with tax enforcement details that judges are neither qualified, nor have the time, to administer.” CDP cases already clog the Tax Court’s

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140. For a discussion of how de novo review adds time to CDP cases, see supra note 137 and accompanying text.


142. See Camp, Failure of Adversarial Process, supra note 139, at 105 (“For every day that taxpayers delay collection, they owe additional interest and possible penalties on their taxes.”); see also Dalton, 682 F.3d at 153 (noting interest accumulation on original tax liability).

143. See Camp, Failure of Adversarial Process, supra note 139, at 105 (commenting that National Taxpayer Advocate has noted “accumulation of interest and penalties on those taxpayer accounts not resolved during the Notice stage will often equal or exceed the original delinquencies”).

144. See id. (describing that extended CDP process leads most taxpayers “further and further into debt”).

145. See Cords, Administrative Law, supra note 10, at 464 (“Significant limits on judicial interference with tax collection are necessary to prevent the tax collection system from screeching to a halt.”).

146. Living Care Alts. of Utica, Inc. v. United States, 411 F.3d 621, 631 (6th Cir. 2005). A de novo review of subsidiary determinations would create the same judicial inefficiencies as the Robinette de novo scope of review that allows the court to consider new evidence during appellate review because both standards require courts to substitute their judgment for the IRS and become the primary collection decision-maker. See Lane, supra note 16, at 160 (noting de novo scope of review on appeal would “require an enormous amount of time”). Lane argues that “the Tax Court simply does not have the time, resources, or energy to admit new evidence
docket. 147 A more burdensome review is inefficient because it diverts limited court resources away from other cases. 148

In addition to the increased burden on scarce judicial resources, a de novo standard of review would shift tax collection decisions away from the experts, the IRS, and to the judiciary. 149 A de novo review of subsidiary determinations would require the courts to substitute their judgment for the IRS’s. 150 The IRS is best suited to make decisions about the most efficient and effective way to collect taxes because it has resources and expertise that the judiciary does not, such as the ability to analyze and verify a taxpayer’s information. 151 Accordingly, judicial review should give deference to the IRS’s judgments and expertise. 152

2. Fairness: Applying the Principle of Horizontal Equity to CDP’s Standard of Review

Dalton’s deferential standard of review of subsidiary determinations promotes horizontal equity in tax collection because it discourages tax evasion. 153 A tax system with horizontal equity requires that similarly situated
taxpayers be treated the same.154 Allowing de novo review of subsidiary determinations could lead to similarly situated taxpayers having different tax burdens, depending on whether a taxpayer has “the time, energy, and persistence to fight the Service into submission.”155 Delinquent taxpayers are given favorable treatment with de novo review because of their ability to further delay reasonable collection actions, while compliant taxpayers pay their taxes on time and in full.156 A delinquent taxpayer that can extend court review through a de novo examination of subsidiary determinations can delay paying a tax liability, leaving compliant taxpayers to foot the bill.157

A de novo standard of review for subsidiary determinations could also encourage taxpayers to practice tax evasion, further slowing collection and creating inequity in the tax system.158 Allowing courts to second-guess the IRS through de novo review of subsidiary determinations could lead to the

154. For a discussion of the concept of horizontal equity, see supra note 11. 155. Lane, supra note 16, at 171. Lane argues that an expanded scope of review would lead to more taxpayers trying to evade taxes, but the same logic applies to an expanded review of subsidiary determinations because both situations allow the Tax Court to substitute its judgment for the IRS. See id. (“[T]he system will operate rewarding those who are less-honest and willing to fight, while punishing those who are more-honest or less inclined to fight.”). Lane notes that compliant taxpayers are hurt by delinquent taxpayers in two ways: first, they pay their fair share while delinquent taxpayers do not; second, as a result of increasing delinquency, taxes are likely to increase because of the inability to collect revenues. See id. at 171–72 (arguing de novo scope of review would also “significantly drive-up overall costs of collecting taxes by increasing the Service’s time spent litigating cases”). 156. See Camp, Failure of Adversarial Process, supra note 139, at 110 (arguing against CDP partly because of a “won’t pay” taxpayer’s ability to delay collection “at the expense of compliant taxpayers”). 157. See Lane, supra note 16, at 171 (describing unfairness to honest taxpayers who “not only pay their current fair-share, but face increasing tax hikes as a result of tax increases because of the system’s inability to collect sufficient revenues”); see also 2006 TAXPAYER ADVOCATE REPORT, supra note 2, at 6 (describing “extraordinary burden” delinquent taxpayers place on compliant taxpayers because of non-payment of validly owed taxes). 158. See Lane, supra note 16, at 171 (discussing possible “chilling effect of scrutiny” and possibility it could “increase the number of individuals who practice tax evasion, and may further embolden them to continue evading after realizing the Service is less likely to pursue them”). One commentator estimates frivolous claims already represented at least one-third of CDP cases. See Camp, Failure of Adversarial Process, supra note 139, at 116 (examining select CDP appeals and noting early on CDP was “a ‘boon to tax protestors and a pain to everyone else’” (quoting Bryan T. Camp, Tax Administration as Inquisitorial Process and the Partial Paradigm Shift in the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, 56 FLA. L. REV. 1, 122 (2004))). Professor Camp noted that frivolous claims decreased with more court-imposed sanctions. See id. (noting direct correlation between lower frivolous claims and increased sanctions); see also Nick A. Zotos, Service Collection Abuse of Discretion: What Is the Appropriate Standard of Review and Scope of the Record in Collection Due Process Appeals?, 62 TAX L. 223, 237 (2008) (noting IRS can assess $5,000 penalty for frivolous arguments and Tax Court can assess $25,000 penalty). Zotos notes that “the Tax Court has demonstrated an increased willingness to impose sanctions as a means of dealing with frivolous claims.” Id.
IRS settling more cases before court review. In turn, taxpayers would then be encouraged to avoid paying taxes, fight the IRS through CDP, and hope to secure a lower tax liability through an OIC. Taxpayers might sense unfairness in a system that allows some to avoid liabilities through CDP, and those individuals are then less likely to comply with tax laws in the future. Ultimately, if courts allowed a de novo review of subsidiary determinations, compliant taxpayers would lose while delinquent taxpayers would win—the definition of unfairness.

3. Sticking to the Point: De Novo Review of Subsidiary Determinations Is Inconsistent with the Purpose of CDP

Judicial review is a critical part of the CDP regime because CDP is intended to ensure the IRS’s collection actions are reasonable through third party oversight. To be consistent with CDP’s purpose, courts only need to decide whether the IRS’s collection action is reasonable, not neces-

159. See Lane, supra note 16, at 171 (arguing judicial substitution of judgment will result in more settlements because IRS “will become more afraid of close scrutiny”).

160. See id. (commenting that IRS “will likely try to settle more CDP cases through OIC’s that are substantially inadequate to the tax liability actually owed” if judges can substitute judgment in place of IRS). This hypothesis is not theoretical: if the Tax Court had its way with de novo review of subsidiary determinations, this would have been the exact result in the Dalton case. See Dalton v. Comm’r, 682 F.3d 149, 153 (1st Cir. 2012) (noting taxpayers offered to settle tax debt for just $10,000 of $400,000).

161. See Johnson, supra note 14, at 1020–21 (showing decreases in IRS enforcement activity leads to decrease in compliance rate and arguing for increased IRS budget); Dan M. Kahan, Signaling or Reciprocating? A Response to Eric Posner’s Law and Social Norms, 36 U. RICHL. L. REV. 367, 578–80 (2002) (discussing how awareness of others cheating on taxes affects compliance rates). Professor Kahan details a study by the Minnesota Department of Revenue in which letters were sent to taxpayers telling them that compliance rates were higher than public perception. See id. at 380 (using study as example to show taxpayer trust in system correlates to higher compliance rate). Taxpayers who received the letter “reported more income and claimed fewer deductions than did individuals in a control group.” Id. (“[S]imply advising taxpayers that others were inclined to comply was more cost-effective than the threat of an audit!”). It follows that a public perception of decreased compliance and low trust in the system would result in a higher rate of non-compliance among taxpayers. See id.

162. For a discussion of how de novo review of subsidiary determinations benefits delinquent taxpayers while harming compliant taxpayers, see supra notes 153–61 and accompanying text.

163. See Book, supra note 16, at 1195–96 (arguing introduction of new evidence during CDP appeal allows “judicial substitution of judgment, rather than a mechanism for external control of agency practice—the very rationale for CDP in the first place”); see also Leslie Book, A Response To Professor Camp: The Importance of Oversight, 84 IND. L.J. SUPPLEMENT 63, 75 (2009) (defending judicial review in CDP as “important safety valve” because “CDP’s limited review has served its intended oversight function of limited aspects of the collection process, and correct for egregious agency error”).
essarily whether it is "correct." Abuse of discretion review is intended to ensure results are not arbitrary, while de novo review is intended to reach the correct result. A de novo review of subsidiary determinations would be inconsistent with the purpose of CDP because it would require courts to make individual determinations of correctness, while overturning potentially reasonable IRS collection actions. After thoughtful consideration, Congress rejected a version of CDP that allowed courts to perform a full de novo review of individual IRS collection actions. The Dalton court noted that the "CDP process presents no occasion for a reviewing court to demand incontrovertibly correct answers to subsidiary questions, whatever their nature." Id. at 159. The Tax Court traditionally functions as a trial court, not as an appellate court. See Book, supra note 16, at 1195–96 (explaining Tax Court's history as court of original jurisdiction and holding de novo trials in context of deficiencies cases to determine taxpayer's true liability). Because the Tax Court is accustomed to reviewing matters de novo in order to find the correct answer, it is not as familiar with true abuse of discretion review. See id. at 1196 (explaining Tax Court’s de novo record rule approach as “fail[ing] to appreciate that review of collection determinations is intended as a means to provide oversight to IRS activities and is not about identifying agency error on an individualized basis”); see also Cords, Administrative Law, supra note 10, at 463 (observing that “district courts have more experience conducting abuse of discretion review than does the Tax Court”). The Tax Court’s de novo approach in CDP review where abuse of discretion is appropriate fails to consider that different standards of review apply in different circumstances. See Cords, Administrative Law, supra note 10, at 463 (explaining Tax Court has justified its de novo approach in CDP cases by pointing to its approach in deficiency cases); Lane, supra note 16, at 168 (“While the motivation to ‘get the right answer’ may be noble . . . it likely is not what Congress intended for the Tax Court in reviewing CDP cases.”).

165. See Woodral v. Comm'r, 112 T.C. 19, 23 (1999) (describing abuse of discretion standard); Book, supra note 16, at 1196 (describing de novo review in CDP context as one in which “court is concerned with the right answer, regardless of the agency action preceding the court review”); Lane, supra note 16, at 168 (stating “purpose of a de novo review is to get to the right answer[,]” but that “it likely is not what Congress intended for the Tax Court in reviewing CDP cases.”); Richard H. W. Maloy, "Standards of Review”—Just a Tip of the Icicle, 77 U. DET. MERCY L. REV. 605, 609 (2000) (noting that de novo review is "intended to produce the correct substantive result").

166. See Book, supra note 16, at 1195 (arguing that limiting IRS’s ability to offer post-hearing justification for actions in de novo review would create incentives for IRS to act reasonably during administrative hearing). But see Eliza Mac Scheibel, Note, Mixing It Up: The Tax Court Pairs a De Novo Scope of Review with an Abuse of Discretion Standard of Review Under Section 6330(D) in Robinette v. Commissioner, 58 TAX LAW. 941, 953–54 (2005) (arguing de novo scope of review carries out purpose of CDP to protect taxpayers because limited scope of review would not be sufficient to curb abuse). For the argument that abuse of discretion review of subsidiary determinations is sufficient to protect taxpayers from IRS error, see infra notes 173–76 and accompanying text.

167. See Camp, Collection Context, supra note 38, at 975–76 (describing earlier version of CDP passed by Senate as having provisions that would make collection “full-blown shift to adversarial process and would have severely restricted IRS collection activity”). The provisions allowed taxpayers to obtain court review of “each and every collection decision made by the IRS in their individual case,” as well as “contest the merits of an assessment in all CDP hearings.” Id. at 975 (arguing these
court properly recognized that the deferential reasonableness review of subsidiary determinations carries out CDP’s purpose.168

While the Dalton standard will likely result in more courts affirming the IRS’s judgments, lopsided results would not mean the standard of review is ineffective.169 Although it seems counterintuitive, it would be beneficial to taxpayers as a whole if the IRS frequently prevailed on appeal because it would mean the IRS’s proposed collection action was reasonable—the entire purpose of CDP.170 There is also concern that a deferential review of subsidiary determinations could provide an incentive for the IRS to develop an insufficient record to increase the chances a reviewing court will affirm its determination.171 However, this concern is addressed by the Tax Court’s policy to remand cases where the administrative record is insufficient to review the IRS’s determination.172

provisions would undermine automatic nature of bulk collection and effectively abolish long-standing rule that taxpayers pay liability in full before contesting it). These provisions were even too extreme for the Clinton administration. See id. (describing argument against provisions was that they would effectively give taxpayers “multiple bites at the apple[,]” with apple being opportunity to contest tax liability). The Dalton court also expressed this concern about de novo review of subsidiary determinations, using a cherry metaphor instead of an apple. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 156 (“De novo review would also give the taxpayers two bites at the cherry.”).

168. See Dalton, 682 F.3d at 155 (“We conclude, therefore, that judicial review must be tailored to effecting the purpose of the CDP process; that is, to ensuring that the IRS’s determinations, whether of fact or of law, are not arbitrary.”); see also Murphy v. Comm’r, 469 F.3d 27, 32 (1st Cir. 2006) (declining to find abuse of discretion in order to avoid “transform[ing] CDP hearings from a shield against invasive government conduct into a taxpayer’s tool to delay the timely collection of delinquent tax liabilities by seeking endless extensions”); Olsen v. United States, 414 F.3d 144, 151 (1st Cir. 2005) (“While Congress clearly wanted to prevent mere bureaucratic harassment, we do not understand it to have intended to strip the IRS of effective and reasonable tax collection procedures.”).

169. See Zotos, supra note 158, at 228–29 (explaining high rate of success for IRS when its determinations are appealed); 2011 TAXPAYER ADVOCATE REPORT, supra note 14, at 624 (showing IRS success rate from 2003 through 2011, with lowest success rate for any year at 89% and highest success rate at 96%). For a discussion of why lopsided results would not necessarily show that the system is ineffective, see infra note 170 and accompanying text.

170. See Book, supra note 16, at 1205 (suggesting “success of [CDP] should not be based on the number of reversals . . . but rather on the broader effects that [CDP] would create, thereby improving IRS collection procedures”); Zotos, supra note 158, at 236 (examining reasons IRS wins majority of appeals and explaining one reason is IRS has “cleaned up its act so to speak, and the CDP provisions have been successful in preventing the very institutional abuses the statute was intended to prevent”).

171. See, e.g., Dalton v. Comm’r, 135 T.C. 393, 423 n.30 (2010) (acknowledging taxpayer’s argument that IRS purposely failed to create sufficient administrative record but ruling for taxpayer on other grounds), rev’d, 682 F.3d 149 (1st Cir. 2012).

172. See Robinette v. Comm’r, 123 T.C. 85, 126 (2004) (“In the event the administrative record of such an informal proceeding is insufficiently developed, ‘the proper course, except in rare circumstances, is to remand to the agency for additional investigation or explanation.’” (quoting Fla. Power & Light Co. v. Lo-
Supporters of de novo review could argue the deferential Dalton standard does not sufficiently ensure that the IRS’s collection actions are reasonable.173 Put another way, the Dalton standard of review is only appropriate if the risk of IRS error is low and no other relief is available for the taxpayer.174 However, the Dalton standard properly protects taxpayers from IRS abuse because it catches egregious agency errors while allowing the IRS to carry out its collection function without unnecessary intrusion.175 Further, as the Dalton court noted, there are usually alternative avenues of relief available to taxpayers when a CDP hearing is inadequate.176

V. CONCLUSION

At the end of fiscal year 2011, the IRS Office of Appeals had over 32,000 CDP cases pending before it.177 The question of the proper standard, 470 U.S. 729, 744 (1985)); Lane, supra note 16, at 162 (detailing “well-established” rule that remand back to IRS is appropriate if record is insufficiently developed). But see Carlton M. Smith, The Tax Court Keeps Growing Its Collection Due Process Powers, TAX NOTES TODAY, Nov. 17, 2011, at 222–11 (questioning whether Tax Court has power to remand CDP cases and arguing Tax Court has inherent power to order IRS to accept OIC).

173. See Zotos, supra note 158, at 237–38 (questioning whether abuse of discretion is proper standard of review in CDP cases).

174. See, e.g., Smith, supra note 172 (“A robust Tax Court review proceeding is necessary to effectuate what I believe was Congress’s intent in setting up the CDP in the first place—preventing the IRS from overreaching in the collection process.”).

175. See Cords, Administrative Law, supra note 10, at 468–69 (arguing “de novo review is not necessary to protect taxpayers” in collection decisions); Zotos, supra note 158, at 237–38 (arguing that abuse of discretion standard protects against “overreaching Service practices while at the same time providing [IRS] agents with the discretion necessary to carry out their day-to-day functions, which is precisely the result the statute was intended to produce”). Professor Cords argues that de novo review would shift some tax collection decisions to the Tax Court, “which does not have the experience or expertise to efficiently make these decisions.” See Cords, Administrative Law, supra note 10, at 468 (arguing shift of decision making power to Tax Court would “hamper the functioning of the tax collection system”); see also Book, supra note 16, at 1203 (arguing “even highly deferential judicial review of agency action provides incentives for better agency practice, increases public confidence in agency practice, and is an integral part of our system of checks and balances . . . .”).

176. See Dalton v. Comm’r, 682 F.3d 149, 156 n.4 (1st Cir. 2012) (noting “deferential standard of review by no means leaves a taxpayer at the mercy of the IRS”). The Dalton court notes that the Daltons could seek a court order to remove the attachment of the Property, or the trust itself could attempt to remove the attachment through either wrongful levy or quiet title actions. See id. (“There are almost always other legal channels through which a taxpayer may develop a complete record and secure a definitive legal ruling on a contested point of law or fact.”).

177. See SOI Tax Stats—Appeals Workload, By Type of Case, I.R.S., http://www.irs.gov/uac/SOI-Tax-Stats—Appeals-Workload-by-Type-of-Case-IRS-Data-Book-Table-21 (last updated Aug. 3, 2012) (providing IRS statistics for Appeals Office workload by year). The source of potential CDP cases is also massive: only approximately 1.2% of taxpayers that receive a CDP notice request a hearing. See

https://digitalcommons.law.villanova.edu/vlr/vol58/iss2/2
Standard of review of subsidiary determinations made during a CDP hearing is likely to arise again because a significant number of CDP cases are appealed to the Tax Court. The Tax Court is unlikely to apply Dalton’s customized standard of review in future cases that are not appealable to the First Circuit because of the Golsen rule. Therefore, Congress should amend the CDP statutes to codify Dalton’s customized standard of review. If Congress does not amend CDP, other circuits should adopt the Dalton standard because of its benefits in providing tax efficiency, tax fairness, and consistency with the purpose of CDP. In the current period of rising budget deficits, courts should not make it more difficult for the IRS to collect taxes when it uses reasonable methods.


178. See 2011 Taxpayer Advocate Report, supra note 14, at 619 (identifying CDP appeals as one of most litigated issues in Tax Court since its inception).

179. See, e.g., Klingenberg v. Comm’r, 102 T.C.M. (CCH) 398, 401 (2011) (describing Tax Court’s willingness to follow Robinette’s de novo scope of review rule, despite being previously overturned by another circuit court, because of adherence to Golsen rule). Under the Golsen rule, the Tax Court will only be bound by the Dalton decision in cases appealable to the First Circuit and is free to apply its de novo review of subsidiary determinations in the other circuits. See Golsen v. Comm’r, 54 T.C. 742, 757 (1970) (holding Tax Court follows law of circuit to which case is appealable). For a further discussion of the Golsen rule, see supra note 61 and accompanying text.

180. See Cords, Scope and Nature of Judicial Review, supra note 124, at 1057 (“Congressional clarification of the CDP provisions relating to judicial review is essential. . . . [T]he CDP provisions need to make clear exactly what standards the courts are to apply to CDP appeals, and in which contexts.”).

181. For a discussion of the benefits the Dalton standard provides, see supra notes 127–76 and accompanying text.

182. For a discussion of the rising budget deficit and how increased tax collection decreases the deficit, see supra note 6 and accompanying text.
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