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Forget Trump's Presidential Tax Returns

Donald Trump once offered \$5 million for President Obama's birth certificate. More recently, a [Republican offered \\$5 million for Donald Trump's tax returns](#). That didn't work either. For a time, there was even a legislative attack on Trump. The Presidential Tax Transparency [bill](#) did not pass. If it had, it would have required Trump to hand over his tax returns. And if Trump refused, the U.S. Treasury Secretary would have handed them over.

How much does the American public really care about Trump's tax returns? He is running for President, so the conventional answer is that [Trump should release them](#). There is no legal requirement that he do so, and Trump breaks more than a few rules. That is part of his appeal to his core supporters. Still, some people care a lot. [Warren Buffett challenged Trump: I'll show my tax returns if you'll show yours](#). [Hillary Clinton](#) and Tim Kaine have attacked in force. But Trump's supporters probably do not care in large part.



Appearing to ignore the audit, Trump has tied his tax returns to Hillary Clinton's missing emails. One Trump [interview](#) said he did not plan to release his tax returns before the general election. Later, he said he would [release the tax returns after his audit](#). But there seems little incentive for him to do it now, unless he could swap them for Hillary Clinton's emails.

Trump is unapologetic about paying as little in taxes as he can. Warren Buffett agrees with this mantra. At every turn, Trump calls out the wasteful spending that is rampant in government. For example, Trump [highlighted the \\$4 billion in IRS refunds to illegals](#), and many other abuses. President Trump would surely not follow in the footsteps of [the IRS, encouraging illegals to steal Social Security Numbers](#).

Trump breaks with many traditions, including by not releasing his tax returns. Many tax professionals agree that releasing returns under audit is not wise. Everyone would pick through them mercilessly, giving the IRS ideas. Even tax returns that are *not* under audit could be impacted. Someone with complex returns is likely to have carryover items from one year to the next. Even closed years can be impacted.

Yet, some people have said that Trump's tax returns are more important than primary votes. Before the Republican Convention, some people argued that convention [delegates should abstain from voting](#) if Trump failed to produce his tax returns. Others have warned that if Trump fails to hand over his returns, someone (at the IRS or elsewhere) will leak them. That would be a crime. Trump has already suggested that the IRS *might* be targeting him with audits. Just imagine his attack on the IRS if an IRS surrogate released his returns.

Mr. Trump is not the only one this election season to get pilloried over tax returns. Bernie Sanders finally endorsed Hillary, but don't forget that Hillary badgered him relentlessly about transparency. He finally managed to [release at least his 2014 tax return](#), but it was slow in coming. Trump said in [an interview](#) that he did not plan to release his returns before the general election. But later he said that he would [release the tax returns after his audit](#). And now the Clinton emails could motivate him. But do Trump supporters really care about the really huge returns? Not hardly.

For alerts to future tax articles, email me at Wood@WoodLLP.com. This discussion is not legal advice.