

OPINION

Tax lawyer: Trump should keep tax returns private

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Until the law requires tax disclosures of candidates or the courts mandate it, the president should stand his ground: Opposing view

Like MAGA hats and the border wall, President Donald Trump's tax returns are a flashpoint, but he should keep them private until the courts order otherwise. As a lawyer for clients facing tax problems, I find it hard to conjure a tax reason for the president to reveal his returns for dissection.

Political considerations may cut the same way. Candidate Trump flouted tradition by refusing to release his returns, and remarkably was still elected, so why disclose them now?

Any scrutiny he faced as a candidate pales with today's feeding frenzy. Trump's tax returns would be pilloried by armies of experts and conspiracy theorists. Even if his storied audit is over, congressional or public viewing could change that. The president's tax returns could become the new Mueller investigation.

Trump's returns may reflect considerable income and aggressive tax maneuvers. Would haters or fans expect anything less? Our tax laws are complex, and even media darlings such as Warren Buffett say they pay as little tax as legally allowed.

Taxes make a poor spectator sport, but many voters consider candidate tax disclosures essential badges of trust. They may be, but Trump surely lost those votes in 2016, and disclosing now will surely not win any for 2020.



President Donald Trump in the Roosevelt Room of the White House on April 12, 2019. (Photo: Evan Vucci/AP)

House Democrats want the returns, invoking a 1924 law they say is clear. Republicans say political motives taint the request, and a protracted court battle seems inevitable. There was never a legal impediment to the president voluntarily releasing his returns, but continuing to resist is unlikely to earn the president any more enemies. He might even lose loyalists by disclosing.

Many Americans believe that tax disclosures should be mandatory for candidates, a kind of public vetting of truth and citizenship. They may be right, but until the law requires it of candidates or the courts mandate disclosure, Trump should stand pat.

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