



Robert W. Wood

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WikiLeaks Won't Hack Trump Taxes After All, But Would Trump Sell Them?

Julian Assange told Bill Maher on HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher* that WikiLeaks was 'working on' hacking Donald Trump's tax returns. Then, shortly thereafter, [WikiLeaks denied it](#). Maher had testily accused Assange of not being even-handed, which may explain the WikiLeaks founder's comment about the long sought tax returns. There is still no suggestion that Trump will knuckle under, even after his stiff and belated [endorsement of House Speaker Paul Ryan](#), and his not quite apologetic [endorsement of Sen. John McCain](#).

Trump campaign chief Paul Manafort has said the candidate "will not be releasing" his taxes. Hillary and [Tim Kaine keep calling for Trump's taxes](#) despite the embarrassing hack of the Democratic Party that led to the resignation of [Debbie Wasserman Schultz](#). Meanwhile, George Will thinks Trump might be in bed with the Russians. Trump's careless suggestion—joke or not—that it would be good if Russian hackers pursue more Hillary emails, might invite just the kind of tit-for-tat hacking that Mr. Assange suggested.



Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks during a news conference at Trump National Doral, Wednesday, July 27, 2016, in Doral, Fla. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

Hillary's emails and Trump's taxes are two quite different things, of course, but transparency is transparency. Still, Trump shows no signs of handing them over. It is not legally required for him to release any tax returns, it is just traditional. And Trump is anything but traditional. Like Warren Buffett—who is certainly more beloved than Trump—the Donald claims to pay as little in taxes as he can. One reason is wasteful government spending, he suggests. His main excuse is still the ongoing tax audit, though at times he has also said it was none of anyone's business.

Most tax lawyers have agreed that from a tax viewpoint, Trump should not release the returns until his audit has been completely concluded. But politics has very different rules, and Trump is running for President. Given Trump's more than unique style, he seems better off with the constant if critical buzz than with releasing his coveted tax returns. Many will not vote for him without them. But as Trump continues to break the mold, some clearly will, and he would probably lose many more votes by releasing them. The man who [offered \\$5 million for his tax returns](#) failed, and so far, the Presidential Tax Transparency [bill](#) to require Trump to hand over his tax returns has not passed.

Besides, Trump's [tax returns are no holy grail](#), and might not tell us much we do not already know. We know he is rich, but perhaps not as rich as he keeps trying to portray. He says he is generous, but what if he turns out to be stingy with charities? Or, what if as Ted Cruz intimated, he has mafia connections. Or, as George Will suggested, what if he is in bed with the Russians?

Americans tend to admire people who break the mold, even if we do not always like them. Yet even if you respect Trump's choice not to hand them over, there is a growing almost *prurient* interest in these tax returns. Julian Assange probably knows that. As for Mr. Trump, if he loses the election, maybe he will make a book of his returns and sell it. How about, *The Art of the Tax Deal*?

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