

## Meckler: If Congress Can Demand Trump's Tax Returns, Expect Them To Weaponize That Power

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Liberals have been wringing their hands since the 2016 presidential campaign over President Trump's refusal to release his tax returns. Now, Democrats in Congress want to use a 1924 law to force his hand, which they can also use against any American.

Some of this drama unfolded during a two-hour hearing on Capitol Hill last week, where Republican lawmakers grilled tax experts about whether the House tax-writing committee can simply demand access to confidential financial documents.

You can almost hear the lament in the words of the director of the Tax History Project, Joe Thorndike. "I am concerned that it may be completely broken," he said, over Trump's refusal. "Then we can't really rely on a tradition to get the job done." Note that this is "tradition," not law.

It started with Jimmy Carter, who voluntarily shared his tax returns with the public in a move toward transparency after Richard Nixon's many scandals. Since then, most presidents have followed suit. Though presidents are not required to do so, tradition, public demand, and fear of political ramifications usually provide ample motivation. Trump, impervious to normal pressures, has not released his returns. Consequently, liberals are apoplectic and willing to do anything to make him comply.

First, they tried public shaming. Liberal politicians and activists have been calling him out on social media, trying to build enough public momentum to tsk-tsk-tsk him into action.

Since that won't work, Democrats inserted a provision in their ethics reform legislation — H.R. 1 — that would require the president (and all future presidential candidates) to release ten years of tax returns. I'll keep my powder dry on the merits of this particular legislation, but it is obviously within their legislative power to do so. This is the appropriate course to fix the perceived problem.

But their latest tactic ominously threatens to use the power of the police state to demand access. In fact, George Yin, a professor from the University of Virginia School of Law, told the committee they have the absolute right to get any tax payer's return for any reason. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal agreed.

If that doesn't make your hair stand on end, you've never read Orwell's 1984. Or, maybe you aren't familiar with the Democrats' admission of weaponizing the IRS against their political enemies. Under President Obama's administration during the run-up to the 2012 election, the IRS illegally singled out patriotic and tea party groups by using unfair delaying tactics and

harassment. In fact, my organization provided the funding for groups to sue the IRS, which was forced to settle the litigation for almost \$4 million. So we know first-hand about Democrats weaponizing the IRS against private citizens.

Can you imagine the damage these partisans would do if they began demanding tax information from conservative organizations, donors, activists, and other political leaders? Their requests require no notice to taxpayers. It's all done in secret.

This tactic is a clear violation of the fundamental right to privacy and sets a dangerous precedent for all of us. The chairman of Ways and Means should have no right to get our private tax returns, and certainly not without cause, without due process, and without notifying us first. If they are able to obtain the tax returns of the president of the United States, "regular Americans" have no chance.

I have been told by insiders that this sordid behavior is likely already under way. Have they requested my returns? How about those of the Heritage Foundation or Cato Institute? How about large Republican donors? How about your return? Basic notions of privacy mean we have a right to know. And basic notions of self-governance mean that we have a right to stop this abuse now.

The chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee should assure the American people that his committee will not request the tax returns of any private citizens or organizations. Further, Congress should take all actions necessary to repudiate this abusive authority. Everyone — from the president to you and me — should push back against this latest outrage that moves us closer to a police state.