

## The Crusade for Trump's Tax Returns Turns McCarthyist

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House Democrats have pulled out every stop trying to get six years' worth of President Trump's tax returns. Their efforts have been relentless and should alarm every American who cares about the security and privacy of their own tax documents and the personal information they contain.

Let's start with some facts. During the February 7, 2019 hearing that House Ways and Means Committee Democrats held on Trump's tax returns, the witness list contained zero former IRS commissioners. That was the first indication that Democrats were not interested in actually learning whether or not the IRS had found any evidence of tax fraud by Trump, which might have led to a criminal referral to the Justice Department. Indeed, to date, no former IRS official with knowledge of Trump's finances has come forward to accuse the president of tax fraud or evasion.

No experts from the privacy and civil liberties communities were invited to the February 9 hearing either. That's significant because if anyone familiar with the Lois Lerner episode from Barack Obama's presidency had been in attendance, committee members would have been reminded that IRS officials have on their own gone after groups across the political spectrum for wholly inappropriate reasons. And who says this congressional quest for individual tax returns will stop at the presidential level?

Indeed, there is a well-documented history of congressional committees using tax return data for political witch hunts.

On July 14, 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7933-A, which gave the Dies Committee—predecessor to the infamous House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)—access to the tax returns of individuals, groups, and businesses that the committee suspected of having communist connections. The committee chairman, Democrat Martin Dies of Texas, misused that authority to hound individuals and groups that he alleged—never with credible documentary evidence—to be in league with Soviet Russia. Dies went so far in October 1939 to order his investigators to raid the offices of the League for Peace and Democracy to seize not only tax information but membership and contributor rolls. He later published the names of 600 federal employees who were League members.

Between 1938 and 1975 (when it was finally abolished by Congress), HUAC either attempted to obtain or actually utilized sensitive personal information on American citizens to conduct anti-communist persecutions that destroyed the professional and personal lives of thousands of citizens. The irony is that the current chairman of the Ways and Means Oversight subcommittee,

civil rights veteran Congressman John Lewis, was one of those targeted for political repression by the federal government.

Clearly, John Lewis is not an evil man; he's one of the kindest, most decent public servants I encountered during my decade as a House staffer. But he and his colleagues are falling into the same pit of unhinged antipathy towards President Trump that Gingrich- and later-era Republicans fell into vis-a-vis President Bill Clinton. Republicans paid a political price for their irrational hatred and partisan pursuit of Clinton. Now Democrats are positioning themselves for the same kind of fall, all while setting a dangerous and civil liberties-threatening precedent.

No IRS official, current or former, has surfaced to claim that Trump has cheated or is cheating on his taxes. If Democrats doubt the integrity of the career government employees responsible for evaluating Trump's finances, then they should identify and subpoena them. To date, they have not done so, which leads me to believe that this is a purely political vendetta against a president viscerally hated by the opposing party.

No chief executive or congressional committee should have the power to use the tax returns of individuals for partisan or political purposes—ever. As I see it, there's only one way to ensure that never happens: eliminate the personal income tax and replace it with a national sales tax. Experts such as Dean Stansel, Stephen Moore, and David Burton and Dan Mastromarco have made this case for over 20 years. The abuses cited above—from the Dies Committee to the Lois Lerner/IRS episode—make the move all the more urgent today.

Any legislation for this switchover should include a provision directing the IRS to purge all IT systems of individual taxpayer info, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) should be tasked with conducting a back-end audit to ensure that all individual taxpayer data has been destroyed. Doing so would make sure the government never harbors tax information that could be misused in the first place, a goal all of us should share.

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