

Trump's tax returns still an obsession for Pascrell



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In July, at age 83, U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr. was rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital in downtown Paterson, where doctors cracked open his chest and saved his life with bypass surgery.

Three months later, Pascrell is not just back in action, but sounds like an excited teenager the night before the big game.

Sure, give the doctors some credit. But what's got Pascrell dancing is the New York Times investigation detailing the sleazy stunts that President Donald Trump used to avoid paying his fair share of taxes, to enrich himself and his family, and to build a myth of himself as a tycoon.

That's just what Pascrell, D-9th Dist., has been saying for years, while serving as point-man in the Democrats' effort to force Trump to release his returns.

And now, he says, he has an even deeper worry: Trump's enormous personal debt

of more than \$400 million, to parties unknown, that would come due during a second term. That could leave him vulnerable to blackmail and other pressure tactics.

"How has he been compromised because of that debt?" Pascrell asks. "In Russia they have a term for it — Kompromat," he says. "I'm going to be relentless about this. I'm going to use my chairmanship aggressively."

Those personal loans are the most important part of this story, and it often escapes notice, because it's so infuriating and easy to understand that we have a president who would cheat on his taxes and use his office to enrich himself and his family.

Bad as that is, it come as no surprise. Grifters are gonna grift, and even make baby grifters.

The scary part is that \$421 million in

loans that Trump has personally guaranteed, and which come due during the next four years. The Times did not say who holds that debt, and Pascrell's office doesn't know either.

Trump's biggest creditor is Deutsche Bank, but it's not clear if the bank is holding these particular loans. And a bank could act as a middleman in any case, while keeping the real source of the money secret. That's one reason that Pascrell is still pressing for release of Trump's full tax returns, which may offer some answers.

"Can we figure out if this is money laundering?" said one source in Pascrell's office.

To put it bluntly: Is Vladimir Putin holding this string? Does Trump cozy up to authoritarian rulers because one or more of them has a piece of this loan?

David Ignatius, a foreign affairs columnist for the Washington Post, was told

by "top former intelligence officials" that Trump would be unlikely to get security clearance if he weren't president, given the risk that foreign players could have powerful leverage over him.

Voters, he argues, should ask themselves this question: "Is this man vulnerable to foreign pressure because of his large debts coming due over the next four years?"

For Pascrell, getting Trump's tax returns has been an obsession since 2016. Pascrell's staff has assembled a list of 38 specific actions he's taken to force the issue, like writing letters, holding hearings, and passing resolutions.

The Times investigation pushed open new doors after all this time, turbo-charging Pascrell's passions just as he takes over as chairman of the key sub-

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mittee looking into this issue, the oversight subcommittee of the powerful Ways & Means committee.

On Thursday, he sent out a tweet that sounds like he was shadow-boxing when he wrote it. "Pascrellian. Pas-krel-ien. Adjective. "Pugilistic in nature; suffers no fools and corrupt actors; irascible to disrespect, real and perceived." Synonym: New Jerseyan."

He plans hearings within the next few weeks and has invited the head of the Internal Revenue Service, Charles Rettig, to testify. Fat chance that he'll show up and try to explain why the IRS has taken a decade to audit Trump's returns, giving him a fake excuse to hold them back.

"Either the IRS is asleep at the wheel, or they don't have enough people to uncover the fraud," Pascrell says. "If I'm working out in Montana or something, I'd have to say I've been had, that this guy has taken me for four years and hasn't paid his share. What has the IRS done about this?"

Good question, but he knows the answer. Republicans have gutted the IRS, slashing its enforcement budget by nearly 40 percent over the last decade, as the number of returns grew by 10 percent. The number of audits of people reporting incomes of \$10 million or more has dropped by about three-fourths, according to IRS data. For rich grifters like Trump, it's party time.

We may be in the final weeks of our torment with this impostor as our president. But you never know, as we found out in 2016.

So, I'm glad Pascrell has lost none of his fire, even in his ninth decade, even with fresh scars on his chest. As long as we have a president like Trump, I'm beyond grateful for pit bulls like Pascrell



U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr. *Star-Ledger file*

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