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Bills require presidential candidates to release tax returns

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Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) - Lawmakers in Hawaii and several other states want to prevent presidential candidates from appearing on their states' ballots unless the candidates release their tax returns.

They're responding to President-elect Donald Trump's decision to not release his tax returns during the presidential campaign, breaking decades of precedent.

The Hawaii bill would require candidates to release five years of federal and state tax returns to qualify for the ballot, state Rep. Chris Lee said Wednesday. Similar proposals are circulating in California, Massachusetts, New Mexico and the District of Columbia.

"It's a reasonable step since every modern president has released their tax returns and put their assets into a blind trust to make sure the only interest they have is the interest of our country and its people," Lee said. "I think we're in a very dangerous climate in which that could change."

Lee consulted with lawyers who assured him it's legal, and if the bill passes it will undergo a thorough review from the state attorney general, he said.

Lee is still working out details on the Hawaii bill, but he plans to include a way to make the tax returns public. In the Massachusetts bill, that state's Secretary of State would be required to make the tax returns public within a month of each vote.

"If even one or two states take action, it changes the game," Lee said.

Trump has interests in 500 companies in about 20 countries, according to a disclosure document released in May.

California state Sens. Scott Wiener and Mike McGuire are planning to introduce similar legislation, saying financial information should be made available to voters to build critical public trust.

A District of Columbia lawmaker plans to introduce a similar bill. The District's three electoral votes have gone to the Democratic candidate in every election since city residents were granted the right to vote for president in 1961.

Nationwide, about two-thirds of registered voters said it's somewhat or very important for presidential candidates to release their tax returns, according to an Associated Press-GfK poll in September.

Associated Press Writer Ben Nuckols contributed to this report from Washington.

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