

WHEN ONE MORMON GOSSIPS ABOUT ANOTHER MORMON NOT PAYING HIS TAXES

For the record, I think Mitt has multiple reasons to hide his tax returns. I think it's largely about what his returns would say about his business practices, it's partly about his tax shelters, and, one way or another, it's about his relative loyalty to his church and his country.

But here's a thought.

Harry Reid, Mormon, and Senator from Nevada, is the one leading the charge to return attention to Mitt's tax returns.

He attributes his claim that Mitt paid no taxes for ten years to someone who invested with Bain. Now he may know his purported Bain-related source because he travels the halls of power. But Bain has very close cultural ties to the Mormon Church—according to some, improperly so. Moreover, because Mitt and other Bain execs have given so much to the Mormon Church in the form of Bain stocks, high ranking Mormon insiders may have a better idea of what Bain Capital actually does—and how Mitt valued his holdings before he gave them to the Church—than most others.

So Reid may be calling out Mitt not just as a former boxer, but as someone who shares a very wealth-based and close knit faith with Mitt.

Add in the practice—which even an outsider like me saw when I lived in UT and worked for a predominantly Mormon company in the 1990s—of gossip about tithing, notably whether Mormon colleagues tithed pre- or post-tax. That's another reason why Reid may have a better sense of what Mitt's tax practices look like than DC pundits might guess on face value.

Finally, though, there's this. If one of the

reasons Mitt is hiding his tax returns does have to do with under-tithing (as the returns Mitt released may suggest), and not just his business practices and tax shelters, remember that both CO (2.15%) and especially NV (over 5%) have larger Mormon populations than average. Nate Silver considers NV the state with the biggest return on investment per voter (CO is 6th). These are lean Democratic states that Mitt might need to win if Obama's attacks on Bain outsourcing continue to turn the race in the manufacturing swing states (though if Mitt doesn't win FL and VA, it may be moot anyway). Driving down the Mormon enthusiasm for Mitt might be one way to boost Obama's chances.

This is obviously all speculation, as all discussions about Mitt's taxes are. But this comment, stated by one Mormon about another, could have different connotations among Mormon listeners than non-Mormon ones.

A month or so ago, [Harry Reid] said, a person who had invested with Bain Capital called his office.

"Harry, he didn't pay any taxes for 10 years," Reid recounted the person as saying.

"He didn't pay taxes for 10 years! Now, do I know that that's true? Well, I'm not certain," said Reid. "But obviously he can't release those tax returns. How would it look?"

This sounds like the kind of gossip even I would hear in UT. Was Mitt's source talking taxes? Or tithes?