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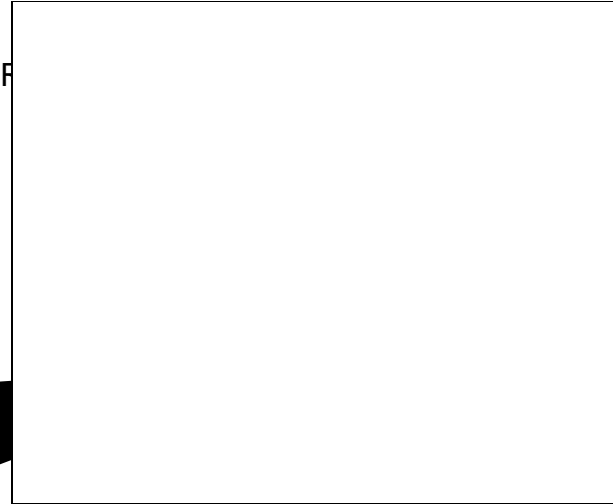
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firm Bain Capital where he bankrupted companies, cost thousands of American jobs and shipped others overseas all the while suggesting that his millions in profits went into Swiss or other offshore bank accounts to avoid paying income tax in the United States.

Obama has tied the two together and dared Romney to untie them by releasing the last decade's worth of tax returns.

The Republican has resisted, arguing that his returns from 2010 and 2011 are sufficient to let the American people know that he is a successful businessman and that he's paid his fair share of taxes.

He's losing the argument, though, just as Whitman, Rollins and I were losing it 19 years ago. Voter distrust of politicians runs deep and, propelled by heated campaign rhetoric, the "something to hide" argument finds a receptive audience, particularly when the debates involves loaded phrases like "Swiss bank accounts" or "tax havens in the Caymans" --- code words for tax cheat.

Leading Republicans, editorial writers, and even the conservative Bible National Review have urged Romney to release the returns, but to no avail. While Romney may hope that delay will make the issue fade, the life it's taken on can only be extinguished by public disclosure. Media appetites are whetted, not satisfied, by being denied information it wants.

Obama, his surrogates and the Super Pacs supporting him will continue to relentlessly

drive the issue. It turns the debate to what they want and keeps it away from what they don't want, just as the Florio campaign attempted in 1993.

The Whitmans ultimately recognized the peril of maintaining the no-release posture. The return was disclosed, revealing a one-time income spike. It turned out to be a dud, generating a one day story and disappearing. It was accomplished early enough in the process that Whitman could redirect the campaign debate to Florio's record, his tax increases and her proposal to cut income tax rates.

If Romney hopes to make headway attacking Obama's less than stellar stewardship of the American economy, he must put the tax return issue to rest; to, as consultants are fond of saying, "stop the bleeding."

Whitman defeated Florio in 1993 by an exceptionally thin margin of some 27,000 votes, becoming the first female Governor in the state's history. How many of those

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were influenced by the release of the disputed tax return is impossible to divine. And, there was no desire to find out.

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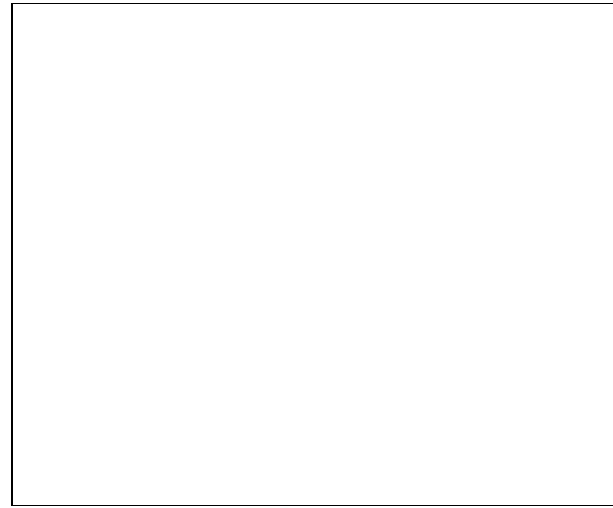
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