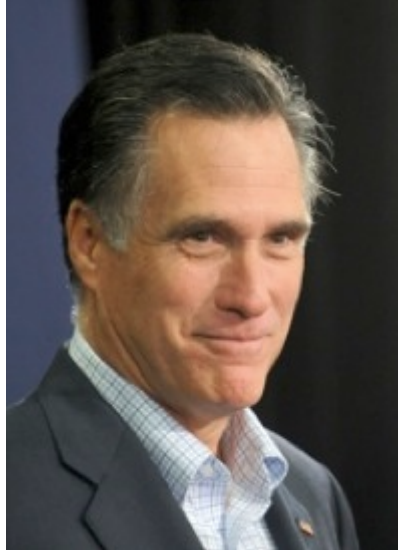




Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 26, 2011

Romney Admin. Destroyed Emails to Thwart Opposition Research

On November 17 the [Boston Globe](#) reported that at the end of 2006, just as Romney was leaving office and gearing up for his first presidential run, “11 of his top aides purchased their state-issued computer hard drives, and the Romney administration’s emails were all wiped from a server.” In addition, the remaining computers in the Governor’s office were replaced. “As a result,” explains the paper, “[Gov. Deval] Patrick’s office, which has been bombarded with inquiries for records from the Romney era, has no electronic record of any Romney administration emails.”



Mark Nielsen, Romney’s chief legal counsel as Governor, told the *Globe* that the administration “fully complied with the law and complied with longstanding executive branch practice,” a refrain repeated by the Romney campaign. The campaign points out that in 1997 the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the Governor is not explicitly included in the state Public Records Law, which requires the preservation of electronic communications.

However, Massachusetts Secretary of State William Galvin, a Democrat, told the newspaper that the ruling “means that emails don’t have to be released to the public, but the governor’s office still has to preserve them and turn them over to the state archivist.”

“They have an obligation as a public official to preserve their records,” Galvin said. “Electronic records are held to the same standard as paper records. There’s no question. They’re not in some lesser standard.”

Galvin also questioned the sale of the hard drives to private parties; and Jeffrey Pyle, a Boston lawyer specializing in public records cases, told the [Globe](#) that the drives “should not have been sold as private property.”

As to the supposed “longstanding executive branch practice” of selling hard drives or any other public property to departing state employees, the *Globe* found that “top aides to the three Massachusetts governors who preceded Mitt Romney — all of them Republicans — said ... they know of no instance when state employees purchased their computer hard drive as they left the administration” and that “they were not familiar with such purchases as a long-standing practice.”

Given the highly irregular nature of the vanishing emails and hard drives, it was only natural that the press, curious as to whether Romney had something to hide, began peppering him with questions soon after the matter was first reported. The former Governor refused to answer directly for a few days. Finally, in an interview with the *Nashua Telegraph*, he [responded](#): “Well, I think in government we should follow the law. And there has never been an administration that has provided to the opposition research team, or to the public, electronic communications. So ours would have been the first.”



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Thus, to keep his administration's emails hidden from both political opponents and the general public, Romney took the extraordinary step of obliterating all electronic evidence of those communications and then ensuring that the hardware itself was turned over to administration employees who would have every incentive to destroy it.

The Romney campaign is portraying the revelation of these unusual acts as a purely political move on the part of the Obama administration, aided and abetted by Obama's friend Gov. Patrick, who campaigned for him in 2008.

"The last thing they [the Obama campaign] want to do is run against Mitt Romney in the general election," Romney communications director Gail Gitcho told [CNN](#). "In this case they have deployed or activated the Patrick Administration to do their dirty work."

Accusing the Governor's office of acting as "an opposition research arm of the Obama reelection campaign," the Romney campaign filed a request for all email communications between Patrick's office and Obama's campaign.

The Democratic National Committee fired back with a request for all email from the Romney administration related to the hard drive purchases or containing "embarrassing subjects including 'destroy records' and 'flip-flop,'" according to CNN. Obviously such email would have to be provided in printed form, perhaps found among the 700 boxes of public documents the Romney administration did send to the state archives. Locating the requested emails, therefore, could take months, which would certainly work to Romney's advantage.

The Romney team is almost certainly correct that the motive behind leaking this story to the press was political, and its request for emails between the Patrick administration and the Obama campaign may uncover evidence of that. Nevertheless, curious observers want to know just what was so potentially damaging in his administration's emails that Romney felt the need to go to such great lengths to prevent its discovery.

Photo of Mitt Romney: AP Images



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