

TAX: Would affect corporations with Oregon sales exceeding \$100M

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the election, when its unified resources and messaging defeated the \$3 billion annual tax measure.

During the annual Oregon Leadership Summit Dec. 5, business leaders said they were open to new business taxes, but only if lawmakers also reformed the costly state retirement plan and made an effort to clean up wasteful spending. Pension reform will likely be a sticking point for the union-backed A Better Oregon, which has said it opposes any reductions to retirement benefits.

Those same business leaders, however, have not answered calls from Gov. Kate Brown and others to present specific revenue-raising proposals they would accept. Brown used her speech at the leadership summit to specifically ask business leaders for such proposals. Business representatives say it's up to the governor to make the first move.

"Right now, we would hope and expect that the governor and elected leaders will lead this process," said Sam Tannahill, chairman of the Oregon Business Association. "The governor certainly put a challenge in front of the business community. However, at the same time, she said in the same speech: 'Make no mistake; we will lead.' That is something we are expecting her to do. The only thing we are saying is everything should be on the table."

The Oregon Business Association and Associated Oregon Industries, which will merge in July, will be main players in any negotiations over new business taxes. They'll coordinate efforts through regular meetings of a new 10-member executive committee, Tannahill said. The lineup has yet to be finalized, but representatives from Portland General Electric, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, PacificCorp Transmission and A-dec dental equipment and supplies will have seats on the committee.

A Better Oregon, which offered the \$6 billion corporate sales tax measure that was defeated on Nov. 8, has proposed a smaller tax of 2 percent on corporations' Oregon sales exceeding \$100 million.

The tax would raise about \$4 billion a biennium to address the state's projected \$1.7 billion revenue shortfall for 2017-19 and increase spending for education and health care. A Better Oregon also endorses a proposal by the governor to expand the health care provider tax.

The new corporate tax proposal is 0.5 percentage points less than the 2.5 percent rate proposed in Measure 97 and applies to all corporations with sales exceeding \$100 million instead of only C corporations' sales exceeding \$25 million. Utility companies would be exempt from the tax.

The changes were a response to criticism of Measure 97, said Andrea Paluso, executive director of Family Forward Oregon, a member of A Better Oregon.

"It would protect home-grown businesses and call on the largest corporations doing business in our state to pay their fair share," Paluso said.

Lawmakers are still brainstorming ideas for raising revenue that would satisfy both sides. Sen. Hass may try to revive his proposal, made during this year's February session, for a commercial activity tax. The tax would replace the corporate income tax. A .39 percent tax on businesses with sales greater than \$5 million would raise \$1.3 billion in 2017-19 and \$2 billion in 2019-21, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Revenue Office. However, eliminating the corporate income tax would trim the net revenue gain to \$500 million to \$1 billion, Hass said.



This photo released by the Syrian official news agency SANA, shows Syrian troops and pro-government gunmen marching walk inside the destroyed Grand Umayyad mosque in the old city of Aleppo, Syria, Tuesday.

Rebels to evacuate Aleppo in surrender deal as fighting ends

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian rebels reached a cease-fire deal to evacuate from eastern Aleppo in an effective surrender on Tuesday, as Russia declared all military action had stopped and the Syrian government had assumed control of the former rebel enclave.

The dramatic developments, which appeared to restore the remainder of what was once Syria's largest city to President Bashar Assad's forces after months of heavy fighting and a crippling siege, followed reports of mass killings by government forces closing in on the final few blocks still held by the rebels.

Damascus confirmed the evacuation deal and the U.N. envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, called for immediate access to the former rebel enclave to confirm the end of military operations and to oversee the safe departure of tens of thousands of civilians and opposition fighters. He was at the Security Council where an emergency meeting for Aleppo was underway.

Russia's U.N. ambassador Vitaly Churkin took to the floor near the end of the session at the U.N. Security Council to announce fighting had ended.

"According to the latest information that we received



This image released by the International Committee for the Red Cross shows Syrians who were displaced with their families from eastern Aleppo gather at the collective shelter, in the village of Jibreen south of Aleppo, Syria, Monday.

... military actions in eastern Aleppo are over," Churkin said. "The Syrian government has re-established control over eastern Aleppo."

Minutes earlier, he had announced that "all militants" and members of their families, as well as those wounded in the fighting, were being evacuated through "agreed corridors in directions that they have chosen voluntarily," including the rebel stronghold of Idlib province.

As word spread of the deal, celebrations broke out in the government-controlled western sector of Aleppo, with convoys of cars driving around honking their cars and waving Syrian flags

from the windows.

Retaking Aleppo, which has been split between rebel and government control since 2012, would be Assad's biggest victory yet in the civil war. Aleppo, the country's former commercial powerhouse, has long been regarded as a major gateway between Turkey and Syria and the biggest prize in the conflict.

The agreement Tuesday came after world leaders and aid agencies issued dramatic appeals on behalf of trapped residents, and the U.N. human rights office said that pro-government forces reportedly killed 82 civilians as they closed in on the last remaining rebel areas.

Trump offers Montana's Zinke interior secretary

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump has offered Montana Rep. Ryan Zinke the job of interior secretary, though it's unclear whether the congressman has accepted, two people with knowledge of the offer said Tuesday.

Zinke, 55, is a retired Navy SEAL who was awarded two Bronze Stars for combat missions in Iraq. He was an early supporter of Trump and met with the president-elect Monday at Trump Tower in Manhattan.



Zinke

He just won re-election to a second term as Montana's only House member, and Republicans had mentioned him as a possible challenger to two-term Democratic Sen. Jon Tester in 2018.

Trump was also said to be considering Washington Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers for the job. She wrote on Facebook Tuesday that it was an "honor" to be invited to meet with Trump.

The people with knowledge of the offer to Zinke insisted on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the transition process publicly.

Zinke, who serves on House Natural Resources and Armed Services committees, describes himself as "a steadfast advocate for Montana veterans and military personnel and families." He advocates greater use of public lands for energy production such as oil and natural gas.

Zinke has prioritized development of oil, gas and other resources on public lands and has advocated for state control of energy development on federal lands, a stance that some environmental groups say threatens national parks. Zinke has voted against efforts to designate new national parks that would diversify the National Park System.

Zinke attracted attention in the 2014 campaign for calling Hillary Clinton "the antichrist."

"Do I really believe that she is the antichrist? That answer would be 'no,'" Zinke said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But I do get a little emotional about Benghazi, and I like the rest of America want answers."



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