

OUR VIEW

Business
tax needs
flexibility

Oregon businesses, at least most of those with commercial activity in the state that brings in more than \$1 million a year, face a new tax this year. The Corporate Activity Tax was created by the 2019 Legislature to raise money for education in the state. It may raise about \$1 billion a year.

Businesses are expected to pungle up the first of four quarterly payments by April 30. Unfortunately, the rules about how the new tax should be calculated, among other things, are a work in progress.

There are some temporary rules. Those are not complete. And the process for the permanent rules won't even start until April 1. How is a business supposed to know what to do?

The tax is also relatively unusual. It's 0.57% tax on most business transactions — not all. It applies at different levels of the supply chain, creating a pyramiding effect on the taxes.

The Legislature turned the task of writing the rules that govern the tax over to the state Department of Revenue. The bill that created the law made it effective Jan. 1. The agency has no authority to delay implementation on its own.

To make matters worse, the Legislature is considering at least one measure, HB 4009, that would make changes to the tax — there have been more than 10 amendments to that measure proposed.

Like the CAT or not, the rush to begin collecting it has created problems for the Oregon businesses that will pay.

It's difficult to make a hiring plan, for example, if it's still unclear how the new tax will impact your business.

And any businessperson worth his or her salt must tremble at the prospect of paying a tax under rules that were being written until the last minute.

Lawmakers can do something about that, and they should. They should direct the Department of Revenue to grant some flexibility to businesses that get their taxes wrong.

That's only fair. And the next time the Legislature slaps a new complicated tax on businesses or anyone else, give more than adequate time to write the rules before the tax starts.

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Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald,
P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814
Email: news@bakercityherald.com

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office: 1705 Main St., Suite 504, Baker City, OR 97814; phone 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.



Noted farming expert's first day on the job

Big moments from the debate

Much of the punditry about Wednesday night's Democratic presidential debate in Las Vegas focuses on the shelling that former New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg took from his rivals. And, indeed, Bloomberg had some very, very bad moments, as well as a few very good ones.

Fortunately for Bloomberg, he wasn't the only one to be caught in the glare of unflattering scrutiny. At least two of his rivals had cringe-worthy moments that they can only hope the public will soon forget.

The stakes have grown progressively higher with each debate, so it's not surprising that the candidates threw more elbows at each other. There were three simultaneous plays-within-the-play: the four moderates (Bloomberg, former Vice President Joe Biden, former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg and Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota) sought to tarnish the front-runner, self-described democratic socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.; and everyone not named Bloomberg attacked the billionaire who bought his way onto the debate stage.

A quick note about Sanders — despite the growing number of jabs thrown his way by his Democratic rivals, including a new effort to hold Sanders responsible for the intolerance and nastiness displayed by some of his supporters online, he remained unflappably on message. I don't think any of the criticisms changed any minds Wednesday night, which bodes well for his prospects going into the Nevada caucus Saturday. I'm not a fan of his policies, but he's navigating the treacherous waters of the primaries remarkably well.

Bloomberg's worst moment came courtesy of Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., whose bracing critiques showed how very ready she is to go head to head with President Donald

JON HEALEY

Trump. Warren forced Bloomberg to defend the legal settlements that keep female employees who've sued him or his company silent about the sexual harassment and gender discrimination they say they encountered there.

After Biden piled on, Bloomberg was given the final word: "I've said we're not going to get — to end these agreements because they were made consensually and they have every right to expect that they will stay private." Ugh. On a night of bad looks for Bloomberg, that one stood out.

Klobuchar has done well in the debates, consistently coming across as smart, funny and in command, but she was clearly rattled Wednesday by an unusually aggressive (and, frankly, misleading) line of questioning by Vanessa Hauc, a senior correspondent at Telemundo.

Hauc brought up an interview with her network last week in which Klobuchar blanked on the name of Mexico's president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. Klobuchar was ready for it and, to her credit, didn't try to deflect. She admitted that she forgot his name and argued that it was a momentary lapse. But Hauc and Buttigieg went further, arguing that the error was a sign that she was ignorant about U.S.-Mexico policy.

Klobuchar practically exploded. "Are you trying to say that I'm dumb? Or are you mocking me here, Pete?" You could practically see the steam pouring out of her ears. She was right to stand up to Buttigieg, but the way she went about it sounded petty and defensive. Her mistake was taking the bait Buttigieg laid out for her by suggesting her experience in Washington wasn't all it's cracked up to be.

Gotta hand it to Buttigieg — he has

shown an uncanny ability to keep his cool in the fray. But he crossed a line there, punching down (he's ahead of Klobuchar in the polls) and making a mountain out of a molehill. Warren, by contrast, came to Klobuchar's rescue ("This is not right. I understand that she forgot a name. It happens. It happens to everybody on this stage"), a move that reflected well on Warren and poorly on Buttigieg.

And then there's Biden, who had another decent night on paper. He made good points about Bloomberg's record on stop and frisk, about nondisclosure agreements, about trade, healthcare and a number of other topics. Yet side by side with far more polished candidates, his inarticulateness was amplified. The best example Wednesday was on climate change, when Biden's mangled comments were followed in quick succession by Bloomberg's best moment of the night — not surprising, given that climate policy is catnip to Bloomberg — and highly cogent responses from Warren and Sanders.

In Biden's defense, the transcript shows that his ideas are much more coherent than his delivery may be. Plus, the incumbent president is the least articulate president in modern times. Trump is so bad, he makes President George W. Bush sound like Laurence Olivier. But right now he's not running against Trump; he's running against Sanders and company.

Again, debate performances tend to be evanescent experiences, grabbing a day's worth of headlines and then vanishing from memory. With the Nevada caucus coming in two days, followed in a little more than a week by California and the other Super Tuesday states, the spotlight will soon shift back to the horse race. And Bloomberg, for one, probably can't wait for that to happen.

Jon Healey is a columnist for The Los Angeles Times.

OTHER VIEWS

Where the Boy Scouts go from here

Editorial from The Dallas Morning News:

The declaration landed with a thud. The 110-year-old Irving, Texas-based institution we know as the Boy Scouts of America declared bankruptcy this week in what is a very messy fight over sexual abuse claims going back decades.

The details here are complex and even arcane. As The Wall Street Journal has reported, there are some 275 pending lawsuits over sexual abuse and another 1,400 more claims waiting in the wings. Most of these — an estimated 90% — are eligible to come forward because several states have revised the statute of limitations to allow claimants to sue over abuse decades in the past. But the top-line out of this legal morass is clear and even simple, if also hard to do: The Boy Scouts of America needs to lead in showing how a venerated organization can do right by victims as it works to restore its ability to serve as an important

cultural institution.

And it should be clear that for millions of Americans, the Boy Scouts has been an important cultural institution for decades. The Scouts have long taught leadership, self-reliance, resiliency, creativity and teamwork and all in service to a larger purpose. The Scouts taught public service and civic engagement to generations.

But the Scouts have also been wounded in a culture war and held fast to indefensible positions for far too long in terms of allowing for gay and transgender scouts. The organization has since reversed its position to allow these Americans to serve in its ranks and have also pulled girls into the organization in ways that should serve them, as well as the institution.

Now the organization has to account for decades of denials and obfuscation in terms of sexual abuse. The facts show that there were young Americans who joined the Scouts to learn how to

live with honor and courage but who were instead shown dishonor, abuse and cowardice. Doing right by these victims to the extent possible is the only thing the organization can do to show that, as an institution, it will live by the ideals it always needed to serve.

It is possible to do that through the bankruptcy process that will now organize claims in federal court where assets and allegations can be sorted out legally and fairly and a compensation fund can be created. But rather than a purely legal process the Boy Scouts need to demonstrate an understanding that this is about more than money and protecting assets. Transparency fosters integrity, compensation signals acknowledgment of culpability, and accepting fault where appropriate are crucial components of leadership. And we should all hope that the Boy Scouts of America can be that social institution that fosters leadership and service that we've always needed it to be.