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THE REGISTER CITIZEN

Taxes add up to kill state economy: Op-Ed

By Edward L. Marcus
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The phrase “death by a thousand cuts” originated in medieval times and was, literally, a description of a slow death by torture, a little bit at a time, usually with a knife.

I believe it is fair to compare the proposed Connecticut tax plans to the same conceptual torture: a little tax here, another little tax there, everywhere a tax — bleeding low- and middle-income families dry.

Instead of calling for a half-percent tax increase in sales tax, or income tax, or a tax on millionaires, the Lamont administration, supported by some of the Legislature’s leadership, has suggested taxing just about anything that we do except for breathing and going to the bathroom.

Where is the public outcry? There hasn’t been any because the proposed taxes strike at different parts of our society so that the response has been muted — not in the numbers or volume one would expect.

The proposed tax increases range from the infamous tax on taxes, that is, a tax on tax return preparation and accounting services as well as:

- sales tax on digital services and just about the entire service economy, including legal fees;
- tax on diesel fuel for boats;
- sales tax on online sales;
- highway tolls, a major hit on the middle class;
- taxes on dry cleaning, haircuts, veterinarian care, interior design consulting, textbooks, bicycle helmets, child care seats;
- eliminating the tax free week in August;
- a 25-cent deposit fee on wine and liquor bottles;

- a new payroll tax to fund family and medical leave;
- a 1.5 cent fee for each fluid ounce of sports drinks, sodas and other sugary drinks. They clearly are not good for you, I agree. However, the additional tax will just hurt the people who can least afford to pay;
- calling on towns to contribute to the teachers' pension fund. Where will the towns get the money? You guessed it: by increasing everybody's real estate taxes (keeping in mind that thanks to Trump's so-called Tax Reform Bill the lid on deductions for real estate taxes now is \$10,000); and
- tuition will be escalated in all state colleges and universities, making it more and more difficult for a middle-class person to obtain a college education.

What has really hurt this state is a vastly underfunded pension system. Top that with the ease with which state employees can retire, collect a state pension, and then find another job, even within a state agency — it's double dipping at its worst.

The governor and/or the Legislature need to sit down, head to head, with Sal Luciano, the president of the AFL-CIO, and work out a bargain which will give us in Connecticut an opportunity to work its way out of our collective financial mess. Luciano is a pretty reasonable person and I know he understands the state's fiscal plight. As well, I am sure that he would be open to a solution that is genuinely fair to all.

The way to recover is not to keep taxing poor and middle-class people with one new tax after another. There really are other solutions.

Governor Lamont is undoubtedly well-meaning. But he has never owned a small business and found himself in a bind just to meet payroll, a mortgage payment or a tax payment, so it is probably hard for him to understand the economic pressure now encumbering people in Connecticut.

The current proposals, if enacted, will just make life for the average person in Connecticut all the more difficult, with no relief in sight. There has to be a better way than tax everything and anything that we do.

Why are people leaving the state? They are trying to avoid tax torture.

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