



TOMORROW *Mary Schmich helps you determine if you're in an unhealthy relationship ... with Facebook.*

OUR VIEW

Beaumont Enterprise

Mark Adkins
 Publisher

Timothy M. Kelly
 Editor

Thomas Taschinger
 Opinions page editor

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Local stores pay sales taxes; net-based should too

Internet shopping is not only here to stay, it will likely grow stronger in coming years. Many consumers like the convenience of buying something from their homes instead of driving to a store. So be it — though other shoppers want to touch what they are buying beforehand to make sure it looks like the enticing photos. What really matters in all of this, however, are sales taxes.

When you buy something from a store in your neighborhood, you pay a state sales tax and whatever local sales taxes apply. When you

employ people who live here. They sponsor Little League teams and host charity barbecues. Online firms based in another state or country don't.

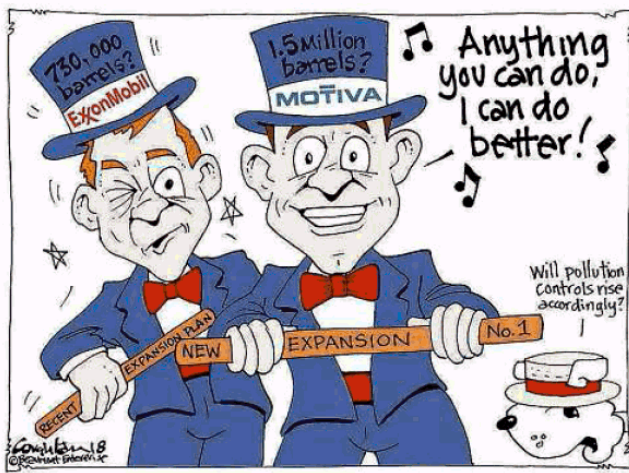
This change would not be hard to implement because some online companies collect sales taxes now. In Texas, that's required for any company that has a physical presence like a store or an office in the state. Yet not all online companies have such a presence, and some states don't require that.

The results is billions of dollars in sales taxes that are not collected

and therefore not distributed to cities, counties, school districts, etc. Modern computer software is quite sophisticated and can easily be adapted to fix this.

Local sales taxes help pave your roads, lay your water lines and build new classrooms. Without them, taxing entities can increase property taxes on homeowners and businesses, or simply do without.

Neither alternative is acceptable, and the Supreme Court can stop forcing local taxing entities to make that painful choice.



Education beats suspension

What about the four-year-old who tears posters off the classroom wall? Or the pre-K student who threw his shoes?

Those are two of the responses we've received to our report about the 101,000 times Texas school districts suspended students in pre-K through second grade in a single year.

We can imagine how frustrating and disruptive it was for the teachers and students when those pre-K kids acted out like that.

In fact, one of the main reasons we published our report is to cut down on that behavior.

Our report urges school districts to implement the kinds of effective strategies that some Texas districts — like Houston, Austin, Dallas and El Paso ISDs — have used to reduce pre-K through second grade suspensions and provide support to teachers and students to improve behavior.

Instead of issuing lots of suspensions to little kids, some districts are working on keeping their four-year-olds or six-year-olds from getting so upset that size 1 Spiderman shoes start flying. They are working on responding to the little shoe-throwers in a way that prevents the next meltdown.

To reach these goals, districts are providing more counseling to kids, implementing effective models like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), training teachers on social and emotional learning and restorative justice, and more.

Issuing lots of suspensions to our youngest students, on the other hand, does nothing to teach little kids how to manage big emotions. And it doesn't address other factors — like a student's disability or a teacher's need for new classroom management strategies — that can lead to challenging behavior.

The state data in our report underscore that many of the children who need the most help are the ones that often get suspended: Texas school districts disproportionately suspend pre-K through second grade students who are in special education or foster care.

For a seven-year-old in special education who is already behind academically and starting to feel out of place at school, the suspensions double down on those challenges.

For a six-year-old who has been abused, removed from his family, and placed in foster care, school suspensions add more disruption and rejection to his life.

The data also show that kids and teachers in certain districts would particularly benefit from more effective strategies. Some districts with large concentrations of poor kids have successfully worked to



Diane Ewing
 Guest column

keep pre-K suspensions to a minimum. On the other hand, the Jasper ISD issued a shocking 80 suspensions to its cohort of 122 pre-K students and the Killeen ISD meted out a stunning 1,460 suspensions to a pre-K enrollment of 3,423 students, according to TEA data on the 2015-2016 school year.

In fact, Killeen had less than 2 percent of the state's pre-K kids, but 31 percent of the state's pre-K suspensions. (The one way that Killeen's student body is notably different from most other districts is its high number of military families, but the district had an even higher rate of suspensions for pre-K kids who are not from military families.)

Discipline policies and practices aren't just inconsistent from district to district. Reaction to kids' behavior also varies depending on the demographic profile of the child.

National research shows that black and white educators react more harshly to black students and male students, even when they behave the same as other students. Indeed, state data confirm that Texas schools disproportionately suspend these students in pre-K through second grade.

The good news is that many Texas school districts are already making positive changes and the Legislature has recognized the importance of the issue. Last year, legislators passed a state law to prohibit most out-of-school suspensions in these early grades and authorize positive behavioral strategies.

Yet there is more work to do to improve behavior and ensure kids and teachers have the support they need. More school district leaders — especially those with the highest early suspension rates — should implement strategies that effectively improve behavior.

They should commit to tracking and reducing in-school suspensions in early grades, especially for those students who are disproportionately suspended.

To help them get the job done, state leaders should monitor suspensions, strengthen the state's pre-K policies, and provide districts with greater funding and technical assistance.

Diane Ewing is a Policy Fellow with Texans Care for Children.

GOP chaos chases Ryan

Once in a great while an athlete quits at the top of his game, or an actress walks away from Hollywood at the peak of her career. But it rarely happens, because an athlete or actor in that position has worked long and hard to get there.



Thomas Taschinger
 Ttaschinger@BeaumontEnterprise.com

The same applies to politicians, who crave power more than most of us. So you know something is fishy when someone like House Speaker Paul Ryan bails out when his party has that rare trifecta — control of both sides of Congress and the presidency.

In theory, Ryan should be grinning from ear to ear as he gazes down from the mountaintop. In reality, he's miserable because working with President Trump is almost impossible — and partly because of that, Ryan knows that Republicans will lose the House in November.

Ryan understands that if he wins re-election to his district — likely but no longer a slam dunk — he would hand over the speaker's gavel to some Democrat. At best, he would be the leader of a minority party split

between hard-liners and traditionalists.

It's also not hard to predict a Democratic House trying to impeach Trump, something Republicans won't enjoy watching from the sidelines. Trump backers will say it's mere politics, and maybe payback for the failed Republican attempt to impeach Bill Clinton back in '98.

But it's also not hard to suspect that Robert Mueller's team will find some legitimate charges against Trump, like obstruction of justice (for firing the FBI director investigating him) or financial shenanigans like money laundering, income tax evasion or enriching himself and his family while in office.

Trump's fortune was built on cutting corners and bending rules whenever possible. On paper,

he always stayed just inside the law. Had he never been elected president, he probably could have continued to operate like that. Once elected, however, all kinds of new ethical rules come into play, and Mueller's team can take a fresh look at his past practices.

Ryan can see all this taking shape. He also knows that Trump doesn't have the discipline or interest to help build legislation and get it through committees, so little will get done for the rest of this year. That is, however, the way bills get passed in Congress, even when one party has both chambers. It's why Republicans in this Congress haven't done much except get tax reform through, and that was a close call.

When you add it all up, Ryan knows it's better to leave now than suffer through two years of powerless gridlock. By stepping away from the impending mess, he will also be in a better position to come back in 2020 and run for higher office. And if his political career is ended by the Trump presidency, he wouldn't be the only Republican to have that dubious distinction.