

Tax from internet sales growing, but state getting less

By Bobby Harrison
Mississippi Today

Since a June 2018 U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowing states to collect taxes on internet sales, Mississippi's use tax collections have steadily increased.

Still, state Economist Darin Webb and Mississippi's other financial experts are projecting use tax revenue going to the general fund for core state functions such as education, law enforcement and health care will slow or even be less this fiscal year. Through November, or through the first five months of the current fiscal year, use tax collections going to the state general fund are down \$3.5 million to \$117.7 million, according to information compiled by the staff of the Legislative Budget Committee.

Use tax collections for core functions of state government are down because they are being diverted to local governments, according to the financial experts who give the Legislature projections of how much revenue the state will collect.

"Use tax collections will be reduced from increased

diversions for infrastructure needs associated with the special session of 2018," Webb told legislative leaders and Gov. Phil Bryant in November.

Webb is citing legislation passed during the 2018 session to divert use tax revenue from paying for those core state functions to paying for local needs. During the special session, legislators, hoping to avoid raising the tax on motor fuel to pay for infrastructure needs, voted to phase in the diversion of 35 percent of the use tax revenue from those core state funds to local needs. When fully enacted, the diversion will send about \$120 million annually (an amount that will grow over time) from state needs to the local governments.

The use tax is a 7 percent tax levied on items purchased out of state, such as on internet or catalog sales. The primary reason the use tax is growing is that in June 2018 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could levy a sales tax (or use tax) on internet purchases.

The Supreme Court decision was a key because in

recent years sales from traditional brick and mortar stores have slowed or even decreased. In recent years, sales tax revenue has slowed while use tax revenue in general has exploded, though, the sales tax collected from retail stores remains Mississippi's single largest source of revenue.

A late October report by Wells Fargo Securities Economic Group projected, "For the first holiday season ever, non-store retailers will likely surpass grocery and general merchandise stores, accounting for the largest share of holiday spending."

For the past fiscal year, ending June 30, use tax collections for the state were up 24 percent to \$419.6 million while sales tax collections were up 2.6 percent to \$3.2 billion. Sales tax collections also are growing at a 2.6 percent rate through November - the first five months of the current fiscal year.

Thus far this fiscal year, use tax collections are up 8.9 percent to \$173 million. But a larger portion, is being diverted to pay for local services instead of state services.

about character and citizenship to the next generation of leaders, some of whom will go on to serve in uniform.

There are many other great ideas that will become realities because of this legislation. There are also many unwise proposals that I worked to exclude from the end product, such as measures that would have unnecessarily limited the president's ability to counter Iranian aggression. Efforts to move terrorist detainees at Guantanamo Bay to the United States and cut off support for our allies were also stopped in their tracks.

A Bipartisan Tradition

Congress has passed a defense authorization every year for the last 58 years, usually with supermajorities of Republicans and Democrats. Both in times of bipartisan unity and during hard fights like today, this process stands out as the legislative branch at its best.

ing a much-needed pay raise to service members. It will also help the Pentagon adapt to changing threats.

Some of the most important provisions will give our Navy professionals the ships they need. These measures will authorize full funding for the LPD-31 and LHA-9, amphibious ships to be built by the experts in Mississippi, as well as three new destroyers. I have long supported these programs, especially through the SHIPS Act, which I authored and which will increase the size of America's fleet to 355 vessels, the number required to keep our country safe.

Satellites and cyber weapons will also present significant challenges going forward. In 2016, then-candidate Trump promised to address these issues by creating an American Space Force. This NDAA keeps the president's promise by establishing that new service branch within the Air Force, getting America ready for launch.

I am glad a provision I led to expand JROTC and National Defense Cadet Corps to 3,700 units nationwide was included as well. These programs benefit schools, families, and communities by teaching lifelong lessons



My ground blind leaks. Yours does too. Yeah, I know you have the top-of-the-line, largest, most cushy, made-of-the-best-water-proof-material-blind money can buy. I'm sure it's nice. But it leaks. It may not leak as much as mine. It may not leak in the same places as mine. But it leaks.

Those leaks may not show up until the hardest rain, but, you know, it leaks. I'm sorry. It's nothing to be ashamed of. You can still claim superiority in ground blind wars. But it leaks. And sometimes those leaks are all you can think about. I sat in the rain, bored from seeing no deer, and from having no cell signal in order to keep my mind occupied.

So, my leaks became my obsession. What I discovered was there is one thing that causes every blind to leak. It's not faulty material or holey seams. It's not the lack of sealant. It's windows. Yes, windows -those things that we actually can't do without if we want to hunt. It's the difference between a tent and a hunting blind. It's those things that are necessary if we are going to accomplish what we go to accomplish. So, dealing with leaks are just something we have to endure if we are going to get those opportunities. And it's odd that as I write, I feel like I'm talking about something else. I get a punch in the side telling me, "Gary, you really can't reach those people that I need you to come in contact with, if you're in a tent and not a blind."

The fact that we were able to approve the NDAA for the 59th year in a row with such broad support shows how necessary this bill is. The vote also demonstrates the level of trust our country has in our defense professionals.

I get another punch that tells me not to think my sins are any better than the sins of the worst individual. A leak is a leak. A sin is a sin. I get yet another jab that reminds me to not be so concerned about getting a little world on you. Greater is He that

is in you, than he that is in the world. And if that that's not enough jabs and pokes, one last somewhat audible admonition tells me, "Gary, have you noticed this whole conversation has been about YOU and YOUR blind, and YOUR obsession with it? Doesn't that sound just a tad bit selfish?"

I don't think this is included in the 'Love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself' lesson I gave." So, I regroup, and rearrange my seat so my thoughts are on more important things and so that my view is of what's outside, where I'm supposed to be looking anyway.

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Start the New Year off right, avoid firework injuries

Press Release

Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney wishes everyone a Happy New Year.

"I hope all Mississippians will begin 2020 safely, by carefully using fireworks," Chaney said. "Anyone choosing to handle fireworks this holiday needs to use caution. That's especially important if young children are around, as they are often more likely to get hurt."

The risk of fireworks injury is highest for young people ages 0-4, followed by children 10-14.

Sparklers, often a favorite with children, accounted for 30% of injuries in 2014, they can reach up to 1200 ° Fahrenheit, which is hot enough to cause third-degree burns.

Chaney added that anyone using or planning to be around any type of fireworks should be mindful of their pets. Check with your local veterinarian and animal shelters to help protect your animals from becoming frightened by fireworks.

For those choosing to use fireworks, the Mississippi State Fire Marshal suggests you follow these safety tips:

- Observe local laws.

- Those wishing to purchase and use fireworks should first check with their fire protection officials to make sure that local laws are being followed.

- Some municipalities prohibit fireworks from being used within city limits.

- Use common sense: always read and follow the directions on each firework.

- Never point or throw fireworks at another person.

- Buy from reliable fireworks sellers. Store them in a cool, dry place.

- Always have an adult present when shooting fireworks.

- Put used fireworks in a bucket of water and have a hose ready.

- Only use fireworks outdoors, away from homes, dry grass, and trees.

- Light only one item at a time and keep a safe distance.

- Never experiment or attempt to make your own fireworks.

- Never re-ignite malfunctioning fireworks.

- Never give fireworks to small children.

- Never carry fireworks in your pocket.

- Never shoot fireworks in metal or glass containers.

THE WICKER REPORT

By: United States Senator Roger Wicker



Wicker Commends Passage of the National Defense Authorization Act

Vital Legislation to Support Our Troops

America now has a National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for this fiscal year. After long congressional debates over this important bill, the overwhelming votes in the House and Senate gave a major win for all our citizens. It shows that supporting our military remains a bipartisan priority. With President Donald Trump's signature making this legislation the law of the land, America's armed forces will have what they need in 2020.

The NDAA fulfills Congress's most basic responsibility to provide for the common defense by setting funding levels and priorities for the Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Army. This year's defense authorization builds on the progress of the last three years and is a strong step forward as our military comes back from the damaging Obama-era cuts and takes care of troops and their families.

Wins in this NDAA

The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2020 authorizes \$738 billion in defense funding, consistent with recent years and below Cold War spending when measured as a percentage of the total U.S. economy. This money supports the Department of Defense's normal operations while giv-

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