

Idaho Falls Post Register, Thursday, Feb. 27, 2014 – Guest opinion by Pam Eaton

Restoring fairness to Idaho business should be a legislative priority

Idaho's local brick-and-mortar businesses have had to compete without the benefit of a level playing field in the marketplace for far too long. Shop owners all across Idaho have to collect sales tax while their out-of-state virtual competitors do not. While this issue may not seem important to consumers, it is a big deal for local business owners.

Let me be clear, the Idaho Retailers Association fully supports online shopping. We understand how simple and convenient it can be to consumers and we encourage all of our members to develop an online presence to compete in today's marketplace. But even if Idaho businesses sell online, it is still an unfair competition.

Out-of-state online companies have a huge price advantage because of a court decision made years before the e-commerce boom. In fact, it is becoming more common for Idaho businesses to help customers look at products in their stores only to have the customers turn around and buy the item online to save money by not paying sales tax.

In Idaho, we are supposed to pay sales tax for all the purchases we make online when we file our taxes, but very few of us actually do. Consumers shopping online often view the lack of tax collection as a discount, and local businesses simply can't compete when people view their prices as 6 percent higher. It is clear the lack of e-fairness is hurting our local businesses.

It is time to restore fairness to all retailers, whether they sell from their shop on Main Street or online. Any retailer selling to an Idaho resident should share the same burden for collecting sales tax.

The Idaho Retailers Association is asking Idaho lawmakers to end the special treatment for online and out-of-state sales. Right now, our laws favor companies that are outside state lines. Does this seem wrong to anyone else? Idaho's businesses

need to start on equal footing with their competitors. If you agree, please let your lawmaker know it is time to level the playing field for the local businesses in Idaho.

Eaton is president/CEO of the Idaho Retailers Association.