

Statement

of Mark Louchheim

President

Bobrick Washroom Equipment, Inc.

North Hollywood, CA

On *behalf* of the National Association of Manufacturers

For the Hearing Record

House Judiciary Subcommittee on Regulatory Reform,
Commercial and Antitrust Law

on H.R. 2992: The Business Activity Tax Simplification
Act of 2013

February 26, 2014

Statement of the National Association of Manufactures

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**House Judiciary Subcommittee on Regulatory Reform, Commercial and Antitrust Law
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Hearing on
H.R. 2992: The Business Activity Tax Simplification Act of 2013**

February 26, 2014

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to submit this statement on behalf of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) for the record of the February 26, 2014, House Judiciary Subcommittee on Regulatory Reform, Commercial and Antitrust Law hearing on H.R. 2992, The Business Activity Tax Simplification Act.

The NAM is the nation's largest industrial trade association, representing small and large manufacturers in every industrial sector and in all 50 states. My name is Mark Louchheim and I have been President of Bobrick Washroom Equipment, Inc., for 21 years. Bobrick, a member of the NAM, is the leading company in the world for design, manufacture and distribution of washroom accessories and toilet partitions for the non-residential construction market. The company celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2006.

The Business Activity Tax Simplification Act

NAM members strongly support bipartisan legislation H.R. 2992, the Business Activity Tax Simplification Act (BATSA), introduced in 2013 by Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and cosponsored by several House Judiciary Committee members. By establishing a bright-line physical presence test for when a state can tax out-of-state companies, BATSA will prevent the arbitrary state taxation of interstate commerce without jeopardizing the ability of states to legitimately tax companies with operations in the state.

Some states currently assess business activity taxes (BAT), e.g. income, franchise, or gross receipts taxes, on out-of-state manufacturers and other businesses that do not have any employees or property in the state. This arbitrary taxation of out-of-state businesses interferes with interstate commerce. Lawmakers last addressed this issue in 1959, when they clarified that a state cannot impose income taxes on an out-of-state company if the company's only contact with the state is to solicit orders for sales of tangible goods. BATSA would update the current "safe harbor" for soliciting sales of tangible goods to include sales of intangible goods and services.

One Company's Experience

Bobrick's headquarters, including manufacturing and distribution facilities, are located in North Hollywood, California. In addition, Bobrick has factories and warehouses in Colorado, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Toronto, Canada. The company, which employs more than 400 people, also has subsidiaries in Australia and England. Bobrick manufactures more than 70 percent of its products in the United States and exports more than \$20,000,000 of U.S.-made products each year.

Our products are sold in all fifty states to independent distributors who generally act as installing subcontractors to the general contractor constructing the building. All product orders are sent to a Bobrick facility and shipped using common carriers.

Bobrick does not contest our responsibility to pay business activity and other taxes in the five states where we have facilities – California, Colorado, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee. At the same time, the company has experienced first-hand attempts to impose business activity taxes on Bobrick by states where we do not deliver with company trucks, install or repair our products or have employees, offices, repair facilities, or bank accounts. Our efforts to fight these unfair assessments have consumed an enormous amount of time and valuable company financial resources, company dollars that could have been better spent on business expansion, job creation and innovation.

There is no single litmus test to determine nexus for imposing business activity taxes on out-of-state businesses, but rather the nexus decision should be based on a preponderance of facts and circumstances. In the past, Bobrick generally has been able to answer most questions about presence in the negative and there have been no further inquiries from the state. However, this approach appears to be changing. The company received a questionnaire from Michigan that would impose nexus if we “actively solicit” through the use of the Internet.

In addition, some states phrase a question in such a way that a “no” answer is not appropriate. For example, the compound question by the state of Texas includes employees, agents, or representatives who sell, solicit, or promote products in the state. Because of the way the question is worded, the state inevitably asserts nexus, which is what happened in our case. We appealed the Texas decision on nexus, an effort that cost us more than \$185,000 for attorneys and consultants and a significant amount of internal staff time. The company filed a “Claim for Refund of Sales and Use Tax” with the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. Once Texas rejected this claim in 2010, we halted pursuing further legal action due to the high cost associated with such litigation and settled with the state.

Furthermore, based on Bobrick's experience and the experience of other NAM members, this arbitrary and discriminatory state taxation falls disproportionately on small and medium size companies. When my company was first challenged by the state of Texas, we asked other small and medium size companies that are members of the NAM about their experiences. Several NAM member companies also had been contacted by the state of Texas. While they felt they were not subject to Texas business activity taxes, the amount of taxes involved was small in comparison to the cost of challenging Texas' position, making it less costly for the company to pay the taxes.

As a result, while it is likely that states may challenge successfully the imposition of business activity taxes, most companies cannot justify the cost of a challenge. As we found in Texas, a company first must exhaust all the state remedies, both administrative and through the

state courts before the company can proceed to federal court in the hopes that the U.S. Supreme Court eventually will take the case. Based on our estimates, this process could take multiple years and cost millions of dollars in legal fees. This situation is blatantly unfair and particularly burdensome for small and medium size companies that do not have in-house legal departments to fight this arbitrary state taxation.

With more and more states taking an aggressive stance in imposing arbitrary business activity taxes on out-of-state companies, this additional taxation increases effective tax rates for U.S.-based companies, making it harder for these companies to compete globally. Also, these businesses will be subject to additional costs including collecting resale certificates and undergoing audits from various states.

Summary

The NAM strongly supports enactment of BATSA, which would establish a bright-line, physical presence test to determine when a state can levy income, franchise, gross receipts and other business activity taxes on out-of-state companies engaged in interstate commerce. By updating current law, BATSA would prevent a state from imposing business activity taxes on an out-of-state company if the company's only contact with the state is to solicit sales of tangible and intangible goods and services. Companies without a physical presence in a state would not be subject to business activity taxes simply because they have worldwide customers.

The legislation also would clarify that a state could not impose a business activity tax unless that state provides benefits or protections to the taxpayer. At the same time, it would reduce widespread litigation associated with the current climate of uncertainty that inhibits business expansion and innovation. Businesses of all sizes need the certainty of a "uniform state taxation nexus standard;" i.e. the minimum amount of activity a business must conduct in a particular state before it becomes subject to taxation in that state.

Based on the increasing and arbitrary imposition of state taxes on out-of-state businesses, we strongly urge the full committee to take up and report favorably H.R. 2992, as soon as possible. Thank you in advance for supporting this important legislation. Bobrick, as well as companies of all sizes – particularly small manufacturers – would benefit from the clarity and certainty provided by this important legislation.

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