

The Columbus Dispatch

Bad law favors online travel companies

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I am a resident and business leader in central Ohio and the president of the board of trustees for the Ohio Hotel and Lodging Association.

Tourism is one of the largest employers and tax generators in central Ohio. We need to act now to protect our local and state tourism industry.

Online travel companies such as Expedia are not paying their fair share of taxes, and it's hurting Ohio's tourism and lodging industry. A loophole in Ohio's tax law allows out-of-state online travel companies to remit taxes at a lower rate than Ohio's hotels do. This is unfair to Ohio businesses such as mine, and it is depriving the state and local governments of Ohio of \$7 million to \$10 million annually.

A large portion of this is lodging-tax dollars that should be going to Experience Columbus to help bring more visitors and conventions to Columbus. Customers of these online travel companies are paying nearly the same prices as they pay when they book directly with my hotel, but the online travel companies are remitting taxes only on their wholesale costs and not on the retail price paid by the customer.

Columbus has come together to turn our city into a great destination for meetings, events and visitors. Now legislators need to add language to the state budget bill (House Bill 59) that protects Ohio businesses by requiring the out-of-state online travel companies to remit tax at the same rate that is required of Ohio hotels.

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