

Leggett genuflecting to corporations

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On Sept. 21, the County Council had a hearing on repealing the 7 percent transient room tax for Lockheed Martin's hotel. This would reduce income to the county by \$450,000. There were many gaps in the explanation of the rationale and implications of this action.

Allow me to fill in some of the gaps.

Lockheed testified that more than 100 persons were employed by the hotel. County Executive Isiah Leggett testified that these employees were examples of the kind of employees he was attempting to attract to the county. Perhaps he didn't realize that the large majority of hotel employees are chambermaids, room service workers and food preparation workers. None of these jobs even require a high school degree.

Both Lockheed and Leggett claimed that this tax reduces Lockheed's competitive advantage. The \$450,000 represented 0.001 percent of Lockheed's \$45 billion sales in 2009, one penny per \$1,000. How much more can credibility be stretched?

Lockheed testified that the tax is passed on to its divisions and contractors, most from out of state, thus the proposed exemption accrues to businesses in other states, not to Lockheed in Maryland. Why is the county so eager to subsidize these employers or states?

Finally, as a footnote, the day after the hearing Lockheed announced a 19 percent increase in its quarterly dividend (just the increase in this quarterly dividend totals 10 times the \$450,000 tax), and on Sept. 27 Leggett announced the need to further reduce next year's spending to cope with the county's revenue shortfall. The logic of this exercise escapes me.

Leggett seems to be afflicted with a case of reflexive genuflection when dealing with large corporations, even if they represent a miniscule portion of the county's economy. Let's hope this affliction is not contagious to the County Council members.

Morris Cobern, Bethesda

The Gazette editorial ["Taxes where they belong," Oct. 13] conveniently quotes only some of us who testified before the County Council, omitting the primary reason for not exempting Lockheed Martin from this hotel tax: If there is a fire at this Lockheed Martin "corporate facility," will Montgomery County send fewer fire trucks than we would to a fire at the Hyatt? If a crime is committed, will we send fewer detectives than we would to the Double Tree? If a Lockheed employee has an accident, will we not send the same

ambulance we'd send to an accident victim at a Marriott hotel and might that employee not use our county court system to sue? Will we not clear the snow from the county-maintained road around this Lockheed facility, the same way we do for the Bolger? Of course, we do and we will continue to. Since we certainly will not curtail this corporate facility's use of our services, why are we even considering relieving Lockheed Martin of its duty to pay their fair share of the cost of these services? This is the definition of equitable treatment. Taxes are where they belong.

George Gluck, Rockville

I attended the County Council public hearing on the proposed tax break for Lockheed Martin ["Lockheed Martin tax exemption raises ire over county budget woes," Sept. 22] and was amazed that despite the headline, the actual Gazette coverage omitted the following:

-Testimony opposing such a handout [was given] by individuals representing more than 30,000 Montgomery County workers, teachers, and taxpayers (Patrick McCann from Montgomery County Education Association; Gino Renne from Local 1994 MCGEO, Rion Dennis from Progressive Maryland), as well as that of Jean Athey from Peace Action Montgomery, George Gluck the Green Party County Council candidate, Shelley Fudge from Progressive Neighbors and state Senator Jamie Raskin. Fortunately, state Del. Ana Sol Gutierrez was quoted, but both legislators warned the council against making the same mistake the state General Assembly did at its last session when it hurriedly passed a similar bill:

-The substantive arguments against the unfairness of what amounts to corporate welfare in the face of nickel-and-diming ordinary citizens and cutting needed services to meet the county's budget shortfall.

-The inherent unfairness of giving a \$450,000-a-year gift to Lockheed Martin, which will continue to consume county services (police and fire, for example) at no lower volume than always.

-The blatant attempt by Lockheed Martin to get the council to change the legal definition of a hotel, a definition the Lockheed Martin lodging facility squarely meets, in order to evade the 7 percent county hotel tax.

-The exchanges between several council members and the Lockheed Martin representative revealing the inanity of the contention that \$450,000 could undermine the financial well-being of this mega-billion dollar corporation or its competitiveness in scoring defense contracts.

Fran Pollner, Takoma Park