

Amazon dispute puts California tax board in spotlight

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

George Runner thinks California's new Internet sales tax law is a terrible idea – and he's one of the people in charge of enforcing it.

The former state senator sits on the State Board of Equalization, the agency that oversees the collection of sales tax in California.

The board, which normally labors in obscurity, has been thrust into one of the hottest political dramas of the year: the fight between California and Amazon.com over Internet taxes. And the five people who govern the agency can't agree on the tax, either.

Runner, a Republican from Lancaster, is rooting for a ballot referendum Amazon is pushing to overturn the tax. He says the tax hurts the business climate, and legislators who pushed it "should be ashamed to appear in public."

Democratic board Chairman Jerome Horton calls Amazon "morally wrong" and predicts the online retailer from Seattle will get clobbered at the ballot box. Other board members have weighed in on both sides of the issue.

Board officials say the philosophical split won't undermine the board's ability to administer the new tax. But the schism does create something of a spectacle: dueling press releases from board members and tart exchanges at board meetings.

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