

# Washington Update: Pending and Potential Administrative and Legislative Changes (With Selected Cases)

**April 2021**

*Parts 1-5 are excerpted from Estate Tax Changes Past, Present, and Future (April 2021). Some of the other parts are adapted from summaries authored or coauthored by Steve Akers. All of those resources are available at [www.bessemertrust.com/for-professional-partners/advisor-insights](http://www.bessemertrust.com/for-professional-partners/advisor-insights).*

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## 1. The 117th Congress and Potential Legislative Agenda in the Biden Administration

### a. Insights from President Biden's Campaign

#### (1) In General

President Biden desires to reverse or roll back many of the 2017 changes. Beginning in his campaign, he has spoken of his desire to "Build Back Better" by increasing the corporate income tax rate from 21% to 28% and increasing individual income taxes for annual incomes over \$400,000, including an increase in the top rate from 36% to 39.6% and taxation of capital gains at the same rates as ordinary income for individuals with taxable incomes over \$1 million.

#### (2) Estate, Gift, and GST Taxes

His campaign website (<https://joebiden.com/plans-to-support-women-duringcovid19/>), under the topic of "Highlights of Joe Biden's Plans to Support Women During the COVID-19 Crisis," stated:

**Permanently provide family, medical, and safe leave as well as sick and safe days.** As President, Biden will work to provide the type of comprehensive 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave envisioned in the FAMILY Act sponsored by Senator Kristen Gillibrand and Representative Rosa DeLauro. Biden will pay for this proposal by returning the estate tax to 2009 levels.

Similarly, the "Greenbook" revenue proposals of the Obama Administration, beginning in 2013, had proposed to return the estate, gift, and GST taxes to their 2009 levels, which included a top 45 percent rate and non-indexed but portable exemptions of \$3.5 million for the estate and GST taxes and \$1 million for the gift tax.

#### (3) Treatment of Appreciation at Death

In connection with the taxation of capital gains as ordinary income, President Biden has also referred to the step-up in basis, likely meaning the step-up for appreciated assets that pass from a decedent. Although, again, he has offered few details, insight may be gained from the final two Greenbooks of the Obama Administration, in 2015 (pages 156-57) and 2016 (pages 155-56), which, under the general heading of "Reforms to Capital Gains Taxation, Upper-Income Tax Benefits, and the Taxation of Financial Institutions," include a proposal labeled simply "Reform the Taxation of Capital Income." In addition to increasing the rate of tax on capital gains in general (although not as high as the rate on ordinary income), that proposal would treat the transfer of appreciated property at death (as well as by lifetime gift) as a realization event, subjecting the appreciation to income tax. That proposal was even featured in President Obama's State of the Union Address on January 20, 2015.

Additional details of the Obama Administration's 2015 and 2016 proposals included:

- (a) Gifts or bequests to a spouse or charity would not be taxed, but the spouse or charity would take a carryover basis in the asset.
- (b) Tangible personal property such as household furnishings and personal effects, but not collectibles, would be exempt.
- (c) The gain would be taxable to a donor in the year a gift is made, and to a decedent either on the final individual return or on a separate capital gains return.
- (d) Each taxpayer would be allowed an additional exclusion of capital gains at death of up to \$100,000 (indexed for inflation), and each person's \$250,000 exclusion of capital gain on a principal residence would be extended to all residences. Both of these exclusions would be portable to the decedent's surviving spouse "under the same rules that apply to portability for estate and gift tax purposes."
- (e) Taxation of the appreciation in the value of certain small family-owned and operated businesses (no further details given) would be deferred until the business is sold or ceases to be family-owned and operated.

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- (f) A “15-year fixed-rate payment plan” would be allowed for the tax on appreciated illiquid assets transferred at death.
  - (g) The Greenbooks clarified that the income tax on capital gains deemed realized at death would be deductible for estate tax purposes.
  - (h) Showing acknowledgment of the complexities involved, the Greenbooks added the following:

The proposal also would include other legislative changes designed to facilitate and implement this proposal, including without limitation: the allowance of a deduction for the full cost of appraisals of appreciated assets; the imposition of liens; the waiver of penalty for underpayment of estimated tax if the underpayment is attributable to unrealized gains at death; the grant of a right of recovery of the tax on unrealized gains; rules to determine who has the right to select the return filed; the achievement of consistency in valuation for transfer and income tax purposes; and a broad grant of regulatory authority to provide implementing rules.

To facilitate the transition to taxing gains at death and gift, the Secretary would be granted authority to issue any regulations necessary or appropriate to implement the proposal, including rules and safe harbors for determining the basis of assets in cases where complete records are unavailable.

b. **“For the 99.5 Percent Act” Introduced by Senator Sanders**

- (1) **The “For the 99.5 Percent Act.”** On March 25, 2021, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) introduced S. 994, titled “For the 99.5 Percent Act,” an updated compilation of legislative proposals he and Democrats have been offering for many years regarding the estate, gift, and GST taxes and related grantor trust income tax issues. Senator Sanders has introduced a bill like this in every Congress since 2010, when he named it the “Responsible Estate Tax Act” (S. 3533, 111th Cong., June 24, 2010). In this Congress he has changed the name from the “For the 99.8 Percent Act” he introduced on January 31, 2019. The bill includes, but is not limited to, adaptations of proposals in the Treasury Department’s “General Explanations” (popularly called “Greenbooks”) of revenue provisions in the budget proposals of the Obama Administration and even the Clinton Administration. A companion bill (H.R. 2576) was introduced in the House of Representatives on April 15, 2021, by Congressman Jimmy Gomez (D-California).
- (a) Senator Sanders’ proposals will be important to his Democratic colleagues as a source for ideas if comprehensive estate tax reform becomes a priority and political possibility. One reason for that is simply that his proposals have been written – that is, reduced to statutory wording – and they are “out there” or “on the shelf” for lawmakers to incorporate into whatever other legislation happens to be popular at the time. These proposals are distinguished in that respect from some other more fundamental ideas that are offered from time to time, such as a “wealth tax” that would have to be analyzed, modeled, written, and refined and might still face years of uncertainty about its scope, operation, and constitutionality.
- (b) Senator Sanders’ bill is important for another reason. Drafted legislation like this can be the source for fillers in the legislation of the day, for Republicans as well as Democrats, particularly a revenue-raiser that has just the right revenue estimate to “pay for” other legislation. That is exactly what happened when “Consistent Basis Reporting Between Estate and Person Acquiring Property from Decedent” was added to the Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act (Public Law 114-41) by a Republican-controlled Congress in July 2015. It raised just the right amount of money to fund a desired extension of the Highway Trust Fund that was scheduled to expire on the day President Obama signed the Act into law. Significantly, the first introduced statutory wording for the consistent basis provision had been section 6 of Senator Sanders’ “Responsible Estate Tax Act” of 2010. See Part 5.d below.
- (2) **Modifications to Rates and Exemptions.** Section 2 of the “For the 99.5 Percent Act” would raise rates and lower exemptions.
  - (a) The marginal estate and gift tax rate would be increased to
    - i. 45 percent (the top rate in 2007 through 2009 under the 2001 Tax Act signed by President George W. Bush), from \$3.5 million to \$10 million,

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- ii. 50 percent (the top rate in 2002 under the 2001 Tax Act), from \$10 million to \$50 million,
  - iii. 55 percent (the top rate achieved in 1984 through 2001 under the 1981 Act signed by President Reagan), from \$50 million to \$1 billion, and
  - iv. 65 percent (the top estate tax rate in effect in 1982; this is down from 77 percent in Senator Sanders' 2019 bill) over \$1 billion.
- (b) The basic exclusion amount would be reduced to
    - i. \$3.5 million, not indexed, for estate tax purposes and
    - ii. \$1 million, not indexed, for gift tax purposes.
  - (c) Portability would be retained for both estate and gift tax purposes.
  - (d) A detailed set of "anti-clawback" rules that had been included in Senator Sanders' 2019 bill is omitted, perhaps simply in recognition of the fact that the anti-clawback regulations have now been finalized, with an "anti-abuse" refinement (which Senator Sanders would presumably favor) in progress. See Part 4.b(2)(g) below.
  - (e) The bill says nothing about the GST tax, which apparently would make the GST tax rate 65 percent and the GST exemption \$3.5 million.
  - (f) These proposals would "apply to estates of decedents dying, and generation-skipping transfers and gifts made, after December 31, 2021." This is consistent with the effective dates in Senator Sanders' previous bills and reflects a long-observed drafting principle (or at least drafting preference) for estate and gift tax changes. Presumably, pursuant to that preference, if this legislation were enacted, for example, in 2022, the reference to 2021 would be changed to 2022, making the effective date January 1, 2023.
- (3) **Value of Farm, etc. Real Property.** Section 3, like section 4 of the 2010 "Responsible Estate Tax Act," would, effective January 1, 2022, increase the cap on the reduction in value under the special use valuation rules of section 2032A from \$750,000 (\$1.19 million in 2021, after indexing since 1998) to \$3 million, indexed for inflation going forward from 2022.
- (4) **Land Subject to Conservation Easements.** Section 4, like section 5 of the 2010 "Responsible Estate Tax Act," would, effective January 1, 2022, increase the maximum exclusion from the gross estate under section 2031(c) by reason of a conservation easement from the lesser of \$500,000 or 40 percent of the net value of the land to the lesser of \$2 million or 60 percent of the net value of the land.
- (5) **No Step-up in Basis for Assets in Grantor Trusts.** Section 5 would add a new section 1014(f) (redesignating the current section 1014(f) as 1014(g)), providing that property "held in a trust of which the transferor is considered the owner under subpart E of part I of subchapter J" would not receive a new basis at the deemed owner's death if "such property is not includible in the gross estate of the transferor for purposes of chapter 11." Although subpart E includes section 678, which treats "[a] person other than the grantor" as the owner of part or all of a trust, it seems that the reference in this bill to "the transferor" is intended to exclude section 678 deemed owners.
- (a) This amendment would "apply to transfers after the date of the enactment of this Act." That would evidently apply to grantor trusts created and funded after enactment. It is less clear how it would apply to transfers to a trust after its initial funding, including perhaps transfers involving sales or exchanges with an existing trust.
  - (b) Section 5 of Senator Sanders' 2019 bill would have extended the "consistent basis" rules of section 1014(f) and the accompanying reporting rules of section 6035(a) (discussed in Part 5.d below) to property received by gift. That provision is omitted from this year's bill, although it presumably would be moot to the extent other legislation taxes unrealized appreciation upon gift or death.)

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(6) **Valuation of Nonbusiness Assets; Limitation on Minority Discounts.** Section 6 is titled “Valuation Rules for Certain Transfers of Nonbusiness Assets; Limitation on Minority Discounts.” It is almost identical to section 7 of Senator Sanders’ 2010 “Responsible Estate Tax Act.”

- (a) Section 6 is also similar to section 276 of H.R. 3874, introduced in March 2000 by Rep. Charles Rangel of New York, the Ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, to implement a legislative proposal in the 1998 Clinton Administration’s “Greenbook.” And it is almost identical to section 303 of H.R. 1264, introduced by Rep. Rangel in March 2001 as an alternative to the Republican proposals that became the 2001 Tax Act, and to three bills subsequently introduced by Rep. Earl Pomeroy (D-North Dakota): H.R. 5008 in June 2002, H.R. 1577 in April 2005, and H.R. 4242 in November 2007.
- (b) The bill would add a new section 2031(d)(1) to the Code, applicable to transfers after the date of enactment, to read as follows:

(d) Valuation Rules for Certain Transfers of Nonbusiness Assets—For purposes of this chapter and chapter 12—

(1) In General—In the case of the transfer of any interest in an entity other than an interest which is actively traded (within the meaning of section 1092) [see Reg. §1.1092(d)-1(a) & (b)]—

(A) the value of any nonbusiness assets held by the entity with respect to such interest shall be determined as if the transferor had transferred such assets directly to the transferee (and no valuation discount shall be allowed with respect to such nonbusiness assets), and

(B) such nonbusiness assets shall not be taken into account in determining the value of the interest in the entity.

The bill includes detailed rules about “passive assets” that might be used in a business and “look-thru rules” for entities that are at least 10 percent owned by another entity.

- (c) The bill would also add a new section 2031(e), to read as follows:

(e) Limitation on Minority Discounts—For purposes of this chapter and chapter 12, in the case of the transfer of any interest in an entity other than an interest which is actively traded (within the meaning of section 1092), no discount shall be allowed by reason of the fact that the transferee does not have control of such entity, or by reason of the lack of marketability of the interest, if the transferor, the transferee, and members of the family (as defined in section 2032A(e)(2)) of the transferor and transferee—

(1) have control of such entity, or

(2) own the majority of the ownership interests (by value) in such entity.

The words “or by reason of the lack of marketability of the interest” are new in this year’s version. Simply stated, the objectives of the proposed new section 2031(e) are to attribute control among family members and to presume control from majority ownership, without exception, apparently not even an exception for an active trade or business. Both objectives will undoubtedly be viewed as unrealistic in many contexts, especially in the context of an active trade or business.

(7) **Grantor Retained Annuity Trusts.** Section 7 mirrors the proposals of the Obama Administration’s Greenbooks regarding GRATs, generally in the form in which those proposals solidified in the 2015 and 2016 Greenbooks.

- (a) Like the 2015 and 2016 Greenbooks, the bill, applicable to transfers after the date of enactment, would require any GRAT to
  - i. have a term no shorter than 10 years (the proposal in the original 2009 Obama Administration Greenbook),
  - ii. prohibit any decrease in the annuity during the GRAT term (a proposal added in the 2010 Greenbook),
  - iii. have a term no longer than the life expectancy of the grantor plus 10 years (a proposal added in the 2012 Greenbook), and

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- iv. have a remainder interest with a value for gift tax purposes when the GRAT is created equal to at least 25 percent of the value of the assets contributed to the GRAT or \$500,000, whichever is greater (but not greater than the total value of the assets contributed) (a proposal added in the 2015 Greenbook).
  - (b) Section 8 of Senator Sanders' 2010 "Responsible Estate Tax Act" had included only the minimum 10-year term and the prohibition on decreases in the annuity, reflecting only the 2009 and 2010 Greenbooks that had been published before then.
  - (c) The 2015 Greenbook had also added that "the proposal ... would prohibit the grantor from engaging in a tax-free exchange of any asset held in the trust." That would diminish the availability of some techniques for managing long-term GRATs. The "For the 99.5 Percent Act" omits that proposal.
- (8) **Grantor Trusts in General.** Similarly, section 8 mirrors the proposals of the Obama Administration's Greenbooks regarding grantor trusts and provides proposed statutory language for those proposals, also generally following the 2015 and 2016 Greenbooks.
- (a) The bill would add to the Code a new chapter 16 (titled "Special Rules for Grantor Trusts"), containing a single section 2901 (titled "Application of Transfer Taxes").
  - (b) Section 2901 would apply to any portion of a trust if
    - i. the grantor is the deemed owner of that portion under subchapter J, or
    - ii. a person other than the grantor is the deemed owner of that portion under subchapter J, if that person "engages in a sale, exchange, or comparable transaction with the trust that is disregarded for purposes of subtitle A [the federal income tax subtitle]," to the extent of "the portion of the trust attributable to the property received by the trust in such transaction, including all retained income therefrom, appreciation thereon, and reinvestments thereof, net of the amount of consideration received by the deemed owner in such transaction." (This second category appears to target the techniques known as "BDITs" and perhaps some "BDOTs," whether as a matter of tax policy or simply to crack down on techniques known to be in use.)
  - (c) Tracking the Obama Administration Greenbooks, section 2901 would
    - i. include the value of the assets of such portion in the gross estate of the deemed owner for estate tax purposes,
    - ii. subject to gift tax any distribution from such portion to one or more beneficiaries [presumably beneficiaries other than the deemed owner] during the deemed owner's life, and
    - iii. treat as a gift by the deemed owner, subject to gift tax, all assets of such portion at any time during the deemed owner's life that the deemed owner ceases to be treated as the owner of such portion for income tax purposes.
  - (d) Section 2901 would reduce the amount thereby subject to estate or gift tax by "the value of any transfer by gift by the deemed owner to the trust previously taken into account by the deemed owner under chapter 12." This is not an exception for the **portion** of the trust attributable to such a taxable gift; it is a "reduction" by the amount reported as a gift. In other words, section 2901 would "freeze" the amount excluded from its reach at its initial gift tax value (thus targeting "leveraged" transfers).
  - (e) Section 2901 provides that it "shall not apply to any trust that is includible in the gross estate of the deemed owner (without regard to [section 2901])." (An additional exception in Senator Sanders' 2019 bill for "any other type of trust that the Secretary determines by regulations or other guidance does not have as a significant purpose the avoidance of transfer taxes" is omitted from his 2021 bill.)



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- (f) Section 2901 would provide that “[a]ny tax imposed by [section 2901] shall be a liability of the trust.” It does not specify whether any such tax, especially estate tax, would be calculated at the average or marginal tax rate, or in some other way.
- (g) Section 2901 would apply to
- i. trusts created on or after the date of enactment,
  - ii. any portion of a trust attributable to a contribution on or after the date of enactment to a trust created before the date of enactment, and
  - iii. any portion of a trust created before the date of enactment if a sale, exchange, or comparable transaction referred to in paragraph (b)ii above occurs on or after the date of enactment.
- (h) There is considerable overlap in the effects of sections 5 and 8 of this bill. In general, section 5 appears to provide that there is no stepped-up basis at death for assets in a grantor trust if the value of those assets is not included in the decedent’s gross estate, while section 8 appears to ensure that there are no such trusts by including the value of the assets of all grantor trusts in the gross estate. There are some differences, such as the application to section 678 deemed owners, the exception for “any trust that is includible in the gross estate of the deemed owner (without regard to [section 2901]),” the possible application to foreign trusts, the effect of transactions between the trust and the deemed owner after the effective date, and even a one-day difference in the effective date itself (section 5 would apply “after” the date of enactment while section 8 would apply “**on or after**” the date of enactment). But, in the main, it appears that there is a lot of redundancy between these two sections, which tends to reinforce the narrative that this bill has been put together with a view toward making it easy for one or more, but not all, of the individual provisions of this bill to be “pulled off the shelf” to serve a targeted policy or revenue purpose in the consideration of legislation on almost any subject.
- (9) **Elimination of GST Exemption for Certain Long-Term Trusts.** Section 9 would mandate an inclusion ratio of one for any trust that is not a “qualifying trust.” A “qualifying trust” is “a trust for which the date of termination of such trust is not greater than 50 years after the date on which such trust is created.”
- (a) This recalls a similar proposal in the Obama Administration’s Greenbooks, but would be significantly more aggressive. It would use a period of 50 years (rather than 90 years as in the Greenbooks) and would mandate an inclusion ratio of one from the beginning of a trust (rather than resetting the inclusion ratio to one on the 90th anniversary), thus apparently without any “wait and see” relief.
  - (b) A trust created before the date of enactment with an inclusion ratio less than one would be allowed to keep that inclusion ratio for 50 years after enactment, and then the inclusion ratio would be reset to one.
  - (c) Special rules would be provided for portions of trusts treated as separate trusts (see section 2654(b)(1) and Reg. §26.2654-1) and for transfers between trusts.
- (10) **“Simplifying” Gift Tax Exclusion for Annual Gifts.** Section 10 would significantly limit the availability of the gift tax annual exclusion, effective January 1, 2022. It would implement a similar proposal in the Obama Administration Greenbooks, from which it borrows the characterization of “simplifying.”
- (a) Like the Greenbooks, the bill would introduce a **per-donor** limit on the annual exclusion, as a further limitation on the \$10,000 (indexed for inflation since 1998) **per-donee** exclusion of current law.
  - (b) While the per-donor limit in the Greenbooks would have been \$50,000 (indexed for inflation), the “For the 99.5 Percent Act” would set the annual per-donor limit at twice the per-donee limit, currently \$30,000 (also indexed for inflation).



- (c) Like the Greenbooks, the bill would impose this new limitation on transfers in trust (without an exception for trusts described in section 2642(c)(2)), transfers of interests in passthrough entities, transfers of interests subject to a prohibition on sale, and other transfers of property that, without regard to withdrawal, put, or other such rights in the donee, cannot immediately be liquidated by the donee.
- (d) Like the Greenbooks, the bill would leave in place the per-donee annual exclusion (currently \$15,000), for example for outright gifts of cash or marketable securities.
- (e) The bill would repeal section 2503(c), which now provides a special way that a trust for a minor can qualify as a present interest.
- (f) As in the Greenbook proposals, the new \$30,000 per-donor limit would apply to all transfers in trust, but apparently would not include a present-interest requirement at all, although it apparently would still require identification of donees to apply the \$15,000 per-donee limit.
- (g) The bill would not change the unlimited exclusion in section 2503(e) for tuition and medical expenses paid directly to the provider.
- (h) The bill would not change the gift-splitting rules in section 2513.

c. **Deemed Realization Proposals**

- (1) **Legislation Introduced and Under Discussion.** On March 29, 2021, Ways and Means Committee Member Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D-New Jersey) introduced H.R. 2286, described as a bill “to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to treat property transferred by gift or at death as sold for fair market value, and for other purposes.” On the same day, Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-Maryland), joined by Senators Cory Booker (D-New Jersey), Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-Rhode Island), and Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts), issued a statement calling “the Stepped-Up Basis Loophole” “one of the biggest loopholes in the U.S. tax code, which subsidizes America’s wealthiest heirs,” citing a Joint Committee on Taxation estimate that it will cause a loss of \$41.9 billion of tax revenue in 2021 alone. The statement was accompanied by 32 pages of statutory language titled the “Sensible Taxation and Equity Promotion (“STEP”) Act of 2021,” with the acronym of “STEP” evidently designed to recall the “step-up” in basis that it attacks.

- (2) **Effective Dates.** A conspicuous and significant difference between Congressman Pascrell’s H.R. 2286 and Senator Van Hollen’s “discussion draft” of the “STEP Act” is their effective dates.

H.R. 2286 would apply to gifts and transfers made, including transfers from decedents dying, after December 31, 2021. As discussed in the context of section 2 of Senator Sanders’ “For the 99.5 Percent Act” in Part 1.b(2)(f) above, that is the typical effective date for broad changes in the taxation of transfers by gift and at death, although other provisions of the Sanders bill itself show how the date of enactment can be a typical effective date for changes to the tax treatment of particular transactions or structures.

For the Senate discussion draft, the corresponding date would be December 31, 2020. In other words, it would be uncharacteristically retroactive to the beginning of 2021. This could be a portent of less deference to conventional effective-date norms in the political climate of the current Congress. Or it could mean only that Congressman Pascrell, as a member of the Ways and Means Committee, has received more technical assistance from staff members who understand the historical and practical preferences for avoiding retroactivity. Or it could mean that a “discussion draft” is only that.

Both proposals would tax past appreciation, not just appreciation following enactment. This contrasts with the 1969 proposed “Taxation of Appreciation of Assets Transferred at Death or by Gift,” which stated that “[o]nly appreciation occurring after the date of enactment would be subject to tax.” “Tax Reform Studies and Proposals, U.S. Treasury Department,” Joint Publication of the House Committee on Ways and Means and Senate Committee on Finance, at 335 (91st Cong., 1st Sess., Feb. 5, 1969). It also contrasts with the 1976 enactment (which

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proved to be temporary) of carryover basis, which provided a “fresh start” valuation on December 31, 1976, and a proration of appreciation over the entire holding period of nonmarketable assets acquired before that date. Section 1023(h), added by section 2005(a)(2) of the Tax Reform Act of 1976, Public Law 94-455 (94th Cong., 2d Sess., Oct. 4, 1976). Interestingly, it does not contrast as sharply with the “aggregate basis increase” and “spousal property basis increase” provided by the second (also temporary) enactment of carryover basis in 2001, taking effect in 2010, which was not as clearly tailored to sheltering pre-enactment appreciation. Section 1022(b) and (c), added by section 542(a) of the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001, Public Law 107-16 (107th Cong., 1st Sess., June 7, 2001).

- (3) **Deemed Sale Rule of New Section 1261.** The proposals would add a new section 1261 to the Code, generally treating any property transferred by gift or at death as sold for its fair market value on the date of the gift or death. Both proposals appear to contemplate that the gain on deemed sales at death would be reported on the decedent’s final income tax return (Form 1040), or a supplement to it, but they do not say that.
- (4) **Exception for Tangible Personal Property.** The deemed sale rules would not apply to transfers of tangible personal property other than collectibles (including coins and bullion) and property held in connection with a trade or business. H.R. 2286 adds property held for investment, and the STEP Act adds property related to the production of income under section 212, to the coverage of the deemed sale rules.
- (5) **Exception for Transfers to Spouses.** A transfer to the spouse of a transferor or surviving spouse of a decedent would be exempt from this deemed sale treatment if the spouse is a U.S. citizen (or long-term resident under the STEP Act), essentially deferring sale treatment until the spouse disposes of the asset.

Under H.R. 2286, this exemption is extended to a “qualifying spousal trust,” which is defined as a qualified domestic trust (“QDOT”) of which the transferor’s spouse or surviving spouse is the sole current income beneficiary and has the power to appoint the entire trust. Under the STEP Act, this exemption is extended to a QTIP trust. Awkwardly, the STEP Act describes a QTIP trust as “qualified terminal [*sic*, not “terminable”] interest property.” Also awkwardly, H.R. 2286 incorporates the QDOT definition of section 2056A, even though the spouse must be a U.S. citizen to qualify for the deemed sale exception in H.R. 2286 in the first place. That could conceivably even require any ordinary QTIP trust for a U.S. citizen spouse to mandate the withholding under section 2056A(a)(1)(B) of estate tax payable with respect to distributions, for example (or, channeling it into the deemed sale context, withholding the income tax on unrealized appreciation avoided by the transfer to the trust), although there is no indication that such an odd result is intended or would serve any purpose of this proposed legislation. And a strict application of the “qualifying spousal trust” rules in H.R. 2286 would also require the spouse to have the power to appoint the entire trust, which is not normal in an ordinary QTIP trust.

Property transferred in such an exempt transfer to an eligible trust for the benefit of the transferor’s spouse or surviving spouse would be subject to the deemed sale rules (1) upon a distribution from the trust to someone other than the spouse, (2) upon the cessation of the trust’s status as an eligible trust, or (3) upon the spouse’s death.

- (6) **Exception for Transfers to Charity.** A transfer to a charity or another organization described in section 170(c) would not be a deemed sale. The STEP Act adds explicit exemptions for (1) a trust in which property is set aside for such an organization (subject to annuity, unitrust, and other valuation rules of section 2702), (2) a qualified disability trust defined in section 642(b)(2)(C)(ii), and (3) a cemetery perpetual care fund described in section 642(i).
- (7) **Other Estate-Includible Grantor Trusts.** In the case of a transfer to a trust is that is **both** deemed owned by the transferor under subpart E of part 1 of subchapter J (commonly called generically the “grantor trust rules”) **and** includible in the transferor’s gross estate, **the deemed sale would occur**, not when the property is transferred to the trust, but when:

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- (a) a distribution is made to a person other than the deemed owner,
  - (b) the transferor ceases to be the deemed owner of the trust (including, apparently, upon the transferor's death), or
  - (c) the trust ceases to be includible in the gross estate of the transferor (oddly, in H.R. 2286, explicitly including upon the transferor's death).
- (8) **Other, Non-Includible, Grantor Trusts. Under the STEP Act**, in the case of other deemed-owned trusts (except the spousal, charitable, disability, and cemetery care trusts discussed above) – that is, a deemed-owned trust that is not includible in the transferor's gross estate – **the deemed sale would apparently occur**:
- (a) when a transfer is made to the trust,
  - (b) when a distribution is made to a person other than the deemed owner,
  - (c) when the transferor ceases to be the deemed owner of the trust, or
  - (d) upon the death of the transferor.

This type of trust is commonly called a "defective grantor trust." The treatment of a transfer to the trust, a distribution from the trust, the termination of grantor trust status, and the death of the transferor as deemed realization events, in effect overturning Rev. Rul. 85-13, 1985-1 C.B. 184, would likely be viewed as quite harsh.

- (9) **Non-Grantor Trusts.** In the case of other trusts – that is, a trust that is not deemed owned by the transferor for income tax purposes – the transfer to the trust would be treated as a sale, and property held in a long-term trust would be deemed sold at specified intervals. In H.R. 2286, property that has been held in trust for **30 years** without being subject to section 1261 would be deemed sold, or, if it has been continuously held in trust for more than 30 years on the effective date (January 1, 2022), it is treated as sold on that date. In the STEP Act, **all** property held by such a trust would be treated as sold every **21 years**, with property in a trust created before January 1, 2006, first treated as sold on December 31, 2026. Thus, H.R. 2286 would apparently require tracking the holding period of each individual asset, while the STEP Act would apparently subject all trust assets to tax every 21 years regardless of the asset's holding period.

In addition, H.R. 2286 would treat a modification of the direct or indirect beneficiaries of a trust (or the beneficiaries' rights to trust assets) or the transfer or distribution of trust assets (including to another trust) as a deemed sale, unless Treasury and the IRS determine "that any such transfer or modification is of a type which does not have the potential for tax avoidance." This apparently is intended to include some decantings.

- (10) **Other Exclusions.** H.R. 2286 would exclude annual exclusion gifts and up to \$1 million of net capital gain at death. The \$1 million amount would be indexed for inflation after 2022. Thus, lifetime exclusions would be measured by the total value transferred (and the number of donees), while the exclusion at death would be measured by the net gain. Among other complications, the exclusion of gifts to the extent of the dollar amount of the annual exclusion would present the challenge of allocating that exclusion when gifts to any individual of assets with different bases exceed the annual exclusion amount in any year, as well as the challenge of applying that allocation in the case of gift-splitting by spouses.

The STEP Act would provide what amounts to a "lifetime exclusion" of \$100,000 of gain, expressed as "the excess of ... \$100,000, over ... the aggregate amount excluded under this subsection for all preceding taxable years." For transfers at death, the exclusion would be \$1 million, less the amount of the \$100,000 exclusion applied to lifetime gifts. Both the \$100,000 and \$1 million amounts would be indexed for inflation.

The proposals would not change the exclusion for sales of a principal residence.

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- (11)**Netting of Gains and Losses.** In the case of deemed sales occurring upon death, the proposals would exempt the sales from the disallowance of related-party losses under section 267, which would allow losses on deemed sales to offset gains.
- (12)**Coordination with Basis Rules.** The basis rules for property acquired from a decedent (section 1014) or upon gift or transfer to a trust (section 1015) would be amended to more or less coordinate with the new deemed sale rules, generally providing a stepped-up (or stepped-down) basis if there is a deemed sale. Apparently, under H.R. 2286, that would mean that even annual exclusion gifts excluded from deemed sale treatment would receive a new basis equal to the fair market value at the time of the gift. Spouses and surviving spouses would receive a carryover basis in all cases.
- (13)**Extension of Time for Payment of Tax.** The proposals would add a new section 6168, providing an election to pay the income tax on deemed sales in installments, similar to the rules in section 6166 for estate taxes. Like section 6166, section 6168 would apply only with respect to transfers at death, not during life. In contrast to section 6166, however, section 6168 would apply not only to closely held business interests that exceed 35 percent of the gross estate, but to all assets other than “actively traded” personal property (such as securities traded on an exchange).
- The STEP Act would mirror section 6166 by allowing payment of the additional income tax in up to 10 equal annual installments beginning no later than five years after the prescribed due date. H.R. 2286 would allow up to seven equal annual installments, with no deferral of the first installment.
- Both proposals would provide for payment of interest (at 45 percent of the normal rate as in section 6601(j)(1)(B) for estate tax extended under section 6166, but with no “2-percent portion” as in section 6601(j)(1)(A)), and the STEP Act would make that interest nondeductible for estate tax purposes. Both proposals, like section 6166, would also include provisions for a special lien (which the STEP Act would allow to be partially replaced by a bond), extensions of the period of limitations on assessment, and proration of deficiencies to installments.
- The STEP Act, but apparently not H.R. 2286, would provide for acceleration of the payment of deferred tax if the subject property is disposed of or is used in whole or in part to secure nonrecourse indebtedness.
- (14)**Information Reporting.** H.R. 2286 would add a new section 6050Z requiring that, except in the case of securities transactions reported by brokers under section 6045(g), the donor or executor must report to the IRS the name and taxpayer identification number of the recipient of each transfer and information describing the property and stating its fair market value and basis. The donor or executor must also report that fair market value and basis to the recipient of the property. These requirements are similar to the rules currently in section 6035 regarding the consistent basis of property transferred at death, except that section 6050Z would require this information reported to the IRS to be shared only with “the person to whom such transfer was made” (not, for example, to all beneficiaries who might receive an asset, as with Schedule A of Form 8971) and only “at such time and in such form and manner as the Secretary shall by regulations prescribe.”
- The STEP Act omits such a reporting requirement, but, seeming to step off-topic somewhat, it would add a new section 6048A requiring any trust (not already reporting under section 6034(b) or 6048(b)) with assets of more than \$1 million or gross income for the year of more than \$20,000 to report annually to the IRS “(1) a full and complete accounting of all trust activities and operations for the year, (2) the name, address, and TIN of the trustee, (3) the name, address, and TIN of the grantor, (4) the name, address, and TIN of each beneficiary of the trust, and (5) such other information as the Secretary may prescribe.”
- (15)**Miscellaneous Matters.** In addition, the STEP Act would provide that the costs of appraising property deemed sold under new section 1261 would be deductible for income tax purposes and would not be a “miscellaneous itemized deduction” subject to section 67.

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The STEP Act also would waive penalties for underpayment of estimated tax related to income tax on deemed realized gains at death (which, of course, would not have been foreseeable).

d. **Estate Tax Repeal Bills**

- (1) On March 9, 2021, joined by several of his Republican colleagues, Senator John Thune (R-South Dakota) introduced the “Death Tax Repeal Act of 2021” (S. 617). The bill resembles repeal bills that have been introduced over the last two or three decades.
  - (a) S. 617 would permanently repeal the estate and GST taxes, effective for estates of decedents dying, and generation-skipping transfers, after the date of enactment. As in past bills, it would retain the estate tax under section 2056A(b)(1)(A) on distributions from qualified domestic trusts for spouses of decedents who died before the date of enactment, but only for ten years after the date of enactment. It would immediately eliminate the estate tax under section 2056A(b)(1)(B) on the value of property remaining in QDOTs at the deaths of surviving spouses after the date of enactment.
  - (b) S. 617 would retain the gift tax with a 35% rate for cumulative gifts over \$500,000 and would make permanent the current gift tax exclusion amount of \$10 million indexed for inflation since 2011 (that is, \$11.7 million for 2021), effective for gifts made on or after the date of enactment.
    - i. S. 617 would deal with the issue currently posed by the phrase “as of the end of the calendar year” in section 2505(a)(1) by treating the year in which the bill is enacted as two separate calendar years, one ending on the day before the date of enactment and the other beginning on the date of enactment.
    - ii. It would also restore the 2001 Tax Act’s enigmatic section 2511(c), providing that “[n]otwithstanding any other provision of this section and except as provided in regulations, a transfer in trust shall be treated as a taxable gift under section 2503, unless the trust is treated as wholly owned by the donor or the donor’s spouse under subpart E of part I of subchapter J of chapter 1.” (It ignores the 2002 amendment, which changed “taxable gift under section 2503” to “transfer of property by gift.”)
      - a. This provision appears to perpetuate the 2001 lore that the retention of the gift tax is needed to back-stop the income tax by subjecting to gift tax any transfer that would be “income-shifting,” but, as in 2001, it is hard to be sure or to fully understand such a policy.
      - b. In any event, such a provision would presumably shut down the advantages of so-called incomplete-gift non-grantor trusts (or “ING trusts”).
      - c. More perplexing, as in 2001, the use of the word “unless” in this provision could create the impression that a taxable gift is **avoided** by simply making the transfer to a trust that **is** a wholly-owned grantor trust as to the grantor or the grantor’s spouse. That would certainly be different from the treatment of “intentionally defective” grantor trusts for which current funding is a completed gift but which normally include no features that would subject the trust to estate tax upon the grantor’s death.
- (2) A companion bill, H.R. 1712, was introduced in the House of Representatives on the same day by Congressman Jason Smith (R-Missouri).

## 2. Requirements of the Regulatory Process

- a. Executive Order 13789 of April 21, 2017, famous for ordering the action that led to the withdrawal in October 2017 of the August 2016 proposed section 2704 regulations, also directed the Treasury Department and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to “review and, if appropriate, reconsider the scope and implementation of the existing exemption for certain tax regulations from the review process set forth in Executive Order 12866 and any successor order.”



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- b. Executive Order 12866, which was signed by President Clinton on September 30, 1993, requires generally that Treasury
- (1) periodically provide the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) within OMB with a list of its planned regulatory actions, including those it believes are “significant regulatory actions” (section 6(a)(3)(A) of Executive Order 12866),
  - (2) for each “significant regulatory action,” provide to OIRA “(i) [t]he text of the draft regulatory action, together with a reasonably detailed description of the need for the regulatory action and an explanation of how the regulatory action will meet that need; and (ii) [a]n assessment of the potential costs and benefits of the regulatory action, including an explanation of the manner in which the regulatory action is consistent with a statutory mandate and, to the extent permitted by law, promotes the President’s priorities and avoids undue interference with State, local, and tribal governments in the exercise of their governmental functions” (section 6(a)(3)(B) of Executive Order 12866), and
  - (3) for each “significant regulatory action” that is likely to have an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more, include the following regulatory impact assessment (section 6(a)(3)(C) of Executive Order 12866, emphasis added):
    - (i) An assessment, *including the underlying analysis*, of *benefits* anticipated from the regulatory action (such as, but not limited to, the promotion of the efficient functioning of the economy and private markets, the enhancement of health and safety, the protection of the natural environment, and the elimination or reduction of discrimination or bias) together with, to the extent feasible, a *quantification* of those benefits;
    - (ii) An assessment, *including the underlying analysis*, of *costs* anticipated from the regulatory action (such as, but not limited to, the direct cost both to the government in administering the regulation and to businesses and others in complying with the regulation, and any adverse effects on the efficient functioning of the economy, private markets (including productivity, employment, and competitiveness), health, safety, and the natural environment), together with, to the extent feasible, a *quantification* of those costs; and
    - (iii) An assessment, *including the underlying analysis*, of costs and benefits of potentially effective and reasonably feasible *alternatives* to the planned regulation, identified by the agencies or the public (including improving the current regulation and reasonably viable nonregulatory actions), and *an explanation why the planned regulatory action is preferable to the identified potential alternatives*.
- c. Under section 3(f) of Executive Order 12866, a “significant regulatory action” to which the requirements described in paragraphs (2) and (3) above apply is defined as
- any regulatory action that is likely to result in a rule that may:
- (1) Have an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more or adversely affect in a material way the economy, a sector of the economy, productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, local, or tribal governments or communities;
  - (2) Create a serious inconsistency or otherwise interfere with an action taken or planned by another agency;
  - (3) Materially alter the budgetary impact of entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs or the rights and obligations of recipients thereof; or
  - (4) Raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President’s priorities, or the principles set forth in this Executive order.
- d. The regulatory impact assessment, along with a draft of the proposed regulations, must be reviewed within OMB before a proposed regulation is published for public comment. In addition, the public must be informed of the content of the regulatory impact assessment and of any substantive changes made in the draft of the proposed regulations after that draft was submitted to OMB for review (section 6(a)(3)(E) of Executive Order 12866).
- e. Obviously, that is not information we are accustomed to seeing in connection with tax regulations. Since a Memorandum of Agreement between Treasury and OMB in 1983, most tax regulations were viewed as exempt from rigorous OMB review, partly because they were viewed as interpreting a statute, and any burden on the economy therefore was attributable to the statute, not to the regulations.



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- f. A new Memorandum of Agreement, signed by the Administrator of OIRA and the General Counsel of the Treasury Department on April 11, 2018, supersedes the 1983 Memorandum of Agreement and generally affirms the application of Executive Order 12866 to tax regulatory actions.
- (1) Under paragraph 3 of the new Memorandum of Agreement, the frequency of providing the list of planned tax regulatory actions referred to in paragraph b(1) above is quarterly.
  - (2) Under paragraph 8, the new Memorandum of Agreement was effective immediately, except that the regulatory impact assessment described in paragraph b(3) above was not required until the earlier of April 11, 2019, or “when Treasury obtains reasonably sufficient resources (with the assistance of OMB) to perform the required analysis.”
  - (3) Under paragraph 4, the time allowed for OIRA review is generally 45 days, with the opportunity for Treasury and OIRA to agree to 10 business days “[t]o ensure timely implementation of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017.”
- g. This has not worked too badly in the tax context in the Trump Administration. For example, there do not appear to have excessive delays. And there is some bipartisan support for this type of oversight. So it is possible – but not certain – that it will continue in some form in the Biden Administration.

### 3. Design Changes in the 2017-2018 Priority Guidance Plan

The Treasury-IRS Priority Guidance Plan for the 12 months beginning July 1, 2017, was released on October 20, 2017 ([https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018\\_pgp\\_initial.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018_pgp_initial.pdf)). The Second Quarter Update was released on February 7, 2018 ([https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018\\_pgp\\_2nd\\_quarter\\_update.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018_pgp_2nd_quarter_update.pdf)) and added a new Part 1 to respond to the 2017 Tax Act. The Third Quarter Update was released on May 9, 2018 ([https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018\\_pgp\\_3rd\\_quarter\\_update.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018_pgp_3rd_quarter_update.pdf)). The Fourth Quarter Update was released on August 17, 2018 ([https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018\\_pgp\\_4th\\_quarter\\_update.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2017-2018_pgp_4th_quarter_update.pdf)). Reflecting additional review mandated by President Trump, the organization and tone of the 2017-2018 Priority Guidance Plan differed from previous Plans. The introduction to the original October 2017 Plan provided the following explanation:

Part 1 [ultimately Part 2] of the plan focuses on the eight regulations from 2016 that were identified pursuant to Executive Order 13789 and our intended actions with respect to those regulations. Part 2 [ultimately Part 3] of the plan describes certain projects that we have identified as burden reducing and that we believe can be completed in the 8½ months remaining in the plan year. As in the past, we intend to update the plan on a quarterly basis, and additional burden reduction projects may be added. Part 3 [later Part 4 and now Part 5] of the plan describes the various projects that comprise our implementation of the new statutory partnership audit regime, which has been a topic of significant concern and focus as the statutory rules go into effect on January 1, 2018. Part 4 [later Part 5 and now Part 6] of the plan, in line with past years’ plans and our long-standing commitment to transparency in the process, describes specific projects by subject area that will be the focus of the balance of our efforts this plan year.

### 4. 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Priority Guidance Plans

- a. Treasury and the IRS released their Priority Guidance Plan for the 12 months from July 2018 through June 2019 on November 8, 2018, and the Fourth Quarter Update to the Plan ([https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2018-2019\\_pgp\\_4th\\_quarter\\_update.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2018-2019_pgp_4th_quarter_update.pdf)) on August 28, 2019. The 2018-2019 Plan followed the five-part organization introduced in the 2017-2018 Plan. For purposes of the subjects addressed in this outline, except for numbering and minor wording changes, the 2018-2019 Plan was carried over to the 2019-2020 Plan.
- b. Treasury and the IRS released their Priority Guidance Plan for the 12 months from July 2019 through June 2020 on October 8, 2019, and the Fourth Quarter Update on September 2, 2020 ([https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2019-2020\\_pgp\\_4th\\_quarter\\_update.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2019-2020_pgp_4th_quarter_update.pdf)). The 2019-2020 Plan had six parts, following the five-part organization introduced in the 2017-2018 Plan with an additional Part 4 titled “Taxpayer First Act Guidance.” Part 1, titled “Implementation of Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA),” included the following items of particular interest to estate planners:

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(1) **Item 16: “Guidance on computational, definitional, and anti-avoidance rules under §199A and §643(f). Final and proposed regulations were published on February 8, 2019. Notice 2019-07 was published on February 25, 2019.”**

- (a) A 184-page Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (including a 104-page preamble) was released on August 8, 2018 (REG-107892-18) and published at 83 Fed. Reg. 40884 (Aug. 16, 2018). The IRS received over 300 comments and heard from 28 witnesses at a public hearing on October 16, 2018. Final regulations were released on January 18, 2019, corrected on February 1, 2019, and published as **Regs. §§1.199A-0, 1.199A-1, 1.199A-2, 1.199A-3, 1.199A-4, 1.199A-5, 1.199A-6, and 1.643(f)-1, T.D. 9847, 84 Fed. Reg. 2952 (Feb. 8, 2019), 2019-9 I.R.B. 670 (Feb. 25, 2019), corrected, 84 Fed. Reg. 15954 (April 17, 2019).**
- (b) Reg. §1.199A-1 provides that the term “trade or business” will be applied consistently with the guidance under section 162, which allows a deduction for ordinary and necessary business expenses. The regulations, however, expand the traditional definition under section 162 to include certain rental or licensing of property to related parties under common control. Notice 2019-7, issued contemporaneously with the final regulations, contains a draft revenue procedure prescribing safe harbor parameters for a real estate rental business. The regulations provide that the section 199A deduction is applied at the partner or shareholder level. The final regulations clarify that the rules of subchapters K and S apply in determining each partner’s or shareholder’s share of applicable items and that an entity with a single owner that is disregarded as an entity separate from its owner under Reg. §301.7701-3 is disregarded under section 199A also. The section 199A deduction does not affect the adjusted basis of a partner’s interest in a partnership, the adjusted basis of a shareholder’s stock in an S corporation, or an S corporation’s accumulated adjustments account.
- (c) Reg. §1.199A-2 prescribes rules for determining W-2 wages of a qualified trade or business for purposes of section 199A, generally using the rules that applied under former section 199 with respect to the domestic production activities deduction. Rev. Proc. 2019-11, issued contemporaneously with the final regulations, further explains methods that may be used to calculate W-2 wages for this purpose. Reg. §1.199A-2 also addresses many issues concerning the related factor used in computing the deduction – the unadjusted basis immediately after the acquisition (UBIA) of qualified property – including its allocation among relevant passthrough entities, the effect of subsequent improvements to the qualified property, and the effect of nonrecognition transactions such as like-kind exchanges.
- (d) Reg. §1.199A-3 restates the definition of qualified business income (QBI) and provides additional guidance on the determination of QBI, qualified REIT dividends, and qualified publicly traded partnership income. The regulations describe in further detail the exclusions from QBI, including capital gains, interest income, reasonable compensation, and guaranteed payments.
- (e) Reg. §1.199A-4 addresses rules for aggregating multiple trades or businesses for purposes of applying section 199A. Comments from the public had urged the IRS to apply the grouping rules for determining passive activity loss and credit limitation rules under section 469. The IRS concluded that the rules under section 469 were inappropriate for purposes of section 199A, but did agree that some aggregation should be permitted.

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- (f) Reg. §1.199A-5 contains guidance related to a specified service trade or business (SSTB).
- i. In general, under section 199A, if a trade or business is an SSTB, none of its items are taken into account for determining a taxpayer's QBI. A taxpayer who owns an SSTB conducted through an entity, such as an S corporation or partnership, is treated as engaged in an SSTB for purposes of section 199A, regardless of the taxpayer's actual level of participation in the trade or business.
  - ii. Notwithstanding that general rule, taxpayers with taxable income of less than \$157,500 (\$315,000 for married couples filing jointly) may claim a deduction under section 199A for QBI received from an SSTB. The section 199A deduction phases out for taxpayers with taxable incomes over this threshold amount. If a trade or business is conducted by a passthrough entity, the phase-out threshold is determined at the individual, trust, or estate level, not at the level of the passthrough entity.
  - iii. The regulations contain a lengthy and detailed definition of an SSTB. Pursuant to section 199A(d)(2)(A), which incorporates the rules of section 1202(e)(3)(A), an SSTB is any trade or business in the fields of health, law, accounting, actuarial science, performing arts, consulting, athletics, financial services, brokerage services, investing, investment management, or trading or dealing in securities, or any trade or business where the principal asset is the reputation or skill of one or more of its employees or owners. The regulations limit "reputation or skill" to trades or businesses involving the receipt of income for endorsing products or services, licensing or receiving income for the use of an individual's publicity rights, or receiving appearance fees.
  - iv. The common law and statutory rules used to determine whether an individual is an employee for federal employment tax purposes apply to determining whether an individual is engaged in the trade or business of performing services as an employee for purposes of section 199A. In an effort to prevent taxpayers from reclassifying employees as independent contractors in order to claim a section 199A deduction, the regulations also create a rebuttable presumption that an individual who was treated as an employee for federal income tax purposes but is subsequently treated as other than an employee with respect to the same services is for three years still engaged in the trade or business of performing services as an employee for purposes of section 199A. The limitation to three years was added in the final regulations.
- (g) Reg. §1.199A-6 contains special rules for passthrough entities, publicly traded partnerships, nongrantor trusts, and estates.
- i. Passthrough entities, including S corporations and entities taxable as partnerships for federal income tax purposes, cannot claim a deduction under section 199A. Any passthrough entity conducting a trade or business, along with any publicly traded partnership conducting a trade or business, must report all relevant information – including QBI, W-2 wages, basis of qualified property, qualified REIT dividends, and qualified publicly traded partnership income – to its owners so they may determine the amount of their respective section 199A deductions.
  - ii. The regulations require that a nongrantor trust or estate conducting a trade or business allocate QBI, expenses properly allocable to the trade or business, W-2 wages, and basis of qualified property among the trust or estate and its beneficiaries. The allocation is based on the ratio that the distributable net income (DNI) distributed or deemed distributed to each beneficiary bears to the trust's or estate's total DNI for the taxable year. Any DNI not distributed is allocated to the nongrantor trust or estate itself. The unadjusted basis immediately after acquisition of qualified property is allocated without taking into account how depreciation deductions are allocated among the beneficiaries under section 643(c). On June 24, 2020, **T.D. 9899** added Reg. §1.199A-6(d)(3)(iii),

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effective August 24, 2020, clarifying that in the case of a trust or estate subject to the separate share rules of section 663(c), the allocation of these items to the separate shares will be governed by the regulations under section 663(c).

- iii. T.D. 9899 also added Reg. §1.199A-6(d)(3)(v), confirming that a charitable remainder trust described in section 664 is not entitled to a section 199A deduction because it is not subject to income tax. It also provides, however, that a taxable recipient of a unitrust or annuity amount from the trust applies the recipient's own threshold amount for purposes of section 199A, taking into account the annuity or unitrust amount received, and may take relevant section 199A items into account for purposes of determining the section 199A deduction to the extent that the unitrust or annuity amount distributed to that recipient consists of such items under Reg. §1.664-1(d).
  - iv. For purposes of the section 199A regulations, a qualified subchapter S trust (QSST) is treated as a grantor trust, and the individual treated as the owner of the QSST is treated as having received QBI directly from the trade or business and not through the QSST. The IRS and Treasury requested comments on whether a taxable recipient of an annuity or unitrust interest in a charitable remainder trust should be eligible for a section 199A deduction to the extent the taxpayer receives QBI from the trust.
- (h) The regulations under section 199A are generally effective as of February 8, 2019, the date they were published in the Federal Register. But the preamble to the final regulations provides that for taxable years ending in 2018 taxpayers may rely either on the final regulations under section 199A in their entirety or on the proposed regulations in their entirety.
- (i) Rev. Proc. 2019-38, 2019-42 I.R.B. 942, providing a safe harbor for certain rental real estate enterprises, was released September 24, 2019.
- (j) In addition to regulations under section 199A, the IRS and Treasury issued regulations under section 643(f) to prevent taxpayers from manipulating the section 199A deduction by the use of multiple nongrantor trusts.
- i. Section 643(f), enacted by the Deficit Reduction Act of 1984, states:

For purposes of this subchapter [subchapter J], under regulations prescribed by the Secretary, 2 or more trusts shall be treated as 1 trust if (1) such trusts have substantially the same grantor or grantors and substantially the same primary beneficiary or beneficiaries, and (2) a principal purpose of such trusts is the avoidance of the tax imposed by this chapter. For purposes of the preceding sentence, a husband and wife shall be treated as 1 person.
  - ii. Proposed Reg. §1.643(f)-1(a), mirroring the statute, stated that

two or more trusts will be aggregated and treated as a single trust if such trusts have substantially the same grantor or grantors and substantially the same primary beneficiary or beneficiaries, and if a principal purpose for establishing such trusts or for contributing additional cash or other property to such trusts is the avoidance of Federal income tax. For purposes of applying this rule, spouses will be treated as one person.
  - iii. Proposed Reg. §1.643(f)-1(b) added, however, that:

A principal purpose for establishing or funding a trust will be presumed if it results in a significant income tax benefit unless there is a significant non-tax (or non-income tax) purpose that could not have been achieved without the creation of these separate trusts.
  - iv. The effective downgrading of the "principal purpose" standard to a "significant income tax benefit" standard in the proposed regulations was quite controversial and was likely to be challenged if it had been finalized without change. But the final regulations dropped that proposal and are limited to mirroring the statute in Reg. §1.643(f)-1(a), with only the clarification that "a principal purpose for establishing such trusts" means "a principal purpose for establishing *one or more of* such trusts." The preamble to the final

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regulations reported that “the Treasury Department and the IRS ... are taking under advisement whether and how these questions should be addressed in future guidance.”

- v. Unlike the regulations under section 199A, which are generally effective on February 8, 2019, the date they were published in the Federal Register, this multiple trust rule mirroring the 1984 statute applies to taxable years ending after August 16, 2018, the date the proposed regulations were published. Moreover, the preamble to the final regulations added:

Nevertheless, the position of the Treasury Department and the IRS remains that the determination of whether an arrangement involving multiple trusts is subject to treatment under section 643(f) may be made on the basis of the statute and the guidance provided regarding that provision in the legislative history of section 643(f), in the case of any arrangement involving multiple trusts entered into or modified before the effective date of these final regulations.

(2) **Item 45. “Final regulations under §2010 addressing the computation of the estate tax in the event of a difference between the basic exclusion amount applicable to gifts and that applicable at the donor’s date of death. Proposed regulations were published on November 23, 2018.”**

This is an amplification of Item 16 in the 2017-2018 Plan, which was described as “Guidance on computation of estate and gift taxes to reflect changes in the basic exclusion amount.” This amplification made it clear that the target of the regulations would be the phenomenon known as “clawback” of the benefits of the doubled federal gift tax exemption during 2018 through 2025 if the “sunset” of those benefits occurs in 2026 as currently scheduled and the donor dies in 2026 or later.

Regulations to prevent “clawback” were proposed in November 2018 (REG-106706-18, 83 Fed. Reg. 59343 (Nov. 23, 2018)) and finalized in November 2019. Although neither the statute nor the regulations use the word “clawback,” the regulations carry out the mandate of the 2017 Tax Act in new section 2001(g)(2), which provides that Treasury

shall prescribe such regulations as may be necessary or appropriate to carry out this section with respect to any difference between (A) the basic exclusion amount under section 2010(c)(3) applicable at the time of the decedent’s death, and (B) the basic exclusion amount under such section applicable with respect to any gifts made by the decedent.

- (a) **The Problem Under the 2017 Tax Act.** The concern that prompted that mandate for regulations is that the remedy added in 2010 as subsection (g) (now paragraph (1) of subsection (g)) addressed only changes in tax **rates**, and the 2017 Tax Act did not change any rates when it **doubled the exclusion amount**. New paragraph (2) obviously contemplated that regulations would reach a similar result for the potential sunset of the doubled exclusion amount, but left the details to the IRS and Treasury.
  - i. To illustrate the concern, assume that an unmarried individual made a **\$9 million gift** (the donor’s only lifetime gift) in 2019 when the indexed exclusion amount was \$11.4 million. With no change in the law, the donor dies in 2026 with a **taxable estate of \$20 million**. Assume further – just a guess, for the sake of simplicity – that the 2026 \$5 million exclusion amount (indexed) is \$6.8 million. With a 40 percent rate and the exclusion amount used up, the **intuitively correct estate tax** is 40 percent of \$20 million, or **\$8 million**. But, as illustrated in **the table below**, without anti-clawback relief the estate tax turns out to be **\$8,880,000**, producing a **“clawback penalty” of \$880,000**.
  - ii. Other ways to look at this \$880,000 million are:
    - a. 40 percent of the amount by which the \$9 million gift exceeded the \$6.8 million date-of-death exclusion amount; or
    - b. the gift tax on the gift if the gift had been made in 2026; or
    - c. the additional estate tax on a taxable estate of \$29 million **if the gift had not been made at all**.



In other words, **all the benefit the 2017 Tax Act apparently promised this donor for making a gift before the sunset would be wiped out by the sunset.**

- (b) **The Solution Under Reg. §20.2010-1(c).** Pursuant to section 2001(g)(2) and corresponding guidance projects identified in the 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 Treasury-IRS Priority Guidance Plans, proposed anti-clawback regulations were published in November 2018 (REG-106706-18, 83 Fed. Reg. 59343, Nov. 23, 2018), and final regulations were released November 22, 2019 (**T.D. 9884, 84 Fed. Reg. 64995, Nov. 26, 2019**). New Reg. §20.2010-1(c) (with the former paragraphs (c), (d), and (e) re-lettered (d), (e), and (f)) states the heart of the anti-clawback rule, applicable to the extent the credit is based on the basic exclusion amount (emphasis added):

If the total of the **amounts allowable as a credit in computing the gift tax** payable on the decedent's post-1976 gifts ... **exceeds** the credit allowable within the meaning of section 2010(a) in computing the estate tax, ... then the portion of the credit allowable in computing the estate tax on the decedent's taxable estate ... is **the sum of the amounts ... allowable as a credit in computing the gift tax payable** on the decedent's post-1976 gifts.

In other words, in the example above (which has the same facts as Example 1 in the regulations), because \$9 million of basic exclusion amount used for the 2019 gift (the only post-1976 lifetime gift) is greater than the \$6.8 million basic exclusion amount otherwise allowable in computing the 2026 estate tax, that larger amount of \$9 million is used for estate tax purposes instead of the \$6.8 million. (This is simplified for the sake of readability; technically, the credits based on the exclusion amounts are compared under the regulation.) The elimination of the clawback penalty under that rule is illustrated in the following table, by changing the entry on line 9a from \$6.8 million (the 2026 basic exclusion amount) to \$9 million (the amount of the 2019 basic exclusion amount used for computing the gift tax).

Calculation of the Estate Tax with and without Clawback Using the Estate Tax Return, Form 706 (August 2019) as a Template			
Line		Illustrating Clawback	Under Reg. §20.2010-1(c)*
3c	Taxable estate	20,000,000	20,000,000
4	Adjusted taxable gifts	9,000,000	9,000,000
5	Add lines 3c and 4	29,000,000	29,000,000
6	Tentative tax on the amount on line 5	11,545,800	11,545,800
7	Total gift tax paid or payable	0	0
8	Gross estate tax	11,545,800	11,545,800
<b>9a</b>	<b>Basic exclusion amount</b>	<b>6,800,000</b>	<b>* 9,000,000</b>
9b	DSUE amount [not applicable]	0	0
9c	Restored exclusion amount [not applicable]	0	0
9d	Applicable exclusion amount (add lines 9a, 9b, and 9c)	6,800,000	9,000,000
9e	Allowable credit amount (tentative tax on line 9d)	2,665,800	3,545,800
10	Adjustment [not applicable]	0	0
11	Allowable applicable credit amount	2,665,800	3,545,800
12	Subtract line 11 from line 8	8,880,000	8,000,000
16	Net estate tax [same as line 12 in this case]	8,880,000	8,000,000
	Intuitively correct tax	8,000,000	8,000,000
	Clawback penalty	880,000	0



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### (c) Comment on This Approach

- i. The approach of the 2010 explicit statutory anti-clawback rule in section 2001(g)(1) – specifically section 2001(g)(1)(A) – was that in calculating the estate tax the rates in effect at the time of death would be used to calculate the hypothetical “tax imposed by chapter 12” on pre-2026 adjusted taxable gifts – in other words, the “total gift tax paid or payable” that is deducted on line 7 of the return. Before the proposed regulations were released, therefore, there was speculation that the regulations under section 2001(g)(2) would mirror the regulations under section 2001(g)(1) and provide (using the above table as an example) that line 7 would be changed from zero to \$880,000 (which is what the 2019 gift tax would have been if 2026 law had applied in 2019). After subtracting that amount, that would have made line 8, and therefore line 12, \$880,000 smaller and would exactly eliminate the clawback penalty.
  - ii. But the regulations take a different approach. The preamble to the proposed regulations implies that other approaches were considered, but concludes that “in the view of the Treasury Department and the IRS, the most administrable solution would be to adjust the amount of the credit in ... the estate tax determination required to be applied against the net tentative estate tax.”
  - iii. By increasing the amount on line 9a, rather than the amount on line 7, the regulations achieve the same result, of course, because both line 7 and line 9a are subtractions in the estate tax calculation. But line 7 already required two pages of instructions, including a 24-line worksheet, to complete. An incremental increase of complexity in what already had a reputation for being a challenge might have been easier to process than adding a new challenge to line 9a, which previously required only 21 words of instructions. Needless to say, IRS personnel see more returns than any member of the public does, they see the mistakes, and they hear the complaints. Presumably – hopefully – they contributed to the assessment that the line 9a approach is “the most administrable solution.”
  - iv. That approach should work fine if the law is not changed and sunset occurs January 1, 2026. But, although the examples in Reg. §20.2010-1(c)(2) assume that the donor’s “date of death is after 2025,” the substantive rule in Reg. §20.2010-1(c) applies by its terms whenever “changes in the basic exclusion amount ... occur between the date of a donor’s gift and the date of the donor’s death.” It is not limited to 2026 or to any other particular time period. The 2010 statutory rule in section 2001(g)(1) and the 2017 statutory rule in section 2001(g)(2) are not limited to any time period either. Therefore, if Congress makes other changes in the law, particularly increases in rates or decreases in exemptions, and doesn’t focus on the potential clawback issue in the context of those changes, the generic anti-clawback regime of section 2001(g)(1) and (2) and these regulations could produce a jigsaw puzzle of adjustments going different directions that may strain the notion of administrability cited in the preamble.
- (d) **The “Off the Top” Option.** There had also been speculation that the regulations might address the option of making, for example, a \$5 million gift during the 2018-2025 period (assuming no previous taxable gifts) and treating that gift as using only the temporary “bonus” exclusion resulting from the 2017 Tax Act, which is sometimes described as using the exclusion “off the top,” still leaving the exclusion of \$5 million (indexed) to generate a credit to be used against the estate tax after 2025. Example 2 was added to the final regulations to illustrate what the preamble to the final regulations acknowledges is the **“use or lose”** nature of the doubled exclusion amount when a donor uses some but not all of the exclusion amount available from 2018 through 2025.

### (e) Preservation of Portability Elections

- i. The text of the regulations and the examples (particularly the original Example (1) of the proposed regulations) are painstakingly limited in all cases to the amount of the credit that is attributable to the basic exclusion amount – that is, the amount (indexed since 2012) defined in section 2010(c)(3). Regarding portability, for example, that approach makes it clear that the deceased spousal unused exclusion amount (DSUE amount) defined in section 2010(c)(4) is not affected by this special rule and is still added under section 2010(c)(2)(B), in effect thereby generating an additional credit of its own in cases in which

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the anti-clawback rule applies. But the proposed regulations still left open the possibility that the words “lesser of” in section 2010(c)(4) would limit the DSUE amount available to the estate of a person who dies after 2025 (assuming no change in the law) to the sunsetted basic exclusion amount of \$5,000,000 indexed for inflation in effect at the time of the death of the surviving spouse referred to in section 2010(c)(4)(A), despite the assertion in Reg. §20.2010-2(c)(1) that “the DSUE amount of a decedent with a surviving spouse is the lesser of the following amounts – (i) The basic exclusion amount in effect in the year of the death of the decedent” (presumably the predeceased spouse), and despite the statement in the preamble to the June 2012 temporary regulations that “the temporary regulations in § 20.2010-2T(c)(1)(i) confirm that the term ‘basic exclusion amount’ referred to in section 2010(c)(4)(A) means the basic exclusion amount in effect in the year of the death of the decedent whose DSUE amount is being computed.” The limiting words “lesser of” in section 2010(c)(4) reflect the notion held by congressional drafters that portability should not be allowed to more than double what would otherwise be the survivor’s exemption, although that limitation might be viewed as unfair and inapplicable in the case of a predeceased spouse whose estate plan and executor’s election forgo the immediate use of the larger exemption allowed before 2026.

- ii. In that light, it is not particularly reassuring, standing alone, that the preamble to the final regulations states:

The regulations in §§ 20.2010-1(d)(4) and 20.2010-2(c)(1) confirm that the reference to BEA is to the BEA in effect at the time of the deceased spouse’s death, rather than the BEA in effect at the death of the surviving spouse.

or even that the preamble to the 2012 temporary regulations (T.D. 9593) rather logically explains:

The temporary regulations in § 20.2010-2T(c)(1)(i) confirm that the term “basic exclusion amount” referred to in section 2010(c)(4)(A) means the basic exclusion amount in effect in the year of the death of the decedent whose DSUE amount is being computed. Generally, only the basic exclusion amount of the decedent, as in effect in the year of the decedent’s death, will be known at the time the DSUE amount must be computed and reported on the decedent’s estate tax return. Because section 2010(c)(5)(A) requires the executor of an estate electing portability to compute and report the DSUE amount on a timely-filed estate tax return, and because the basic exclusion amount is integral to this computation, the term “basic exclusion amount” in section 2010(c)(4)(A) necessarily refers to such decedent’s basic exclusion amount.

But it is helpful and reassuring that the final regulations themselves (not just the preamble) add Examples (3) and (4), which illustrate scenarios where a DSUE amount from a predeceased spouse who dies before 2026 is applied to the surviving spouse’s gifts before 2026 and to the calculation of the estate tax when the surviving spouse dies after 2025.

- (f) **A Possibly Surprising Collateral Result.** If large amounts of the increased credit attributable to the new doubled basic exclusion amount are used to shelter gifts from gift tax before 2026 (like the \$9 million gift in the example), then after 2025 the donor might have to wait for many years or even decades for the indexed \$5 million amount to catch up so there can be more credit available for gift tax purposes.

- (g) **An Ominous Warning.** Finally, the preamble to the final regulations adds:

A commenter recommended consideration of an anti-abuse provision to prevent the application of the special rule to transfers made during the increased BEA period that are not true inter vivos transfers, but rather are treated as testamentary transfers for transfer tax purposes. Examples include transfers subject to a retained life estate or other retained powers or interests, and certain transfers within the purview of chapter 14 of subtitle B of the Code. The purpose of the special rule is to ensure that bona fide inter vivos transfers are not subject to inconsistent treatment for estate tax purposes. Arguably, the possibility of inconsistent treatment does not arise with regard to transfers that are treated as part of the gross estate for estate tax purposes, rather than as adjusted taxable gifts. An anti-abuse provision could except from the application of the special rule transfers where value is included in the donor’s gross estate at death. Although the Treasury Department and the IRS agree that such a provision is within the scope of the regulatory authority granted in section 2001(g)(2), such an anti-abuse provision would benefit from prior notice and comment. Accordingly, this issue will be reserved to allow further consideration of this comment.

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- i. The commenter the preamble cites is the Tax Section of the New York State Bar Association, in its February 20, 2019, letter to Treasury and the IRS available at <https://nysba.org/NYSBA/Sections/Tax/Tax%20Section%20Reports/Tax%20Section%20Reports%202019/1410%20Report.pdf>.
  - ii. With slowdowns and distractions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Treasury and the IRS may not be able to return to the subject of “transfers that are treated as part of the gross estate for estate tax purposes” as promptly as they might have hoped when they wrote the preamble. Thus, it is possible that significant estate planning actions involving such transfers will be taken before even proposed guidance is made public. Nothing was added to the Second and Third Quarter Updates of the 2019-2020 Priority Guidance Plan, issued March 6, 2020, and June 11, 2020, other than a report that the final regulations were published in November.
  - iii. For an in-depth discussion of this issue, see Lynagh, *Potential Anti-Abuse Rules May Limit Use of the Temporarily Increased Gift Tax Exclusion*, 45 Tax Mgmt. Est., Gifts & Tr. J. 183 (May 14, 2020).
  - iv. To illustrate the circumstances in which such an anti-abuse rule might apply, consider again the example above, a \$9 million gift in 2019 and an otherwise taxable estate of \$20 million and basic exclusion amount of \$6.8 million in 2026, except that the gift is of such nature that the value of the property is included in the donor’s gross estate under, for example, section 2036, thereby making the taxable estate \$29 million (assuming no intervening change in value). In that case, the **intuitively correct estate tax** seems to be the tax on a taxable estate of \$29 million, which is **\$8,880,000** (as shown under “Illustrating Clawback” in the above table, calculated on the tax base of \$29,000,000 on line 3 after adding adjusted taxable gifts in that case). Two ways of computing that are:
    - a. \$11,545,800 (the tax on \$29,000,000 under the section 2001(c) rate schedule) minus \$2,665,800 (the applicable credit amount, which is the tax on the applicable exclusion amount of \$6,800,000 under the section 2001(c) rate schedule) = \$8,880,000, or
    - b. 40% times (the taxable estate of \$29,000,000 minus the applicable exclusion amount of \$6,800,000) =  $0.4 \times \$22,200,000 = \$8,880,000$ .

Thus, application of the anti-clawback calculation in this case would not eliminate an \$880,000 clawback penalty, it would in effect produce an \$880,000 bonus, as the following table indicates.

### Calculation of the Estate Tax with and Without the Anti-Clawback Regulations Again Using the Estate Tax Return, Form 706 (August 2019) as a Template

Line	Without Reg. §20.2010-1(c)	Under Reg. §20.2010-1(c)*
3c Taxable estate	29,000,000	29,000,000
4 Adjusted taxable gifts	0	0
5 Add lines 3c and 4	29,000,000	29,000,000
6 Tentative tax on the amount on line 5	11,545,800	11,545,800
7 Total gift tax paid or payable	0	0
8 Gross estate tax	11,545,800	11,545,800
<b>9a Basic exclusion amount</b>	<b>6,800,000</b>	<b>* 9,000,000</b>
9b DSUE amount [not applicable]	0	0
9c Restored exclusion amount [not applicable]	0	0
9d Applicable exclusion amount (add lines 9a, 9b, and 9c)	6,800,000	9,000,000
9e Allowable credit amount (tentative tax on line 9d)	2,665,800	3,545,800
10 Adjustment [not applicable]	0	0
11 Allowable applicable credit amount	2,665,800	3,545,800
12 Subtract line 11 from line 8	8,880,000	8,000,000
16 Net estate tax [same as line 12 in this case]	8,880,000	8,000,000
	Intuitively correct tax	8,880,000
	Unintended anti-clawback bonus	0
		880,000

That “bonus” is probably what has prompted the IRS and Treasury to consider an “anti-abuse provision,” and probably what such a provision would curtail.

## 5. 2020-2021 Priority Guidance Plan

Treasury and the IRS released their Priority Guidance Plan for the 12 months from July 2020 through June 2021 ([https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2020-2021\\_pgp\\_initial.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/2020-2021_pgp_initial.pdf)) on November 17, 2020. The introduction stated:

We are pleased to announce the release of the 2020-2021 Priority Guidance Plan. The 2020-2021 Priority Guidance Plan sets forth guidance priorities for the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Solicitation of input on and issuance of this plan reflects an emphasis on taxpayer engagement with Treasury and the IRS through a variety of channels, consistent with the directive of the Taxpayer First Act, Pub. L. 116-25, 133 Stat. 981. Issuing timely published guidance is a key element of this engagement in that it helps taxpayers understand their obligations and what tax treatment could apply to them.

The issuance of timely published guidance under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) that helps taxpayers understand their obligations has been a priority for Treasury and IRS for the past three years. Many TCJA guidance projects have been reflected in prior Priority Guidance Plans. It is expected that virtually all published guidance necessary to implement TCJA will be issued by December 31, 2020. This includes the issuance of 59 final regulations, 42 Revenue Procedures, 59 Notices, and other guidance.

The 2020-2021 Priority Guidance Plan contains guidance projects that will be the focus of efforts during the 12-month period from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021 (referred to as the plan year). The 2020-2021 Priority Guidance Plan contains 191 guidance projects. As of September 30, 2020, 57 guidance items have been released. In addition to the projects on the 2020-2021 plan, the Appendix lists routine or ministerial guidance that is generally published each year.

We may further update the 2020-2021 plan during the plan year to reflect additional items that have become priorities and guidance that we have published during the plan year. The periodic updates allow us flexibility to consider comments received from taxpayers and tax practitioners relating to additional guidance priorities and to respond to developments arising during the plan year. This also helps meet our goals under the Taxpayer First Act.

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The published guidance process can fully succeed only if we have the benefit of the insight and experience of taxpayers and practitioners who must apply the Internal Revenue laws passed by Congress. Therefore, we invite the public to continue to provide us with their comments and suggestions as we develop guidance throughout the plan year.

Additional copies of the 2020-2021 Priority Guidance Plan can be obtained from the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Priority-Guidance-Plan>.

a. **Part 1: “Implementation of Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA)”**

Part 1 contains 38 items, compared to 51 items in the Updated 2019-2020 Plan, reflecting progress in completing guidance under the 2017 Tax Act, such as the regulations on multiple trusts and clawback discussed above. Of particular interest to estate planners:

(1) **Item 4: “Regulations clarifying the deductibility of certain expenses described in §67(b) and (e) that are incurred by estates and non-grantor trusts. Notice 2018-61 was published on July 30, 2018 and proposed regulations were published on May 11, 2020.”**

- (a) This item first appeared in the 2018-2019 Priority Guidance Plan.
- (b) Notice 2018-61, 2018-31 I.R.B. 278, released on July 13, 2018, stated that “[t]he Treasury Department and the IRS intend to issue regulations clarifying that estates and non-grantor trusts may continue to deduct expenses described in section 67(e)(1)” despite the eight-year “suspension” of section 67(a) in the 2017 Tax Act by new section 67(g). The IRS received comments from the public agreeing with that statement and confirmed it in an amendment to Reg. §1.67-4(a)(1) proposed in REG-113295-18, 85 Fed. Reg. 27693 (May 11, 2020), and finalized by **T.D. 9918, 85 Fed. Reg. 66219 (Oct. 19, 2020)**.
- (c) Deductibility, however, continues to be limited by the harsh treatment in Reg. §1.67-4(b)(4) and (c)(2) of fees for investment advice, including the portion of a “bundled” fiduciary fee attributable to investment advice (which now will mean total disallowance, not just the application of a 2-percent floor). Reg. §1.67-4(a)(1)(i)(A) & 4(a)(2). Notice 2018-61 had stated flatly that “nothing in section 67(g) impacts the determination of what expenses are described in section 67(e)(1).” In addition, the new regulations do not address the treatment of deductions for purposes of the alternative minimum tax, and the preambles to both the proposed and final regulations state that such treatment “is outside the scope of these [proposed] regulations.”
- (d) Notice 2018-61 also indicated that regulations would address the availability of “excess deductions” to individual beneficiaries under section 642(h)(2) on termination of a trust or estate, including the treatment of those deductions as miscellaneous itemized deductions (and therefore entirely nondeductible through 2025) as current Reg. §1.642(h)-2 implies, and the Notice asked for comments on those issues. Public comments urged relief on those points, noting, as the preamble to the proposed regulations put it, “that the regulations under §1.642(h)-2 were written before the concept of miscellaneous itemized deductions was added to the Code and need to be updated.” The regulations affirm the availability to beneficiaries of such excess deductions and affirm, as comments recommended, that “[e]ach deduction comprising the excess deductions under section 642(h)(2) retains, in the hands of the beneficiary, its character (specifically, as allowable in arriving at adjusted gross income, as a non-miscellaneous itemized deduction, or as a miscellaneous itemized deduction) while in the estate or trust.” Reg. §1.642(h)-2(b)(1). The final regulations include helpful clarifications of the allocation of expenses among items of income, including the fiduciary’s discretion to make those allocations, that had been recommended by public comments on the proposed regulations. Accordingly, the 2020 “Instructions for Schedule K-1 (Form 1041) for a Beneficiary Filing Form 1040 or 1040-SR” (released Oct. 21, 2020), citing the final regulations, clarify and elaborate previous versions in explanations titled “Box 11,



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Code A—Excess Deductions on Termination - Section 67(e) Expenses” and “Box 11, Code B—Excess Deductions on Termination - Non-Miscellaneous Itemized Deductions.”

The ability of fiduciaries to pass through those final-year excess deductions provides very important relief from what would otherwise be pressure to artificially time the payment of expenses, the sale or distribution of assets, and the termination of the trust or estate in ways that could be unfair and frustrating to both fiduciaries and beneficiaries.

- (2) **Item 33. “Guidance under §§1400Z–1 and 1400Z–2 concerning Opportunity Zones, including census tract changes. Proposed regulations were published on October 29, 2018 and May 1, 2019. Final regulations were issued on January 13, 2020. Notice 2020-39 was published on June 22, 2020.”**

Regulations implementing a prominent feature of the 2017 Tax Act may shed light on how the IRS might view common estate planning techniques.

- (a) **2017 Statutory Background.** One of the provisions of the 2017 Tax Act that had bipartisan support added a new Subchapter Z to the income tax chapter of the Internal Revenue Code, containing two new sections 1400Z-1 and 1400Z-2. These sections provide income tax incentives to invest in distressed low-income communities called “opportunity zones.” A qualified opportunity fund (QOF) is a corporation or partnership that has at least 90% of its assets invested in qualified opportunity zone property.
- i. An investor who has sold appreciated property may defer recognition of the resulting capital gain, at least until December 31, 2026, by investing the amount of the gain in a qualified opportunity fund within 180 days. The investor’s basis in the QOF is initially zero and increases by 10% of the original deferred gain after five years (in effect the forgiveness of 10% of the original gain) and by another 5% after seven years (in effect the forgiveness of another 5% of the original gain). On December 31, 2026, the gain is recognized and the investor’s basis in the fund is stepped up to the amount of the original gain that was invested in the fund.
  - ii. Of course, Congress might extend the December 31, 2026, recognition date, as it might extend some or all of the other provisions of the 2017 Tax Act that sunset at the beginning of 2026. It is already impossible to make an investment and hold it for seven years before December 31, 2026. In addition, section 1400Z-2(c) provides an opportunity to avoid recognition of all gain and obtain a fair market value basis by holding the investment for 10 years (necessarily beyond December 31, 2026).
- (b) **2019 Regulations.** Regulations implementing these provisions were published as proposed regulations in May 2019 and finalized in December 2019. **T.D. 9889, 85 Fed. Reg. 1866 (Jan. 13, 2020).** As released by the Treasury Department and the IRS (not as published in the Federal Register), the final regulations are 190 pages, and the Preamble is 354 pages. The regulations discussed here generally will take effect for taxable years beginning after March 13, 2020 (that is, for calendar year taxpayers, January 1, 2021), with taxpayers permitted to elect to apply them earlier.
- (c) **“Inclusion Event.”** Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1 provides rules for determining when deferred gain is accelerated by an “inclusion event” regarding an investor’s interest in a QOF, which the regulations call a “qualifying investment” (defined in Reg. §1.1400Z2(a)-1(b)(34)).
- (d) **Gifts.** Of most interest from an estate planning perspective, Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(1)(i) provides that an event is an inclusion event if it “reduces an eligible taxpayer’s direct equity interest for Federal income tax purposes in the qualifying investment.” As suggested by that broad definition, Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(3)(i) provides in general that a transfer of a qualifying investment by **gift** is an inclusion event.



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- (e) **Transfers at Death.** Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(4)(i) provides that a transfer of a qualifying investment by reason of the investor's **death** is not an inclusion event. It further provides:

Transfers by reason of death include, for example:

- (A) A transfer by reason of death to the deceased owner's estate;
- (B) A distribution of a qualifying investment by the deceased owner's estate;
- (C) A distribution of a qualifying investment by the deceased owner's trust that is made by reason of the deceased owner's death;
- (D) The passing of a jointly owned qualifying investment to the surviving co-owner by operation of law; and
- (E) Any other transfer of a qualifying investment at death by operation of law.

In contrast, Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(4)(ii) specifies that "a transfer by reason of the taxpayer's death" does not include any other sale, exchange, or disposition by the deceased investor's estate or trust, any disposition by the legatee, heir, beneficiary surviving joint owner, or other recipient who received the qualifying investment by reason of the taxpayer's death.

- (f) **Grantor Trusts.** An exception from the treatment of gifts of qualifying investments as inclusion events is Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(5)(i), which exempts a contribution to a trust if "under subpart E of part I of subchapter J of chapter 1 of subtitle A of the Code (grantor trust rules), the contributing owner of the investment is the deemed owner of the trust (grantor trust)."
- i. The reference to subpart E generally and the use of the term "deemed owner" rather than "grantor" suggest that the regulation applies to trusts deemed owned by a third party under section 678, not just trusts owned by the "grantor" under sections 673 through 677. And, in an addition not included in the May 2019 proposed regulations, Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(5)(i) goes on to provide:

Similarly, a transfer of the investment by the grantor trust to the trust's deemed owner is not an inclusion event. For all purposes of the section 1400Z-2 regulations, references to the term grantor trust mean the portion of the trust that holds the qualifying investment in the QOF, and such a grantor trust, or portion of the trust, is a wholly grantor trust as to the deemed owner. Such contributions may include transfers by gift or any other type of transfer between the grantor and the grantor trust that is a nonrecognition event as a result of the application of the grantor trust rules.
  - ii. This addition helpfully clarifies that transfers from the trust to the deemed owner, not just transfers from the deemed owner to the trust, are exempt from treatment as inclusion events. It also clarifies that the term "contribution" includes not just gifts (as in funding the trust) but "any other type of transfer ... that is a nonrecognition event as a result of the application of the grantor trust rules." As an example, a sale to a deemed owned trust comes to mind. The Preamble, somewhat timidly, seems to affirm application to a sale in the following explanation:

A commenter also requested clarification that non-gift transactions between a grantor trust and its deemed owner that are not recognition events for Federal income tax purposes are not inclusion events, and that such transactions do not start a new holding period for purposes of section 1400Z. In such transactions, the deemed owner of the trust continues, for Federal income tax purposes, to be the taxpayer liable for the Federal income tax on the qualifying investment. Thus, the Treasury Department and the IRS have determined that, like transfers by the deemed owner to the grantor trust, these transactions (including transfers from the grantor trust to its deemed owner) are not inclusion events.
  - iii. Finally, Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(5)(ii) adds that "the termination of grantor trust status or the creation of grantor trust status ... is an inclusion event," except that "termination of grantor trust status as the result of the death of the owner of a qualifying investment is not an inclusion event."

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- (g) **Tacking Holding Periods.** Consistently with the exception of transfers by reason of death and transfers to a deemed owned trust from treatment as an inclusion event, Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(d)(1)(iii) provides that the recipient in either of those scenarios does not begin a new holding period for the qualifying investment, but succeeds to or “tacks” the decedent’s or other transferor’s holding period. This is a clarifying rewording of the proposed regulation (Proposed Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(d)(1)(iv)), which bore the possibly misleading heading “Tacking with donor or deceased owner” and identified one of its subjects as “a gift that was not an inclusion event.” The final regulation drops the use of the word “gift” and elaborates as follows:

This same rule [applicable to transfers by reason of death] also applies to allow a grantor trust to tack the holding period of the deemed owner if the grantor trust acquires the qualifying investment from the deemed owner in a transaction that is not an inclusion event.

This does not explicitly pick up the expansion of Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(5)(i) to include “a transfer of the investment **by** the grantor trust **to** the trust’s deemed owner” (emphasis added) described above, but it is reasonable to hope that in context the tacking rule of Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(d)(1)(iii) will be given the same scope as Reg. §1.1400Z2(b)-1(c)(5)(i).

- (h) **Comment.** Treatment of a gift as a recognition event is not the normal result estate planners are accustomed to, and it is especially surprising in light of section 1400Z-2(b)(1), which states that the otherwise deferred gain “shall be included in income in the taxable year which includes the earlier of (A) the date on which such investment is sold or exchanged, or (B) December 31, 2026.”

- i. A gift obviously is not a sale or exchange. But the Preamble explains why that obvious interpretation wouldn’t work (emphasis added):

As indicated ... in the Explanation of Provisions in the May 2019 proposed regulations, the termination of a direct interest in a qualifying investment that resulted in an inclusion event terminated the status of an investment in a QOF as a qualifying investment “[f]or purposes of sections 1400Z-2(b) and (c).” This is because the statutory text of each of section 1400Z-2(a), (b), (c), and (e)(1) focuses on one holding period of “the taxpayer” tested at various points during a period of at least 10 years. [The inclusion of subsection (e)(1) looks like a typo, possibly meant to be subsection (d)(3).]

...

This degree of identity of taxpayer [between the transferor and transferee] is fundamentally different (and more demanding) than a mere “step in the shoes” concept based on whether the transferee of the interest can tack the holding period and basis of the transferor. Accordingly, the May 2019 proposed regulations treated, among other transactions, gifts and section 351 exchanges as inclusion events because, in each instance, (i) the initial eligible taxpayer had severed the direct investment interest in the QOF and (ii) the transferee taxpayer was not treated for Federal income tax purposes either as the same taxpayer as the initial eligible taxpayer or as a successor taxpayer.

...

As noted in the preamble to the May 2019 proposed regulations, section 1400Z-2(b)(1) does not directly address non-sale or exchange dispositions, such as gifts and bequests. However, the Conference Report provides that, under section 1400Z-2(b)(1), the “deferred gain is recognized on the earlier of the date on which the [qualifying] investment *is disposed of* or December 31, 2026.” See Conference Report at 539 (indicating that continued gain recognition deferral requires the taxpayer to maintain directly the taxpayer’s qualifying investment).

... The Treasury Department and the IRS have concluded that (i) no authority exists to impose the donor’s deferred capital gains tax liability on the donee of the qualifying investment, and therefore (ii) the Federal income tax on the deferred gain must be collected from the donor at the time of the gift of the qualifying investment. Accordingly, the final regulations continue to provide that a gift of the qualifying investment in a QOF is an inclusion event.

- ii. In other words, a qualifying investment in a qualified opportunity fund is simply not like other assets, because section 1400Z-2 requires the tax law, in effect, to follow the investment, but the general rules in the rest of the Code do not provide a way to do that. So the tax is collected from the investor-transferor when the transfer is made.

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- iii. Applying that principle, the exception for transfers (in either direction) between a grantor trust and the deemed owner of the trust makes sense, because “the taxpayer” – that is, the deemed owner who bears the tax liability under the grantor trust rules – does not change. Indeed, although the regulations and Preamble do not cite Rev. Rul. 85-13, 1985-1 C.B. 184 (the acknowledged foundation of much grantor trust planning), they do mirror its analysis.
  - iv. Similarly, the creation or termination of grantor trust status does not qualify for the exception and must be treated as an inclusion event, because “the taxpayer” does change. Finally, a transfer at death can be exempted, because the rest of the Code does provide an enforcement tool in the rules of section 691 governing income in respect of a decedent, which are explicitly incorporated into section 1400Z-2(e)(3).
  - v. The Preamble provides confirmation of this analysis:

The Treasury Department and the IRS have determined that [rules similar to those for certain other passthrough entities] for a grantor trust are not necessary because the grantor is treated as the owner of the grantor trust’s property for Federal income tax purposes. Therefore, the final regulations set forth different rules applicable to the grantor.

...

The Treasury Department and the IRS have received several comments requesting clarification that qualifying investments include interests received in a transfer by reason of death that is not an inclusion event. In the case of a decedent, section 1400Z-2(e)(3) provides a special rule requiring amounts recognized under section 1400Z-2, if not properly includible in the gross income of the decedent, to be includible in gross income as provided by section 691. In that specific case, the beneficiary that receives the qualifying investment has the obligation to include the deferred gain in gross income in the event of any subsequent inclusion event, including for example, any further disposition by that recipient. ... In other words, unlike an inclusion event contemplated by the general rules of section 1400Z-2(b), the obligation to include the original taxpayer investor’s deferred gain in income travels with that taxpayer’s qualifying investment to the beneficiary. Accordingly, the May 2019 proposed regulations excepted transfers of a qualifying investment to the deceased owner’s estate, as well as distributions by the estate, from the definition of “inclusion event.”

- (i) **Application to Estate Planning in General.** Because of the unique origin and nature of QOFs, care is required in generalizing the rules of these regulations beyond the QOF context. But a few observations regarding the implications for estate planning in general include:
  - i. As noted above, the notion that a gift is a recognition event while death is not a recognition event is inconsistent with general rules, but is explained by the unique requirements of the QOF rules to follow the investment. Thus, the distinction between gifts and transfers by reason of death in the QOF regulations should have no general implications outside of that context.
  - ii. Similarly, when contrasted with general rules, it is ironic that a qualifying investment in effect gets a stepped-up basis upon a gift (because of the donor-investor’s recognition) but a carryover basis at death (subject to the holding period that the recipient succeeds to or “tacks”). But that also is just the result of the unique requirements of the QOF rules, as well as the income in respect of a decedent rules that always, in effect, produce a carryover basis at death.
  - iii. The most interesting implications arise from the treatment of grantor trusts. Recognition of gain upon the loss of grantor trust status during life has generally come to be expected, under authorities such as Reg. §1.1001-2(c), Example 5; *Madorin v. Commissioner*, 84 T.C. 667 (1985); and Rev. Rul. 77-402, 1977-2 C.B. 222. On the other hand, avoiding recognition of gain when grantor trust status is unavoidably lost at the death of the grantor is not always as clear and has sometimes been debated. Chief Counsel Advice 200923024 (issued Dec. 31, 2008; released June 5, 2009) has often been cited as an indication that the IRS acknowledges that there is no recognition at death. After discussing Reg. §1.1001-2(c), Example 5, *Madorin*, and Rev. Rul. 77-402, the CCA stated (emphasis added):

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We would also note that the rule set forth in these authorities is narrow, insofar as it only affects inter vivos lapses of grantor trust status, not that caused by *the death of the owner which is generally not treated as an income tax event*.

iv. Now a regulation has added significantly more weight to that proposition.

b. **Part 2: “E.O. 13789 - Identifying and Reducing Regulatory Burdens”**

- (1) Part 2 in the 2017-2018 Plan contained eight items, the first of which was expressed as “Withdrawal of proposed regulations under §2704 regarding restrictions on liquidation of an interest for estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer taxes. Proposed regulations were published on August 4, 2016.”
- (2) The very controversial proposed section 2704 regulations were withdrawn. 82 Fed. Reg. 48779-80 (Oct. 20, 2017). As a result, that item is omitted from the 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021 Plans.

c. **Part 3: “Burden Reduction” in General**

- (1) In addition to announcing the intended withdrawal of the section 2704 proposed regulations, Treasury’s October 2, 2017, second report in response to Executive Order 13789 stated that “Treasury continues to analyze all recently issued significant regulations and is considering possible reforms of several recent regulations not identified in the June 22 Report [Notice 2017-38].”
- (2) In that vein, Treasury and the IRS stated in the original 2017-2018 Priority Guidance Plan that “Part 2 [ultimately Part 3] of the plan describes certain projects that we have identified as burden reducing and that we believe can be completed in the 8½ months remaining in the plan year” – that is, by June 30, 2018. The 2017-2018 Plan contained 19 such items, the 2018-2019 Plan contained 14, and the 2019-2020 Plan contained 26. Now Part 3 of the 2020-2021 Plan contains 24 such items, including the following:
  - (a) Item 14 is **“Final regulations under §§1014(f) and 6035 regarding basis consistency between estate and person acquiring property from decedent. Proposed and temporary regulations were published on March 4, 2016.”** With the addition of the word “Final” in the 2018-2019 Plan, this is the same in the 2017-2018 Plan. The background and significance of these regulations are discussed in paragraph d below.
  - (b) Item 18, carried over from the 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 Plans, is **“Final regulations under §2642(g) describing the circumstances and procedures under which an extension of time will be granted to allocate GST exemption.”** The background and significance of these regulations are discussed in paragraph e below.

d. **Item 14 of Part 3: The Consistent Basis Rules**

- (1) On July 31, 2015, the day that funding for the Highway Trust Fund was scheduled to expire, President Obama signed into law the Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act (Public Law 114-41), extending that infrastructure funding for three months, with the \$8 billion cost funded by various tax compliance measures. One of those was section 2004 of the Act, labelled “Consistent Basis Reporting Between Estate and Person Acquiring Property from Decedent,” which of course has nothing to do with highways or veterans’ health care other than raising money. The provision added new provisions to the Code.
  - (a) New section 1014(f) requires in general that the basis of property received from a decedent “whose inclusion in the decedent’s estate increased the liability for the tax” may not exceed the value as finally determined for estate tax purposes, or, if there is no final determination (as in the case of property sold while an estate tax audit is still in progress or, within the statutory period for assessments, has not begun) the value reported on the estate tax return.
  - (b) New section 6035 requires every executor (or person in possession of property with the statutory duties of an executor) who is required to file an estate tax return – that is, in general, if the gross estate plus adjusted taxable gifts exceeds the applicable filing threshold – to furnish to the IRS and to the recipients of property interests included in the decedent’s gross estate a statement setting forth the value of those property interests reported on the

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estate tax return. This statement is due 30 days after the estate tax return is filed or, if the return is filed after its due date (including extensions), 30 days after that due date. Every such statement must be supplemented if a value is adjusted, for example on audit.

- (c) There are also penalties for failure to file a required statement and for reporting basis inconsistently with such a statement.
- (2) Previously (and **still the law** unless an estate tax return was or is filed after July 31, 2015), under section 1014(a)(1), the basis of property acquired from a decedent is simply “the fair market value of the property at the date of the decedent’s death,” with appropriate adjustments in section 1014 for the alternate valuation date and so forth. It is possible for the recipient of property from a decedent to claim, for income tax purposes, that the executor somehow just got the estate tax value too low, and that the heir’s basis should be greater than the estate tax value. Usually, of course, such claims are made after the statute of limitations has run on the estate tax return. Such claims can be accompanied by elaborate appraisals and other evidence of the “real” date-of-death value that, long after death, is hard to refute. Invoking principles of “privity,” the Service is able to insist on using the lower estate tax value when the recipient was one of the executors who signed the estate tax return, but otherwise it has had no tool to enforce such consistency.
- (3) *Van Alen v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2013-235, however, created confusion about the role of a duty of consistency in determining the basis of heirs.
  - (a) In *Van Alen*, a brother and sister had inherited a cattle ranch from their father in 1994, with a low “special use” estate tax value under section 2032A. They were not executors; their stepmother was. The heirs sold a conservation easement on the land in 2007 and argued that their basis for determining capital gain should be higher than the estate tax value. The court held their basis to the low estate tax value.
  - (b) A key to the outcome was that section 1014(a)(3) describes the basis of property acquired from a decedent as “in the case of an election under section 2032A, its value *determined* under such section.” This contrasts with the general rule of section 1014(a)(1), which describes the basis as merely “the fair market value of the property at the date of the decedent’s death,” which arguably opens up the opportunity for a non-executor heir to argue that the value “determined” for estate tax purposes was simply too low. In addition, the court pointed to the special use valuation agreement, which the two heirs (one, a minor, by his mother as his guardian *ad litem*) had signed. Consistently with this rationale for its holding, the court cited Rev. Rul. 54-97, 1954-1 C.B. 113 (“the value of the property as determined for the purpose of the Federal estate tax ... is not conclusive but is a presumptive value which may be rebutted by clear and convincing evidence”), and observed that “it might be reasonable for taxpayers to rely on this revenue ruling if they were calculating their basis under section 1014(a)(1).”
  - (c) Surprisingly, however, the court also seemed to view heirs *who were not executors* as bound by a “duty of consistency” to use the value determined for estate tax purposes as their basis for income tax purposes. The court spoke of a “sufficient identity of interests” between the heirs and the executor and concluded that “[w]e rest our holding on the unequivocal language of section 1014(a)(3) .... And we rest it as well on a duty of consistency that is by now a background principle of tax law.”
  - (d) While “consistency” is superficially an appealing objective, the notion that it might apply generally to the basis of an heir who was not an executor may be more novel and more troubling than the court seems to have realized. The court acknowledged that “[t]here are lots of cases that hold that the duty of consistency binds an estate’s beneficiary to a representation made on an estate-tax return if that beneficiary was a fiduciary of the estate.” But the court then went on to say: “But the cases don’t limit us to that situation and instead say that the question of whether there is sufficient identity of interests between the parties making the first and second representation depends on the facts and circumstances of each



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case.” The problem is that the court cited the same three cases for both propositions, and all three cases involved the basis of an heir who *was* a co-executor. Thus, *Van Alen* appears to stand alone for applying a duty of consistency to the basis of an heir who was not an executor, although the *Van Alen* holding does have the alternative ground of the word “determined” in section 1014(a)(3), applicable only in special use valuation cases.

- (4) In the Obama Administration, the Treasury Department’s annual “General Explanations” of revenue proposals associated with the President’s budget proposals (popularly called the “Greenbook”) included a provision, last found on pages 195-96 in the 2015 Greenbook (see <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/tax-policy/Documents/General-Explanations-FY2016.pdf>), to require the income tax basis of property received from a decedent or donor to be equal to the estate tax value or the donor’s basis. The Greenbooks provided that the executor or donor would be required to report the necessary information to both the recipient and the Service.
- (a) The Greenbook proposal would have been effective
- i. “as of the date of enactment” in the 2009, 2010, and 2011 Greenbooks,
  - ii. “for transfers on or after the date of enactment” in the 2012 and 2013 Greenbooks, and
  - iii. “for transfers after the year of enactment” in the 2014 and 2015 Greenbooks.
- (b) Statutory language for this proposal appeared
- i. in section 6 of the Responsible Estate Tax Act, S. 3533 (introduced on June 24, 2010, by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT)) and H.R. 5764 (introduced on July 15, 2010, by Congresswoman Linda Sanchez (D-CA)), applicable **“to transfers for which returns are filed after the date of the enactment of this Act”** and requiring a statement by the executor or donor on or before the due date of the return;
  - ii. in section 5 of the “Sensible Estate Tax Act of 2011,” H.R. 3467, introduced on November 17, 2011, by Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA), also applicable “to transfers for which returns are filed after the date of the enactment of this Act” but requiring a statement by the executor or donor **within 30 days after filing the return;**
  - iii. in section 1422 of Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp’s Discussion Draft released February 26, 2014, also applicable to transfers for which returns are filed after the date of enactment and requiring a statement by the executor or donor within 30 days after filing the return but **applicable only to estate tax values and with the changes to section 1014 (but not the reporting requirement) applicable only to property that increases the estate tax;**
  - iv. in section 5 of the “Sensible Estate Tax Act of 2015,” H.R. 1544, introduced on March 23, 2015, by Congressman McDermott, similar to the Camp Discussion Draft except that it did not exclude property that did not increase the estate tax; and
  - v. then as a “pay-for” in the “Highway and Transportation Funding Act of 2015, Part II” (Public Law 114-41), endorsed by then Ways and Means Committee Chairman Ryan on July 13, 2015, which became the Surface Transportation and Veterans Health Care Choice Improvement Act (with a 10-year revenue estimate of \$1.542 billion).
- (5) The statute that was enacted followed the Camp Discussion Draft. As a result, compared to the 2014 and 2015 Greenbook proposals, new subsection (f) of section 1014 includes some twists.
- (a) Like the Camp Discussion Draft and the 2015 “Sensible Estate Tax Act” (H.R. 1544), it applies only to property acquired from a decedent, not to gifts.



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- (b) Under section 1014(f)(2), like the Camp Discussion Draft, it “shall only apply to any property whose inclusion in the decedent’s estate increased the liability for the tax imposed by chapter 11 (reduced by credits allowable against such tax) on such estate.” In other words, these new rules apparently do not apply to property that passes to a surviving spouse or to charity, or to property that does not pass to the surviving spouse but is reported on an estate tax return filed only to elect portability. **(But, as in the Camp Discussion Draft, there is no such exception to the reporting requirement of section 6035.)**
- (c) While the Greenbook versions, since 2014, would have been effective for transfers – that is, for gifts made and decedents dying – after the year of enactment, section 1014(f) (as in all the above introduced bills since the Responsible Estate Tax Act of 2010 and consistently with the 2009, 2010, and 2011 Greenbook proposals) is applicable to property with respect to which an estate tax return is filed after the date of enactment – that is, on or after August 1, 2015. A return filed after the date of enactment might have been due, and filed, on August 1, 2015, **making the statement due August 31, 2015.**
- (6) In response to that accelerated application, Notice 2015-57, 2015-36 I.R.B. 294, released on August 21, 2015, extended to February 29, 2016, the due date of any statements required by section 6035 that otherwise would be due before February 29, 2016. The Notice cited section 6081(a), which allows extensions of time only for up to six months except in the case of taxpayers who are abroad. February 29, 2016, is the closest date the calendar allows to six months after August 31, 2015. So Notice 2015-57 implied that it was the only extension there would be.
- (a) Notice 2015-57 also stated that “[t]he Treasury Department and the IRS expect to issue additional guidance to assist taxpayers with complying with sections 1014(f) and 6035.”
- (b) Notice 2016-19, 2016-9 I.R.B. 362, released on February 11, 2016, provided: “Statements required under sections 6035(a)(1) and (a)(2) to be filed with the IRS or furnished to a beneficiary before March 31, 2016, need not be filed with the IRS and furnished to a beneficiary until March 31, 2016.”
- i. In other words, the “due date” is not “extended” (confirming the implication of Notice 2015-57), but executors “need not” comply with any due date earlier than March 31, 2016.
- ii. Indeed, Notice 2016-19 affirmatively added that “[t]he Treasury Department and IRS recommend that executors and other persons required to file a return under section 6018 wait to prepare the statements required by section 6035(a)(1) and (a)(2) until the issuance of proposed regulations by the Treasury Department and the IRS addressing the requirements of section 6035” and that “[t]he Treasury Department and the IRS expect to issue proposed regulations under sections 1014(f) and 6035 very shortly.”
- (c) Notice 2016-27, 2016-15 I.R.B. 576, released on March 23, 2016 (three weeks after the publication of the proposed regulations discussed in paragraph (9) below), extended the same relief through June 30, 2016. The stated rationale was that “[t]he Treasury Department and the IRS have received numerous comments that executors and other persons have not had sufficient time to adopt the systemic changes that would enable the filing of an accurate and complete Form 8971 and Schedule A.”
- (7) Meanwhile, the IRS developed Form 8971 (January 2016) for reporting the information for which the due date was originally August 31, 2015, then was February 29, 2016, and then “need not” be observed before June 30, 2016. Form 8971 itself is to be filed only with the IRS. It includes a Schedule A that is to be given to each respective beneficiary (like a K-1), as well as to the IRS.
- (a) With respect to the biggest problem with the reporting deadline – namely, that executors, especially of estates large enough to be required to file an estate tax return, will not know

just one month after filing the estate tax return which beneficiaries will receive which assets – Schedule A of Form 8971 states (emphasis in original):

**Notice to Beneficiaries:**

You have received this schedule to inform you of the value of property you received from the estate of the decedent named above. **Retain this schedule for tax reporting purposes.** If the property increased the estate tax liability, Internal Revenue Code section 1014(f) applies, requiring the consistent reporting of basis information. For more information on determining basis, see IRC section 1014 and/or consult a tax professional.

(b) The Instructions to Form 8971 candidly stated (emphasis added):

All property acquired (*or expected to be acquired*) by a beneficiary must be listed on that beneficiary's Schedule A. If the executor hasn't determined which beneficiary is to receive an item of property as of the due date of the Form 8971 and Schedule(s) A, *the executor must list all items of property that could be used, in whole or in part, to fund the beneficiary's distribution* on that beneficiary's Schedule A. (*This means that the same property may be reflected on more than one Schedule A.*) A supplemental Form 8971 and corresponding Schedule(s) A may, but aren't required to, be filed once the distribution to each such beneficiary has been made.

(c) It is striking that the Instructions refer to property "expected to be acquired" while Schedule A refers to "property you received." This interchangeability of "acquired" and "received" could have been used as the basis for regulations that construed the requirement to file Form 8971 to apply only when property had been distributed by the estate or otherwise "received." See Part 5.d(9)(b)i below.

(8) Certain regulations were explicitly contemplated and authorized by the statute.

(a) Section 1014(f)(4) states that "[t]he Secretary may by regulations provide exceptions to the application of this subsection."

(b) Section 6035(b) states that "[t]he Secretary shall prescribe such regulations as necessary to carry out this section, including regulations relating to (1) the application of this section to property with regard to which no estate tax return is required to be filed, and (2) situations in which the surviving joint tenant or other recipient may have better information than the executor regarding the basis or fair market value of the property."

(9) Proposed regulations were released on March 2, 2016. Proposed Reg. §§1.1014-10 & 1.6035-1 (REG-127923-15).

(a) The proposed regulations provided some welcome, albeit modest, clarifications.

- i. Only the "initial" basis of property received from a decedent would be subject to these rules. Proposed Reg. §1.1014-10(a)(1). Subsequent authorized adjustments are not precluded. Proposed Reg. §§1.1014-10(a)(2) & 1.6662-8(b).
- ii. The consistency rules would not apply to tangible personal property for which an appraisal is not required under Reg. §20.2031-6(b) – generally household and personal effects other than "articles having marked artistic or intrinsic value of a total value in excess of \$3,000." Proposed Reg. §1.1014-10(b)(2). Such assets will rarely be sold at a gain, and any loss on a sale of such personal property would be nondeductible in any event.
- iii. In addition to such tangible personal property, Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(b)(1) would exclude from the Form 8971 reporting requirement:
  - a. cash (other than a coin collection or other coins or bills with numismatic value), which ordinarily has no basis apart from its face amount anyway;
  - b. income in respect of a decedent, which ordinarily would be reported as such on the beneficiary's income tax return anyway; and

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- c. property that is sold (and therefore not distributed to a beneficiary) in a transaction in which capital gain or loss is recognized, which ordinarily would therefore be reported as a taxable sale on the fiduciary's income tax return anyway.
  - iv. The term "executor" is given its usual expanded meaning in section 2203. Proposed Reg. §1.1014-10(d).
  - v. Form 8971 would not be required if the estate tax return was not required for **estate tax** purposes and was filed solely to make a portability election ("notwithstanding §20.2010-2(a)(1)") or a GST tax election or exemption allocation. Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(a)(2).
  - vi. If a beneficiary is a trust, estate, or business entity, Form 8971 would be furnished only to the entity and not to its beneficiaries or owners. Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(c)(2).
  - vii. An executor could state on Form 8971 that a beneficiary cannot be located, although the executor must also state the efforts taken to locate the beneficiary. Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(c)(4).
  - viii. A supplemental Form 8971 to report a change in value or otherwise correct or complete information on an original Form 8971 would not be required to be filed until 30 days after the property is distributed. Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(e)(4)(ii). (That, of course, should have been acknowledged as the appropriate occasion for **any** reporting under section 6035. See paragraph (7) above and Part 5.d(9)(b)i below.)
  - ix. Indeed, a supplemental Form 8971 is not needed at all merely to report a distribution of property if a previous Form 8971 included that property as property that *might* be used to satisfy the beneficiary's interest. Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(e)(3)(i)(B) & (ii), *Examples 1 & 2*.
- (b) The proposed regulations also included some surprising or disappointing features.
- i. Echoing the Instructions, Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(c)(3) states:

If, by the due date [of Form 8971], the executor has not determined what property will be used to satisfy the interest of each beneficiary, the executor must report on the Statement for each such beneficiary all of the property that the executor could use to satisfy that beneficiary's interest. Once the exact distribution has been determined, the executor may, but is not required to, file and furnish a supplemental Information Return and Statement.

This is asserted even though a beneficiary who has not yet received (and may never receive) the property has no use for basis information and providing such information serves no discernable purpose of section 1014(f), and even though, like the Instructions, the preamble to the proposed regulations refers to "each beneficiary who has acquired **(or will acquire)** property from the decedent" and the statutory requirement of section 6035(a)(1) itself attaches only "to each person **acquiring** any interest in property." It seems that the regulations could have carried that linguistic comparison to its logical conclusion by requiring Form 8971 and Schedule A only with respect to property that is distributed – in other words, "received" – or "acquired." In that case, section 6035(a)(3) would be construed to require reporting for property **passing upon death or distributed before its value is reported on an estate tax return** within 30 days after the estate tax return is filed, whereas property **distributed after the estate tax return is filed** would be reported on a supplemented Form 8971 and Schedule A within 30 days after the distribution or perhaps on a year-by-year basis. That would be a much more workable rule.
  - ii. After-discovered and omitted property that is not reported on an (initial or supplemental) estate tax return before the estate tax statute of limitations runs (thus including all property and omissions discovered after the statute runs) would be given a value, and therefore an initial basis, of zero. Proposed Reg. §1.1014-10(c)(3)(i)(B). Moreover, if the after-discovered or omitted property would have increased the gross estate enough to cause an estate tax return to be required, but no estate tax return was filed, the estate tax value of **all** property subject to the consistency rule would be considered to be zero. Proposed Reg. §1.1014-10(c)(3)(ii). **Thus, a very innocent omission by the executor**

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**could result in a very harsh penalty for beneficiaries. The statutory support for these zero basis rules is very questionable, because such property appears to be neither “property the final value of which has been determined for purposes of the [estate] tax” within the meaning of section 1014(f)(1)(A) nor property “with respect to which a statement has been furnished under section 6035(a)” within the meaning of section 1014(f)(1)(B).**

- iii. Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(f) would impose a seemingly open-ended requirement on a recipient of a Schedule A to in turn file a Schedule A when making any gift or other retransfer of the property that results wholly or partly in a carryover basis for the transferee. The preamble again cites the regulatory authority granted in section 6035(b)(2) and also a concern “that opportunities may exist in some circumstances for the recipient of such reporting to circumvent the purpose of the statute (for example, by making a gift of the property to a complex trust for the benefit of the transferor’s family).” While such property does indeed continue to have a basis determined in part with reference to the value at the time of someone’s death in the past, section 6035 imposes the reporting requirement only on an “executor,” and section 1014(a) itself applies only to property acquired “from a decedent,” creating great doubt about the statutory authority for Proposed Reg. §1.6035-1(f), especially when one of the explicit changes Congress made to Treasury’s Greenbook proposal was to apply it only to transfers at death, not to lifetime gifts.
- iv. The Greenbook proposals since 2009 explicitly contemplated a grant of regulatory authority “for situations in which the surviving joint tenant or other recipient may have better information than the executor.” Congress seems to have captured that notion in section 6035(b)(2). Some observers read this as authorizing Treasury to relieve the tension between an executor and beneficiaries that a strict consistency rule might otherwise create by permitting beneficiaries to prove a higher value in some cases.
  - a. In the preamble to the proposed regulations, Treasury recites that regulatory authority in section 6035(b)(2), but construes it in effect to apply only to a person with a legal or beneficial interest in property who is required to file an estate tax return under section 6018(b) in some cases.
  - b. In addition, the preamble to the proposed regulations states:

One commenter requested the creation of a process to allow an estate beneficiary to challenge the value reported by the executor. There is no such process under the Federal law regarding returns described in section 6018. The beneficiary’s rights with regard to the estate tax valuation of property are governed by applicable state law. Accordingly, the proposed regulations do not create a new Federal process for challenging the value reported by the executor.

In other words, the preamble not only confirms the potential for these rules to create tension within families (see paragraph (10) below), it documents Treasury’s indifference to it.

- (c) A public hearing on the proposed regulations was held on June 27, 2016, and most of the foregoing points were made.
- (10) But no administrative guidance will or can address what many observers consider the fundamental flaw of the statute – it has the potential, especially when an estate tax return is audited, to pit family members and other beneficiaries against each other in an intolerable tension.
- (a) The *Van Alen* opinion itself, discussed in paragraph (3) above reveals how mischievous a “consistency” requirement might be in this context.
  - (b) The court describes how the audit “went back and forth” and the low value of the ranch could have been a trade for higher values of three other properties. Indeed, the court said: “The bottom line was that the IRS got an increase in the total taxable value of the estate ...

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and an increase in the estate tax” (although later the court said, with specific reference to the ranch, that “[b]oth Shana and Brett [the heirs], and their father’s estate, benefited from a reduced estate tax.”

- (c) If the heirs benefited from the special use valuation, it was a coincidental detail that is affected by tax apportionment rules and other factors and may not be present in every estate. And, as *Van Alen* illustrates, executors often settle estate tax audits by trade-offs and for strategic reasons that could have nothing to do with an effort to find the “true” “fair market value” for purposes of section 1014(a)(1).
  - (d) To bind heirs who do not participate in that audit seems quite unfair, and to give the heirs a role in the audit would be monstrously impractical. Yet, enchanted by the Siren Song of “consistency” – not to mention the temptation of a conjectural revenue gain – Congress seems not to have thought this through.
- (11) The 2016 Greenbook renewed the proposal of past Greenbooks to also apply the consistency rules to property qualifying for an estate tax marital deduction and to gifts reportable on a gift tax return.
- (12) Executive Order 13789 of April 21, 2017, directed the identification of tax regulations issued on or after January 1, 2016, that (i) impose an undue financial burden on United States taxpayers, (ii) add undue complexity to the Federal tax laws, or (iii) exceed the statutory authority of the Internal Revenue Service, and the recommendation of specific actions to mitigate the burdens identified. Notice 2017-38, 2017-30 I.R.B. 147, identified eight regulations that meet at least one of the first two criteria specified by the Executive Order, including the proposed section 2704 regulations, but not including the consistent basis regulations.
- (13) Now the Priority Guidance Plan suggests that Treasury and the IRS will revisit the proposed basis consistency regulations in the context of “burden reduction.” The Office of Management and Budget’s Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions confirms that “[t]he final regulations will provide less burdensome guidance to taxpayers enabling them to satisfy the requirements of sections 1014(f) and 6035.” **Treasury and the IRS cannot undo the ill-advised statute, but they could apply the statute in a reasonable way to provide a more practical reporting date and could reconsider the zero-basis rule and continuous reporting requirement that the statute does not appear to authorize. That would be “burden reduction.”**

e. **Item 18 of Part 3: The Section 2642(g) Regulations**

- (1) This project first appeared in the 2007-2008 Plan.
- (2) The background of this project is section 564(a) of the 2001 Tax Act, which added subsection (g)(1) to section 2642, directing Treasury to publish regulations providing for extensions of time to allocate GST exemption or to elect out of statutory allocations of GST exemption (when those actions are missed on the applicable return or a return is not filed).
  - (a) Before the 2001 Tax Act, similar extensions of time under Reg. §301.9100-3 (so-called “9100 relief”) were not available, because the deadlines for taking such actions were prescribed by the Code, not by the regulations.
  - (b) The legislative history of the 2001 Tax Act stated that “[n]o inference is intended with respect to the availability of relief from late elections prior to the effective date of [section 2642(g)(1)],” and section 2642(g)(1)(A) itself directs that the regulations published thereunder “shall include procedures for requesting comparable relief with respect to transfers made before the date of the enactment of [section 2642(g)(1)].” Section 2642(g)(1)(B) adds:

In determining whether to grant relief under this paragraph, the Secretary shall take into account all relevant circumstances, including evidence of intent contained in the trust instrument or instrument of transfer and such other factors as the Secretary deems relevant. For purposes of determining whether to grant relief under this paragraph, the time for making the allocation (or election) shall be treated as if not expressly prescribed by statute.



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- (c) Shortly after the enactment of the 2001 Tax Act, Notice 2001-50, 2001-2 C.B. 189, acknowledged section 2642(g)(1) and stated that taxpayers may seek extensions of time to take those actions under Reg. §301.9100-3. The Service has received and granted many requests for such relief over the years since the publication of Notice 2001-50.
- (3) In addition, Rev. Proc. 2004-46, 2004-2 C.B. 142, provides a simplified method of dealing with pre-2001 gifts that meet the requirements of the annual gift tax exclusion under section 2503(b) but not the special “tax-vesting” requirements applicable for GST tax purposes to gifts in trust under section 2642(c)(2).
- (a) Gifts subject to Crummey powers are an example.
- (b) In such cases, GST exemption may be allocated on a Form 709 labeled “FILED PURSUANT TO REV. PROC. 2004-46,” whether or not a Form 709 had previously been filed for that year.
- (c) Post-2000 gifts are addressed by the expanded deemed allocation rules of section 2632(c), enacted by the 2001 Tax Act.
- (4) Proposed Reg. §26.2642-7 (REG-147775-06) was released on April 16, 2008. When finalized, it will oust Reg. §301.9100-3 and become the exclusive basis for seeking the extensions of time Congress mandated in section 2642(g)(1) (except that the simplified procedure for dealing with pre-2001 annual exclusion gifts under Rev. Proc. 2004-46 will be retained).
- (5) The proposed regulations resemble Reg. §301.9100-3, but with some important differences. Under Proposed Reg. §26.2642-7(d)(1), the general standard is still “that the transferor or the executor of the transferor’s estate acted reasonably and in good faith, and that the grant of relief will not prejudice the interests of the Government.”
- (a) Proposed Reg. §26.2642-7(d)(2) sets forth a “nonexclusive list of factors” to determine whether the transferor or the executor of the transferor’s estate acted reasonably and in good faith, including (i) the intent of the transferor to make a timely allocation or election, (ii) intervening events beyond the control of the transferor or the executor, (iii) lack of awareness of the need to allocate GST exemption to the transfer, despite the exercise of reasonable diligence, (iv) consistency by the transferor, and (v) reasonable reliance on the advice of a qualified tax professional.
- (b) Proposed Reg. §26.2642-7(d)(3) sets forth a “nonexclusive list of factors” to determine whether the interests of the Government are prejudiced, including (i) the extent to which the request for relief is an effort to benefit from hindsight, (ii) the timing of the request for relief, and (iii) any intervening taxable termination or taxable distribution.
- (c) Noticeably, the proposed regulations seem to invite more deliberate weighing of all those factors than the identification of one or two dispositive factors as under Reg. §301.9100-3.
- (6) “Hindsight,” which could be both a form of bad faith and a way the interests of the Government are prejudiced, seems to be a focus of the proposed regulations. This is probably explained by the obvious distinctive feature of the GST tax – its effects are felt for *generations*, in contrast to most “9100 relief” elections that affect only a current year or a few years. There simply is more opportunity for “hindsight” over such a long term. Thus, the greater rigor required by the proposed regulations seems to be justified by the nature of the GST tax and consistent with the mandate of section 2642(g)(1)(B) to “take into account all relevant circumstances.”
- (7) Proposed Reg. §26.2642-7(h)(3)(i)(D) requires a request for relief to be accompanied by “detailed affidavits” from “[e]ach tax professional who advised or was consulted by the transferor or the executor of the transferor’s estate with regard to any aspect of the transfer, the trust, the allocation of GST exemption, and/or the election under section 2632(b)(3) or (c)(5).”
- (a) The references to “any aspect of the transfer” and “the trust” appear to go beyond the procedural requirement of Reg. §301.9100-3(e)(3) for “detailed affidavits from the individuals having knowledge or information about the events that led to the failure to make a valid regulatory election and to the discovery of the failure.” Presumably, a professional who



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advised only with respect to “the transfer” or “the trust” would have nothing relevant to contribute other than a representation that they did not advise the transferor to make the election, a fact that the transferor’s own affidavit could establish.

- (b) Out of concern about returning to the supercharged “fall on your sword” days before the reformation of the 9100 rules reflected in Rev. Proc. 92-85, 1992-2 C.B. 490, the author of this outline recommended the relaxation of that requirement in a comment letter dated July 3, 2008.
- (8) Section 2642(g)(1) itself, having been enacted by the 2001 Tax Act, was once scheduled to “sunset” on January 1, 2011, then on January 1, 2013, and is now permanent.
- (9) These regulations ought to have been close to completion for a long time now.
  - (a) This item last appeared in the 2015-2016 Plan. It was removed in the 2016-2017 Plan, perhaps so these regulations could be issued at the same time as the ETIP-related regulations envisioned by the project discussed in Part 5.h(1) below. Or it might have been thought that the consistent basis and section 2704 regulations alone may have kept Treasury and the IRS busy through June 2017, while most of the objectives of the section 2642(g) regulations were being served anyway by Reg. §301.9100-3.
  - (b) Then these regulations were revived in the 2017-2018 Plan as a “burden reduction” project. How can this be, when the proposed regulations would generally be more burdensome than Reg. §301.9100-3, which Notice 2001-50 now allows to be used? **Perhaps the extensive experience of the IRS with ruling requests under Notice 2001-50 and Reg. §301.9100-3 has shown that less onerous requirements may be sufficient.**

f. **Part 6: “General Guidance”**

Part 6 of the Priority Guidance Plan, titled “General Guidance,” like previous Plans, describes specific projects by subject area “that will be the focus of efforts during the 12-month period from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021 (referred to as the plan year).” Under the heading of **“Gifts and Estates and Trusts,”** the 2020-2021 Plan includes five items.

(1) **“Guidance on basis of grantor trust assets at death under §1014”**

- (a) This project was new in 2015.
- (b) In Letter Ruling 200434012 (April 23, 2004), involving a sale from one grantor trust to another, the Service included the caveat (emphasis added) that “when either Trust 1 or Trust 2 ceases to be treated as a trust owned by A under § 671 **by reason of A’s death** or the waiver or release of any power under § 675, **no opinion is expressed or implied** concerning whether the termination of such grantor trust treatment results in a sale or disposition of any property within the meaning of § 1001(a), **a change in the basis of any property** under § 1012 or § 1014, or any deductible administration expense under § 2053.”
- (c) An installment note received by the grantor from a grantor trust in connection with a sale to a grantor trust receives a new basis – presumably a stepped-up basis – under section 1014 when the grantor dies. The note is not an item of income in respect of a decedent (“IRD”) under section 691, which would be excluded from the operation of section 1014 by section 1014(c), because the fact, amount, and character of IRD are all determined in the same manner as if “the decedent had lived and received such amount” (section 691(a)(3); cf. section 691(a)(1)), and the decedent would not have realized any income in that case, as confirmed by Rev. Rul. 85-13, 1985-1 C.B. 184). See the analysis in Manning & Hesch, “Deferred Payment Sales to Grantor Trusts, GRATs, and Net Gifts: Income and Transfer Tax Elements,” 24 Tax Mgmt. Ests., Gifts & Tr. J. 3 (1999).
- (d) Chief Counsel Advice 200923024 (Dec. 31, 2008) opined that “the Service should not take the position that the mere conversion of a nongrantor trust to a grantor trust [by reason of the replacement of an independent trustee with a related or subordinate party] results in taxable income to the grantor.” After citing and discussing Reg. §1.1001-2(c), Example 5, *Madorin v.*

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*Commissioner*, 84 T.C. 667 (1985), and Rev. Rul. 77-402, 1977-2 C.B. 222 (which addressed the reverse conversion to nongrantor trust status), the Chief Counsel's office noted (emphasis added) that "the rule set forth in these authorities is narrow, insofar as it only affects inter vivos lapses of grantor trust status, not that caused by the death of the owner *which is generally not treated as an income tax event.*" Because of the interrelationship with certain partnership transactions and section 754 basis elections, however, the Chief Counsel's office viewed the overall transaction as "abusive" and wanted to explore other ways to challenge it. But it nevertheless believed that "asserting that the conversion of a nongrantor trust to a grantor trust results in taxable income to the grantor would have an impact on non-abusive situations."

- (e) This guidance project may somehow be related to the analytical gymnastics found in those authorities.
- (f) On the other hand, this proposal may simply be aimed at a clarification of the rules for foreign trusts.
  - i. Rev. Proc. 2015-37, 2015-26 I.R.B. 1196, added "[w]hether the assets in a grantor trust receive a section 1014 basis adjustment at the death of the deemed owner of the trust for income tax purposes when those assets are not includible in the gross estate of that owner under chapter 11 of subtitle B of the Internal Revenue Code" to the list of "areas under study in which rulings or determination letters will not be issued until the Service resolves the issue through publication of a revenue ruling, a revenue procedure, regulations, or otherwise." That designation was continued in section 5.01(12) of Rev. Proc. 2016-3, 2016-1 I.R.B. 126, section 5.01(10) of Rev. Proc. 2017-3, 2017-1 I.R.B. 130, section 5.01(8) of Rev. Proc. 2018-3, 2018-1 I.R.B. 130, section 5.01(8) of Rev. Proc. 2019-3, 2019-1 I.R.B. 130, section 5.01(9) of Rev. Proc. 2020-3, 2020-1 I.R.B. 131, and section 5.01(11) of Rev. Proc. 2021-3, 2021-1 I.R.B. 140.
  - ii. Meanwhile, Letter Ruling 201544002 (June 30, 2015), similar to Letter Ruling 201245006 (July 19, 2012), held that assets in a revocable trust created by foreign grantors for their U.S. citizen children would receive a stepped-up basis under section 1014(b)(2) at the grantors' deaths. The ruling acknowledged the no-rule policy of Rev. Proc. 2015-37, but avoided it on the ground that the ruling request had been submitted before the no-rule policy was announced.
  - iii. It is hard to believe that it is a coincidence that Rev. Proc. 2015-37 was published in the Internal Revenue Bulletin on June 29, 2015, the *day before* Letter Ruling 201544002 was issued. If those two contemporaneous events are related, then the no-rule position of Rev. Procs. 2015-37, 2016-3, 2017-3, 2018-3, 2019-3, 2020-3, and 2021-3 might have been aimed only at foreign trusts, and so might this proposal first announced in the 2015-2016 Priority Guidance Plan a month later on July 31, 2015. It is also possible that, even if the project originally had such a narrow focus, it has since been expanded in the Trump Administration. But this item apparently is not mentioned in the Office of Management and Budget's Spring 2020 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions, which was released on June 30, 2020.

(2) **"Guidance on user fee for estate tax closing letters under §2001."**

- (a) This project is new in the 2020-2021 Plan, although there was a preview of it in the Office of Management and Budget's Spring 2020 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions, which was released on June 30, 2020.
- (b) Before June 1, 2015, the IRS routinely issued a closing letter (not the same as a formal "closing agreement") when the examination of an estate tax return was closed, except returns that were not required for estate tax purposes but were filed solely to elect portability. The "Frequently Asked Questions on Estate Taxes" on the IRS website was updated on June 16, 2015, to state that for such returns filed on or after June 1, 2015, closing letters would be issued only upon request. Notice 2017-12, 2017-5 I.R.B. 742, confirmed that, and also confirmed informal reports that an estate tax account transcript that

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includes the transaction code “421” and the explanation “Closed examination of tax return” can, as the Notice put it, “serve as the functional equivalent of an estate tax closing letter.”

(c) Many estate planning professionals have been frustrated with efforts to obtain such transcripts and in any event have not found that a transcript has the same dignity as a closing letter for purposes of obtaining the release of liens and otherwise documenting the propriety of making distributions, closing accounts, and taking other financial actions. While it has been suggested that the IRS abandoned automatic closing letters for budgetary reasons, that explanation has been hard to understand, because presumably a closing letter is computer-generated from the same computer records that support transcripts, and it requires the same diligence to generate the transaction code “421” anyway.

(d) At the end of 2020, the IRS released proposed regulations to establish a \$67 user fee for issuing an estate tax closing letter, to take effect 30 days after the publication of final regulations. Proposed Reg. §300.13, REG-114615-16, 85 Fed. Reg. 86871 (Dec. 31, 2020).

i. The preamble to the proposed regulations acknowledges the importance of closing letters to executors, but adds:

The practice of issuing estate tax closing letters to authorized persons is not mandated by any provision of the Code or other statutory requirement. Instead, the practice is fundamentally a customer service convenience offered to authorized persons in view of the unique nature of estate tax return filings and the bearing of an estate's Federal estate tax obligations on the obligation to administer and close a probate estate under applicable State and local law.

ii. The preamble explains that the practice of issuing closing letters for every filed estate tax return was changed in 2015 primarily for two reasons – (1) the increase in the volume of filed returns since the enactment of portability and (2) the availability of the transcript alternative described in Notice 2017-12. Regarding the first reason, the preamble notes that in 2016 approximately 20,000 optional estate tax returns were filed solely to elect portability, compared to approximately 12,000 mandatory returns.

iii. The preamble includes a detailed description of the calculation of the user fee, based on fiscal year 2017 and 2018 data, culminating in the determination of a full annual cost to the IRS (including direct labor and non-labor costs and a 74.08% overhead factor) of \$1,160,058, divided by an estimated volume of 17,249 requests to produce the proposed user fee of \$67. The calculations include an average of one-half hour of quality assurance review by a senior staff member applied to 5% of mailed closing letters.

iv. The preamble does not explain how to request a closing letter and pay the user fee, but it states:

The Treasury Department and the IRS expect to implement a procedure that will improve convenience and reduce burden for authorized persons requesting estate tax closing letters by initiating a one-step, web-based procedure to accomplish the request of the estate tax closing letter as well as the payment of the user fee. As presently contemplated, a Federal payment website, such as <http://www.pay.gov>, will be used and multiple requests will not be necessary. The Treasury Department and the IRS believe implementing such a one-step procedure will reduce the current administrative burden on authorized persons in requesting estate tax closing letters and will limit the burden associated with the establishment of a user fee for providing such service.

(3) **“Regulations under §2032(a) regarding imposition of restrictions on estate assets during the six month alternate valuation period. Proposed regulations were published on November 18, 2011.”**

(a) This project first appeared in the 2007-2008 Plan.

(b) The first set of proposed regulations related to this project, Proposed Reg. §20.2032-1(f) (REG-112196-07), was published on April 25, 2008. The preamble appeared to view these regulations as the resolution of “[t]wo judicial decisions [that] have interpreted the language of section 2032 and its legislative history differently in determining whether post-death

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events other than market conditions may be taken into account under the alternate valuation method.”

- (c) In the first of these cases, *Flanders v. United States*, 347 F. Supp. 95 (N.D. Calif. 1972), after a decedent’s death in 1968, but before the alternate valuation date, the trustee of the decedent’s (formerly) revocable trust, which held a one-half interest in a California ranch, entered into a land conservation agreement pursuant to California law.
  - i. The conservation agreement reduced the value of the ranch by 88 percent. Since that reduced value was the value of the ranch at the alternate valuation date (which until 1971 was one year after death), the executor elected alternate valuation and reported the ranch at that value.
  - ii. Citing the Depression-era legislative history to the effect that alternate valuation was intended to protect decedents’ estates against “many of the hardships which were experienced after 1929 when market values decreased very materially between the period from the date of death and the date of distribution to the beneficiaries,” the court held that “the value reducing result of the post mortem act of the surviving trustee” may not be considered in applying alternate valuation.
- (d) The second of these cases was *Kohler v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2006-152, *nonacq.*, 2008-9 I.R.B. 481, involving the estate of a shareholder of the well-known family-owned plumbing fixture manufacturer. The executor had received stock in a tax-free corporate reorganization that had been under consideration for about two years before the decedent’s death but was not completed until about two months after the decedent’s death.
  - i. The court rejected the Service’s attempt to base the estate tax on the value of the stock *surrendered* in the reorganization (which had been subject to fewer restrictions on transferability), on the ground that Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(1) prevents that result by specifically refusing to treat stock surrendered in a tax-free reorganization as “otherwise disposed of” for purposes of section 2032(a)(1).
  - ii. The court also noted that the exchange of stock must have been for equal value or the reorganization would not have been tax-free as the parties had stipulated (although, ironically, the executor’s own appraiser had determined a value of the pre-reorganization shares of \$50.115 million and a value of the post-reorganization shares of \$47.010 million – a difference of about 6.2 percent). The court distinguished *Flanders*, where the post-death transaction itself reduced the value by 88 percent.
  - iii. The Tax Court in *Kohler* viewed the 1935 legislative history relied on in *Flanders* as irrelevant, because Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(1) (promulgated in 1958) was clear and unambiguous and because “the legislative history describes the general purpose of the statute, not the specific meaning of ‘otherwise disposed of’ in the context of tax-free reorganizations.”
- (e) The 2008 proposed regulations would have made no change to Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(1), on which the *Kohler* court relied. But they invoked “the general purpose of the statute” that was articulated in 1935, relied on in *Flanders* but bypassed in *Kohler*, to beef up Reg. §20.2032-1(f), to clarify and emphasize, with both text and examples, that the benefits of alternate valuation are limited to changes in value due to “market conditions.” The 2008 proposed regulations would specifically add “post-death events other than market conditions” to changes in value resulting from the “mere lapse of time,” which are ignored in determining the alternate value under section 2032(a)(3).
- (f) New proposed regulations (REG-112196-07) were published on November 18, 2011. The preamble stated:
  - ... Some commentators expressed concern that the proposed regulations (73 FR 22300) would create administrative problems because an estate would be required to trace property and to obtain appraisals based on hypothetical property....

...

Many commentators ... suggested that the IRS and Treasury Department would better serve taxpayers and address any potential abuse [of the section 2032 election] by ensuring that the regulations address the issues described in this preamble rather than finalizing the approach taken in the proposed regulations.

In view of the comments, the Treasury Department and the IRS are withdrawing the proposed regulations (73 FR 22300) by the publication of these proposed regulations in the Federal Register.

- (g) Thus, in contrast to the 2008 approach of ignoring certain intervening events – and thereby potentially valuing assets six months after death on a hypothetical basis – the new approach is to expand the description of intervening events that are regarding as dispositions, triggering alternate valuation as of that date. The expanded list, in Proposed Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(1)(i), includes distributions, exchanges (whether taxable or not), and contributions to capital or other changes to the capital structure or ownership of an entity, including “[t]he dilution of the decedent’s ownership interest in the entity due to the issuance of additional ownership interests in the entity.” Proposed Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(1)(i)(I)(1). But under Proposed Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(1)(ii), an exchange of interests in a corporation, partnership, or other entity is not counted if the fair market values of the interests before and after the exchange differ by no more than 5 percent (which would still subject a 6.2 percent difference as in *Kohler* to the new rules).
  - i. If the interest involved is only a fraction of the decedent’s total interest, an aggregation rule in Proposed Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(1)(iv) values such interests at a pro rata share of the decedent’s total interest.
  - ii. The proposed regulations also include special rules for coordinating with annuities and similar payments (§20.2032-1(c)(1)(iii)(B)) and excepting qualified conservation easements (§20.2032-1(c)(4)), and also many more examples (§20.2032-1(c)(5), (e) *Example (2)*, (f)(2)(B) & (f)(3)).
- (h) While the 2008 proposed regulations were referred to as the “anti-*Kohler* regulations,” the most significant impact of these proposed regulations may fall on efforts to bootstrap an estate into a valuation discount by distributing or otherwise disposing of a minority or other noncontrolling interest within the six-month period after death (valuing it as a minority interest under section 2032(a)(1)) and leaving another minority or noncontrolling interest to be valued six months after death (also valued as a minority interest under section 2032(a)(2)).
  - i. Examples 7 and 8 of Proposed Reg. §20.2032-1(c)(5) specifically address the discount-bootstrap technique – Example 8 in the context of a limited liability company and Example 7 in the context of real estate – and leave no doubt that changes in value due to “market conditions” do not include the valuation discounts that might appear to be created by partial distributions.
  - ii. Example 1 reaches the same result with respect to the post-death formation of a limited partnership.
- (i) The Office of Management and Budget’s Spring 2020 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions, released on June 30, 2020, offered the following concise summary of the scope of the proposed regulations:

In cases where section 2032 election has been made, the regulations would provide guidance on: (1) The effect of certain post-death transactions on assets includible in the decedent’s gross estate; (2) the treatment of assets the title to which is transferred at death by contract; (3) the determination of the portion of trusts in which the decedent retained an interest that are includible in the decedent’s gross estate under section 2036; (4) the effect of the grant of a qualified conservation easement under section 2031(c) during the 6-month period after the date of death; and (5) the types of factors, the impact of which affect the fair market value of assets includible in the decedent’s gross estate, that will be recognized under section 2032.
- (j) The 2008 proposed regulations were to be effective April 25, 2008, the date the proposed regulations were published. The 2011 proposed regulations, more traditionally, state that they will be effective when published as final regulations.



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(4) **“Regulations under §2053 regarding personal guarantees and the application of present value concepts in determining the deductible amount of expenses and claims against the estate”**

- (a) This project first appeared in the 2008-2009 Plan as an outgrowth of the project that led to the final amendments of the section 2053 regulations in October 2009. The significance of present value concepts is elaborated in this paragraph in the preamble to the 2009 regulations (T.D. 9468, 74 Fed. Reg. 53652 (Oct. 20, 2009)):

Some commentators suggested that the disparate treatment afforded noncontingent obligations (deduction for present value of obligations) versus contingent obligations (dollar-for-dollar deduction as paid) is inequitable and produces an inconsistent result without meaningful justification. These commentators requested that the final regulations allow an estate to choose between deducting the present value of a noncontingent recurring payment on the estate tax return, or instead deducting the amounts paid in the same manner as provided for a contingent obligation (after filing an appropriate protective claim for refund). The Treasury Department and the IRS find the arguments against the disparate treatment of noncontingent and contingent obligations to be persuasive. The final regulations eliminate the disparate treatment by removing the present value limitation applicable only to noncontingent recurring payments. The Treasury Department and the IRS believe that the issue of the appropriate use of present value in determining the amount of the deduction allowable under section 2053 merits further consideration. The final regulations reserve § 20.2053-1(d)(6) to provide future guidance on this issue.

- (b) But it is easy to see how the Treasury Department’s and the IRS’s “further consideration” of “the appropriate use of present value concepts” could turn their focus to the leveraged benefit in general that can be obtained when a claim or expense is paid long after the due date of the estate tax, but the additional estate tax reduction is credited as of, and earns interest from, that due date.
- i. *Graegin* loans (see *Estate of Graegin v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1988-477) could be an obvious target of such consideration.
  - ii. If this project results in a deduction of only the present value of the payment, as of the due date of the tax, *and* the discount rate used in the calculation of the present value is the same as the rate of interest on the tax refund, *and* the interest is not subject to income tax (or the discount rate is also reduced by the income tax rate), then the invocation of “present value concepts” might make very little difference on paper. But it might require legislation to accomplish all these things.
  - iii. Since claims or expenses are rarely paid exactly on the due date of the tax, the *precise* application of such principles might be exceedingly complicated.

(5) **“Regulations under §7520 regarding the use of actuarial tables in valuing annuities, interests for life or terms of years, and remainder or reversionary interests”**

- (a) This item was new in the 2018-2019 Plan.
- (b) The current mortality tables, based on 2000 census data, became effective May 1, 2009. Previous mortality tables had taken effect on May 1, 1989, and May 1, 1999. Section 7520(c)(2) mandates revision of the tables at least once every ten years. Thus, this project appears to be that routine revision, to reflect 2010 census data and to be effective as of May 1, 2019, even though it was not completed by that date.
- (c) It is reasonable to assume that there will be transitional relief for taxpayers who, since May 1, 2019, have relied on the mortality tables that took effect May 1, 2009. Because the mortality tables have not been late before, there is no model for such transitional relief. But even the timely promulgation of the 2009 mortality tables provided what the preamble described as “certain transitional rules intended to alleviate any adverse consequences resulting from the proposed regulatory change.” T.D. 9448, 74 Fed. Reg. 21438, 21439 (May 7, 2009). The preamble went on to elaborate:

For gift tax purposes, if the date of a transfer is on or after May 1, 2009, but before July 1, 2009, the donor may choose to determine the value of the gift (and/or any applicable charitable deduction) under tables based on either [the 1990 or 2000 census data]. Similarly, for estate tax purposes, if the decedent dies on or after May 1, 2009, but before July 1, 2009, the value of any interest (and/or any applicable charitable deduction) may be determined in the discretion of the decedent’s executor under tables



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based on either [the 1990 or 2000 census data]. However, the section 7520 interest rate to be utilized is the appropriate rate for the month in which the valuation date occurs, subject to the ... special rule [in section 7520(a)] for certain charitable transfers.

In other words, transitional relief may be provided with respect to the actuarial components of calculations based on mortality (life expectancy) tables, but not with respect to merely financial components such as applicable federal rates and the section 7520 rate, which have been published monthly as usual without interruption. For example, such transitional relief would apply to the calculations since May 1, 2019, of the values of an interest for life, an interest for joint lives, an interest for life or a term whichever is shorter or longer, or a remainder following such an interest. But no transitional relief would be necessary for calculations related to promissory notes or GRATs that involve only fixed terms without mortality components, which the new mortality tables would not affect.

g. **Omissions from the 2017-2018 Plan**

The following items, which had been in previous Priority Guidance Plans, were omitted from the 2017-2018 Plan:

(1) **“Guidance on definition of income for spousal support trusts under §682”**

- (a) This project was new in 2016.
- (b) Section 682 was repealed by the 2017 Tax Act.

(2) **“Guidance on the valuation of promissory notes for transfer tax purposes under §§2031, 2033, 2512, and 7872”**

- (a) This project first appeared in the 2015-2016 Plan.
- (b) This project was joined in the 2016-2017 Plan by an item under the subject of “Financial Institutions and Products” described as “Regulations under §7872. Proposed regulations were published on August 20, 1985.” When the promissory notes project was dropped from the subject of “Gifts and Estates and Trusts” in the 2017-2018 Plan, that item under “Financial Institutions and Products” remained. It was carried over to the 2018-2019 Plan, but dropped from the 2019-2020 Plan.
- (c) It is well known that the Tax Court has held that section 7872 is the applicable provision for valuing an intra-family promissory note – specifically for determining that a note carrying the section 7872 rate may be valued at its face amount. *See Frazee v. Commissioner*, 98 T.C. 554 (1992). *See also Estate of True v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2001-167, *aff’d on other grounds*, 390 F.3d 1210 (10th Cir. 2004).
- (d) But Judge Hamblen concluded his opinion in *Frazee* by stating:

We find it anomalous that respondent urges as her primary position the application of section 7872, which is more favorable to the taxpayer than the traditional fair market value approach, but we heartily welcome the concept.

98 T.C. at 590. Perhaps this project was intended to resolve that anomaly, probably by regulations.

(e) Section 7872(i)(2) states:

Under regulations prescribed by the Secretary [of the Treasury], any loan which is made with donative intent and which is a term loan shall be taken into account for purposes of chapter 11 [the estate tax chapter] in a manner consistent with the provisions of subsection (b) [providing for the income and gift tax treatment of below-market loans].

- i. Proposed Reg. §20.7872-1 (proposed in 1985) provides that a “gift term loan” shall be valued for estate tax purposes at no less than (a) its unpaid stated principal plus accrued interest or (b) the present value of all the future payments under the note using the applicable federal rate in effect at the time of death.
- ii. Answers to the proposed regulation might include the arguments that (1) the proposed regulation is not effective unless and until it is finalized, (2) the loan represented by the installment note is not a “gift term loan” because it uses an interest rate calculated to

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avoid below-market treatment under section 7872(e), and (3) with respect to section 7872(i)(2) itself, the loan is not made “with donative intent” because the transaction is a sale.

- iii. Under section 7805, the proposed regulations could probably be expanded even beyond the strict mandate of section 7872(i)(2), and under section 7805(b)(1)(B) such expanded final regulations might even be made effective retroactively to the publication date of the proposed regulations in 1985 (although that would be an aggressive choice that undoubtedly would be roundly criticized). But, unless and until that happens, most estate planners have seen no reason why the estate tax value should not be fair market value, which, after all, is the general rule, subject to Reg. §20.2031-4, which states:

The fair market value of notes, secured or unsecured, is presumed to be the amount of unpaid principal, plus interest accrued to the date of death, unless the executor establishes that the value is lower or that the notes are worthless. However, items of interest shall be separately stated on the estate tax return. If not returned at face value, plus accrued interest, satisfactory evidence must be submitted that the note is worth less than the unpaid amount (because of the interest rate, date of maturity, or other cause), or that the note is uncollectible, either in whole or in part (by reason of the insolvency of the party or parties liable, or for other cause), and that any property pledged or mortgaged as security is insufficient to satisfy the obligation.

- (f) It is not clear that this guidance project was related to these developments, and in any event it did not cite Proposed Reg. §20.7872-1.
  - i. It is clear that the IRS has long been interested in the valuation of promissory notes, and at times has seemed to embrace a market interest rate standard. See Letter Ruling 200147028 (issued Aug. 9, 2001; released Nov. 23, 2001).
  - ii. The interest of the IRS was especially apparent after the docketing of *Estate of Davidson v. Commissioner*, T.C. Docket No. 13748-13, in which the IRS asserted \$2.8 billion in estate, gift, and generation-skipping taxes owed. On July 6, 2015, the case was settled for just over \$550 million. Addressing Mr. Davidson’s sales both in Chief Counsel Advice 201330033 (Feb. 24, 2012) and in its answer in the Tax Court, the IRS argued that the notes should be valued, not under section 7520, but under a willing buyer-willing seller standard that took account of Mr. Davidson’s health. See also *Estate of Kite v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2013-43.
- (g) Promissory notes are frequently used in estate planning, and guidance could provide welcome clarity.

(3) **“Guidance on the gift tax effect of defined value formula clauses under §§2512 and 2511”**

- (a) This project was also new in 2015.
- (b) Defined value clauses have an interesting history. See, for example, Technical Advice Memorandum 8611004 (Nov. 15, 1985) (approving a transfer of “such interest in X Partnership ... as has a fair market value of \$13,000”); *Knight v. Commissioner*, 115 T.C. 506 (2000) (disregarding the use of such a technique to transfer “that number of limited partnership units in [the partnership] which is equal in value, on the effective date of this transfer, to \$600,000”); *Succession of McCord v. Commissioner*, 461 F.3d 614 (5th Cir. 2006), *rev’g* 120 T.C. 358 (2003) (reviewed by the Court) (approving a defined value clause, with the excess going to charity); *Estate of Christiansen v. Commissioner*, 130 T.C. 1 (2008) (reviewed by the Court), *aff’d*, 586 F.3d 1061 (8th Cir. 2009) (approving a formula disclaimer in favor of charity); *Estate of Petter v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2009-280, *aff’d*, 653 F.3d 1012 (9th Cir. 2011) (approving a defined value clause, with the excess going to charity); *Hendrix v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-133 (approving a defined value clause, with the excess going to charity); *Wandry v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2012-88, *nonacq.*, AOD 2012-004, 2012-46 I.R.B. (approving a type of defined value clause, with the excess remaining with the transferor).
- (c) The taxpayers’ actual implementation of defined value clauses (that is, returning property to the donors where it might be taxed as part of their estates) was likely an element of the settlements in *Estate of Donald Woelbing v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 30261-13,

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stipulated decision entered March 25, 2016) and *Estate of Marion Woelbing v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 30260-13, stipulated decision entered March 28, 2016); and possibly in *Karen S. True v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 21896-16, stipulated decision entered July 9, 2018) and *H.A. True III v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 21897-16, stipulated decision entered July 6, 2018).

- (d) Another example of the IRS and the taxpayer agreeing to give effect to a formula – in this case a formula for determining the annuity payments from a GRAT – is the stipulation in *Grieve v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2020-28 (Judge Kerrigan). In that case, in addition to other transfers, there was a two-year GRAT with annuity payments determined as stated percentages of what the opinion describes only as “the fair market value of assets transferred to the trust for Federal gift tax purposes.” As the court noted in a footnote:

The parties stipulated that petitioner will not owe additional gift tax if we determine that he understated the initial fair market value of assets transferred to the GRAT if, within a reasonable time, the GRAT pays to petitioner, or to his personal representative in the event of his passing, an amount equal to the difference of the properly payable annuity and the annuity actually paid.

They never had the opportunity to make such a payment, however, because the taxpayer won the case on the underlying valuation issue.

- (e) *Nelson v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2020-81 (June 10, 2020, Judge Pugh), involved a gift to a trust of a limited partner interest “having a fair market value” of a specified dollar amount, “as determined by a qualified appraiser within ninety (90) days of the effective date of this Assignment,” followed two days later by a sale to the same trust described in the same way, except that the time for obtaining the appraisal was 180 days instead of 90 days. The taxpayer argued unsuccessfully that this permitted an adjustment to the transfer based on the values finally determined for gift tax purposes, as in *Wandry*. Significantly, the IRS not only accepted the formulas based on appraisals within a specified time but actually advocated for them, obviously not offended by such formula transfers as it is by *Wandry* clauses. This is understandable, because by the time the IRS looks at the return the transferred quantity will already have been determined, and the IRS can contest the valuation of that quantity.
- (f) For an important analysis of limitations on the effectiveness of *Wandry* clauses, see Bramwell & Dillon, “Not Another *Wandry* Article: Real Issue With *Wandry* Formulas,” 41 Est. Plan. 3 (May 2014).
- (g) In affirming the Tax Court in *Petter*, albeit in the context of a rather narrow subpoint of a condition precedent within the meaning of Reg. §25.2522(c)-3(b)(1), the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit concluded its opinion by quoting:

“[W]e expressly invite[ ] the Treasury Department to “amend its regulations” if troubled by the consequences of our resolution of th[is] case.” *Mayo Found. for Med. Educ. & Research v. United States*, 131 S. Ct. 704, 713 (2011) (quoting *United Dominion Indus., Inc. v. United States*, 532 U.S. 822, 838 (2001)).

Maybe, in this guidance project, Treasury was proposing to accept that invitation. Because of the widespread use of defined value formula clauses in estate planning, particularly (as we saw in 2012) to make use of increased exemptions that were about to sunset, guidance could provide needed clarity on this point also.

- (4) **“Guidance under §§2522 and 2055 regarding the tax impact of certain irregularities in the administration of split-interest charitable trusts”**

This project was new in 2016.

- (5) **“Guidance under §2801 regarding the tax imposed on U.S. citizens and residents who receive gifts or bequests from certain expatriates. Proposed regulations were published on September 10, 2015.”**

- (a) The Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax Act of 2008 (the “HEART” Act) enacted a new income tax “mark to market” rule when someone expatriates on or after June 17, 2008, and a new succession tax on the receipt of certain gifts or bequests from someone who

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expatriated on or after June 17, 2008. The new succession tax is provided for in section 2801, comprising all of new chapter 15.

- (b) Referring to the guidance contemplated by this project, Announcement 2009-57, 2009-29 I.R.B. 158 (released July 16, 2009), stated:

The Internal Revenue Service intends to issue guidance under section 2801, as well as a new Form 708 on which to report the receipt of gifts and bequests subject to section 2801. The due date for reporting, and for paying any tax imposed on, the receipt of such gifts or bequests has not yet been determined. The due date will be contained in the guidance, and the guidance will provide a reasonable period of time between the date of issuance of the guidance and the date prescribed for the filing of the return and the payment of the tax.

- (c) This project first appeared on the 2008-2009 Plan. Treasury and IRS personnel initially referred to it as a top priority, but now it has been dropped from the Priority Guidance Plan, even though proposed regulations were published on September 10, 2015. Evidently the implementation of what amounts to a succession tax on transferees, not transferors or their estates, is quite complicated and challenging.
- (d) The proposed regulations (§§28.2801-1 through -7 and related procedural sections, REG-112997-10) are about 18,000 words long and were accompanied by a preamble of about 8,600 words. The preamble included the estimate that there would be 1,000 respondents annually.
- (e) Proposed Reg. §28.6011-1(a) provides that “covered” gifts and bequests must be reported by the recipient on Form 708, “United States Return of Tax for Gifts and Bequests from Covered Expatriates.”
- i. Under Proposed Reg. §28.6071-1(a)(1), Form 708 is generally due on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 18<sup>th</sup> month following the close of the calendar year in which the transfer was received. But, fulfilling the promise of Announcement 2009-57, Proposed Reg. §28.6071-1(d) states that no Form 708 will be due before the date specified in the final regulations.
- ii. Under Proposed Reg. §28.2801-3(c)(1) and (2), if a gift or bequest is reported by the expatriate donor or executor of the expatriate decedent on a Form 709 or 706, and gift or estate tax is paid, it is not a covered gift or bequest and need not be reported on Form 708.
- (f) Proposed Reg. §28.2801-3(b) confirms that covered bequests include the receipt of assets the value of which would be included in a U.S. citizen’s gross estate under section 2036, 2037, 2038, 2040, 2042, or 2044.
- (g) There are some oddities and surprises in the calculation of the tax.
- i. Under Proposed Reg. §28.2801-4(b)(2), the sum of both covered gifts and covered bequests is reduced by the annual exclusion amount provided for gift tax purposes under section 2503(b). But only one such reduction is allowed, regardless of the number of donors. In the case of a gift to a spouse who is not a U.S. citizen, that amount is determined under section 2523(i) (see Proposed Reg. §28.2801-3(c)(4) and -3(f), *Example 1*) and is 10 times the unrounded amount determined under section 2503(b).
- ii. Under section 2801(b), the tax is an obligation of the recipient. Nevertheless, under the calculation rules in Proposed Reg. §28.2801-4(b), the gift tax the recipient pays is not deducted from the amount subject to tax, as it would be in the case of a typical “net gift.” The section 2801 tax, whether on a gift or a bequest, is “tax-inclusive.”
- iii. Proposed Reg. §28.2801-4(a)(2)(iii) provides rules for computing the tax in the case of a covered transfer to a charitable remainder trust. The value of the transferred property is allocated between the noncharitable interest and the charitable remainder interest in the usual way and the tax is calculated on the noncharitable portion. Although the payment of the tax by the trust does not reduce the value of the gift for purposes of the calculation of the section 2801 tax (see paragraph ii above), it does reduce the value of the charitable remainder and therefore might actually *increase* the value of the covered gift.

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- iv. Under Proposed Reg. §28.2801-6(a), the recipient's payment of the tax does not increase the basis of the transferred property.
- (h) One of the most vexing issues regarding the section 2801 tax has been figuring out how the recipient will know when a gift or bequest is a "covered" gift or bequest from a "covered" expatriate. Gifts and bequests normally have no tax consequences to the recipient.
- i. Proposed Reg. §28.2801-7(a) provides this ominous and exasperating, but probably unavoidable, confirmation:
- (a) *Responsibility of recipients of gifts and bequests from expatriates.* It is the responsibility of the taxpayer (in this case, the U.S. citizen or resident receiving a gift or bequest from an expatriate or a distribution from a foreign trust funded at least in part by an expatriate) to ascertain the taxpayer's obligations under section 2801, which includes making the determination of whether the transferor is a covered expatriate and whether the transfer is a covered gift or covered bequest.
- ii. Doing the best it can to be helpful, Proposed Reg. §28.2801-7(b) adds:
- (b) *Disclosure of return and return information—(1) In general.* In certain circumstances, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) may be permitted, upon request of a U.S. citizen or resident in receipt of a gift or bequest from an expatriate, to disclose to the U.S. citizen or resident return or return information of the donor or decedent expatriate that may assist the U.S. citizen or resident in determining whether the donor or decedent was a covered expatriate and whether the transfer was a covered gift or covered bequest. The U.S. citizen or resident may not rely upon this information, however, if the U.S. citizen or resident knows, or has reason to know, that the information received from the IRS is incorrect. The circumstances under which such information may be disclosed to a U.S. citizen or resident, and the procedures for requesting such information from the IRS, will be as provided by publication in the Internal Revenue Bulletin (see §601.601(d)(2)(ii)(b)).
- (2) *Rebuttable presumption.* Unless a living donor expatriate authorizes the disclosure of his or her relevant return or return information to the U.S. citizen or resident receiving the gift, there is a rebuttable presumption that the donor is a covered expatriate and that the gift is a covered gift. A taxpayer who reasonably concludes that a gift or bequest is not subject to section 2801 may file a protective Form 708 in accordance with §28.6011-1(b) to start the period for the assessment of any section 2801 tax.
- iii. The preamble further explains:
- Section 28.2801-7 provides guidance on the responsibility of a U.S. recipient, as defined in §28.2801-2(e), to determine if tax under section 2801 is due. The Treasury Department and the IRS realize that, because the tax imposed by this section is imposed on the U.S. citizen or resident receiving a covered gift or covered bequest, rather than on the donor or decedent covered expatriate making the gift or bequest, U.S. taxpayers may have difficulty determining whether they are liable for any tax under section 2801. Nevertheless, the same standard of due diligence that applies to any other taxpayer to determine whether the taxpayer has a tax liability or a filing requirement also applies to U.S. citizens and residents under this section. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of each U.S. citizen or resident receiving a gift or bequest, whether directly or indirectly, from an expatriate (as defined in section 877A(g)(2)) to determine its tax obligations under section 2801. Thus, the burden is on that U.S. citizen or resident to determine whether the expatriate was a covered expatriate (as defined in section 877A(g)(1)) and, if so, whether the gift or bequest was a covered gift or covered bequest.
- iv. In other words, if a family member expatriates, life will be tougher for other family members (or any objects of the expatriate's bounty) who do not expatriate.
- v. Proposed Reg. 28.6011-1(b)(i) does provide that a recipient who reasonably concludes that a gift or bequest is not a "covered" gift or bequest may file a protective Form 708, and that such a filing will start the period for assessment of tax with respect to any transfer reported on that return.
- (i) Section 2801(e)(1) provides that a "covered gift or bequest" includes any property acquired "directly or indirectly." Section 2801(e)(4)(A) provides that a covered transfer includes a transfer to a U.S. domestic trust. Section 2801(e)(4)(B)(i) provides that in the case of a covered gift or bequest to a foreign trust, the tax is imposed on distributions *from* the trust "attributable to such gift or bequest."



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- i. Proposed Reg. §28.2801-5(c)(1)(i) provides that the amount of any distribution attributable to covered gifts and bequests is determined by applying a “section 2801 ratio” to the value of the distribution. Tracing of particular trust assets is not allowed.
  - ii. Under Proposed Reg. §28.2801-5(c)(1)(ii), the “section 2801 ratio,” representing the portion of the trust and of each distribution that is deemed to be attributable to covered transfers, is redetermined after each contribution to the trust, in a manner resembling the calculation of the inclusion ratio for GST tax purposes.
  - iii. Proposed Reg. §28.2801-5(c)(3) provides:

If the trustee of the foreign trust does not have sufficient books and records to calculate the section 2801 ratio, or if the U.S. recipient is unable to obtain the necessary information with regard to the foreign trust, the U.S. recipient must proceed upon the assumption that the entire distribution for purposes of section 2801 is attributable to a covered gift or covered bequest.

This encourages the expatriate transferor to cooperate with transferees.

- iv. Proposed Reg. §28.2801-5(d) permits a foreign trust to elect to be treated as a U.S. domestic trust.
  - a. Thereby the section 2801 tax is imposed on the value of the trust multiplied by the section 2801 ratio and on all current and future transfers to the trust from covered expatriates, but *not* on future distributions *from* the trust.
  - b. The trustee of an electing foreign trust must designate and authorize a U.S. agent solely for purposes of section 2801. Proposed Reg. §28.2801-5(d)(3)(iv) states:

By designating a U.S. agent, the trustee of the foreign trust agrees to provide the agent with all information necessary to comply with any information request or summons issued by the Secretary. Such information may include, without limitation, copies of the books and records of the trust, financial statements, and appraisals of trust property. ... Acting as an agent for the trust for purposes of section 2801 includes serving as the electing foreign trust’s agent for purposes of section 7602 (“Examination of books and witnesses”), section 7603 (“Service of summons”), and section 7604 (“Enforcement of summons”) with respect to [a]ny request by the Secretary to examine records or produce testimony related to the proper identification or treatment of covered gifts or covered bequests contributed to the electing foreign trust and distributions attributable to such contributions; and [a]ny summons by the Secretary for records or testimony related to the proper identification or treatment of covered gifts or covered bequests contributed to the electing foreign trust and distributions attributable to such contributions.

Under such a rule, care would be advisable in agreeing to be a U.S. agent.

- (6) **And, under the heading of “General Tax Issues,”** deletion of the project described as “Guidance regarding material participation by trusts and estates for purposes of §469.” This guidance could have shed light on the application to trusts and estates of the 3.8 percent tax on net investment income under section 1411.
  - (a) Final regulations addressing many issues under section 1411 were issued on November 26, 2013, but did not address the issue of material participation in the context of trusts. The preamble (T.D. 9644) candidly acknowledged Treasury’s sympathy with the problems of material participation and the difficulty of dealing with those problems, which it described as “very complex.” The preamble to proposed regulations published on December 2, 2013, cited the preamble to the 2013 final regulations and deferred the issue of material participation by estates and trusts, including QSSTs, which it said “is more appropriately addressed under section 469.” Even so, the guidance project described as “Guidance regarding material participation by trusts and estates for purposes of §469,” which had been in previous Priority Guidance Plans, was omitted from the 2017-2018 Plan.
  - (b) Meanwhile, *Frank Aragona Trust v. Commissioner*, 142 T.C. 165 (2014), provides an encouraging precedent.



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h. **Omissions from the 2016-2017 Plan**

The following items, which had been in previous Plans, were omitted from the 2016-2017 Plan:

(1) **“Regulations under §2642 regarding available GST exemption and the allocation of GST exemption to a pour-over trust at the end of an ETIP”**

- (a) This project first appeared in the 2012-2013 Plan.
- (b) Some context might be derived from a request for guidance from the AICPA, first made in a letter to the IRS dated June 26, 2007, which stated:

The issues presented here are best illustrated by considering the following fact pattern:

Taxpayer creates an irrevocable trust, Trust Z, in which a qualified annuity interest (as defined in section 2702(b)) is payable to the taxpayer or his estate for 10 years. Upon the termination of the annuity interest, Trust Z is to be separated into two trusts, Trust A and Trust B. Trust A is for the exclusive benefit of Taxpayer's children and grandchildren. Trust B is for the exclusive benefit of Taxpayer's children. Trust A is to receive from Trust Z so much of the Trust Z's assets as is equal to Taxpayer's remaining GST exemption, if any. Trust B is to receive from Trust Z the balance of Trust Z's assets, if any, after funding Trust A. The taxpayer is alive at the end of the 10 years.

Presumably, the transfer to Trust Z is an indirect skip to which GST exemption will be automatically allocated at the end of the ETIP. Will the automatic allocation rules apply to all the assets remaining in Trust Z at that time? If so and if the taxpayer wants to allocate GST exemption only to the assets going to Trust A, the taxpayer should timely elect out of the automatic allocation rules of section 2632(c), and then affirmatively allocate GST exemption only to the assets going into Trust A at the end of the ETIP. Is that possible?

In the alternative, the automatic allocation rules may apply only to the transfer going into Trust A because Trust B is not by definition a GST trust. Because of the application of the ETIP rules, the transfer from the taxpayer for GST purposes would occur only at the time that the assets are funded into Trust A. If that is the case, then the taxpayer does not need to do anything affirmatively to ensure that GST exemption is allocated to Trust A and not Trust B as he or she desires.

It has been our experience that many trusts are structured in a manner similar to the above referenced fact pattern. By letter dated November 10, 2004, the AICPA submitted comments on the proposed regulations on electing out of deemed allocations of GST exemption under section 2632(c). In that letter, guidance was requested on these issues. The preamble to the final regulations (T.D. 9208) acknowledged this request for the inclusion in the regulations of an example addressing the application of the automatic allocation rules for indirect skips in a situation in which a trust subject to an ETIP terminates upon the expiration of the ETIP, at which time the trust assets are distributed to other trusts that may be GST trusts. According to the preamble, the Treasury Department and the Internal Revenue Service believed that this issue was outside the scope of the regulation project and would consider whether to address these issues in separate guidance.

(2) **“Final regulations under §2642(g) regarding extensions of time to make allocations of the generation-skipping transfer tax exemption. Proposed regulations were published on April 17, 2008”**

- (a) This project first appeared in the 2007-2008 Plan.
- (b) It reappeared in the 2017-2018 Plan and is discussed in Part 5.e above.

i. **Other Notable Omissions**

(1) **Decanting**

- (a) The 2011-2012 Priority Guidance Plan included, as item 13, “Notice on decanting of trusts under §§2501 and 2601.” This project was new in 2011-2012, but it had been anticipated for some time, especially since the publication at the beginning of 2011 of Rev. Proc. 2011-3, 2011-1 I.R.B. 111, in which new sections 5.09, 5.16, and 5.17 included decanting among the “areas under study in which rulings or determination letters will not be issued until the Service resolves the issue through publication of a revenue ruling, revenue procedure, regulations or otherwise.” Rev. Proc. 2021-3, 2021-1 I.R.B. 140, §§5.01(8), (16) & (18) continues this designation.

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- (b) On December 20, 2011, the IRS published Notice 2011-101, 2011-52 I.R.B. 932. Notice 2011-101 asked for comments from the public by April 25, 2012, on the tax consequences of decanting transactions – the transfer by a trustee of trust principal from an irrevocable “Distributing Trust” to another “Receiving Trust.” Notice 2011-101 asked for comments on the relevance and effect of the following 13 facts and circumstances (as well as the identification of any other factors that might affect the tax consequences):
- i. A beneficiary’s right to or interest in trust principal or income is changed (including the right or interest of a charitable beneficiary);
  - ii. Trust principal and/or income may be used to benefit new (additional) beneficiaries;
  - iii. A beneficial interest (including any power to appoint income or corpus, whether general or limited, or other power) is added, deleted, or changed;
  - iv. The transfer takes place from a trust treated as partially or wholly owned by a person under §§671 through 678 of the Internal Revenue Code (a “grantor trust”) to one which is not a grantor trust, or vice versa;
  - v. The situs or governing law of the Receiving Trust differs from that of the Distributing Trust, resulting in a termination date of the Receiving Trust that is subsequent to the termination date of the Distributing Trust;
  - vi. A court order and/or approval of the state Attorney General is required for the transfer by the terms of the Distributing Trust and/or applicable law;
  - vii. The beneficiaries are required to consent to the transfer by the terms of the Distributing Trust and/or applicable local law;
  - viii. The beneficiaries are not required to consent to the transfer by the terms of the Distributing Trust and/or applicable local law;
  - ix. Consent of the beneficiaries and/or a court order (or approval of the state Attorney General) is not required but is obtained;
  - x. The effect of state law or the silence of state law on any of the above scenarios;
  - xi. A change in the identity of a donor or transferor for gift and/or GST tax purposes;
  - xii. The Distributing Trust is exempt from GST tax under §26.2601-1, has an inclusion ratio of zero under §2632, or is exempt from GST tax under §2663; and
  - xiii. None of the changes described above are made, but a future power to make any such changes is created.
- (c) Notice 2011-101 also “encourage[d] the public to suggest a definition for the type of transfer (‘decanting’) this guidance is intended to address” and encouraged responses to consider the contexts of domestic trusts, the domestication of foreign trusts, and transfers to foreign trusts.
- (d) Meanwhile, Notice 2011-101 said that the IRS “generally will continue to issue PLRs with respect to such transfers that do not result in a change to any beneficial interests and do not result in a change in the applicable rule against perpetuities period.”
- (e) There were extensive public comments, and there is little doubt that Treasury and the IRS have continued to study decanting. But decanting was omitted from the 2012-2013 Plan and from subsequent Plans.
- (f) A new Uniform Trust Decanting Act (UTDA) was approved by the Uniform Law Commission at its annual conference in July 2015. The Act generally allows decanting whenever the trustee has discretion to make principal distributions, or even if the trustee does not have such discretion if it is appropriate to decant into a special-needs trust.
- i. Generally decanting may not add beneficiaries, and Section 19 of UTDA includes extensive explicit safeguards, called “tax-related limitations,” to prevent decanting from jeopardizing any intended beneficial tax characteristics of the trust. The beneficial tax

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characteristics explicitly addressed are the marital deduction, the charitable deduction, the annual gift tax exclusion, the eligibility of the trust to hold S corporation stock, an inclusion ratio of zero for GST tax purposes, preservation of the use of the trust beneficiary's life expectancy in determining minimum required distributions from a retirement plan or IRA, and the preservation, creation, avoidance, or termination of grantor trust status as the circumstances might warrant.

- ii. UTDA in effect now provides the "definition" Notice 2011-101 asked for, and its publication should now pave the way for the long-awaited tax guidance for decantings done under UTDA or substantially identical statutes. And because of the care to avoid tax problems that UTDA exhibits, that guidance should not be as hard to complete or as harsh in its application as many might have feared.

## **(2) Private Trust Companies as Fiduciaries**

- (a) Privately owned and operated trust companies are becoming an option that families with large trusts are turning to in increasing numbers, and state law authority for such private trust companies is being continually refined. Every Priority Guidance Plan since the 2004-2005 Plan had included an item referring to private trust companies.
  - i. When this project first appeared, in the 2004-2005 Plan, it was described as "Guidance regarding family trust companies."
  - ii. In the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 Plans, it was described as "Guidance regarding the consequences under various *estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer tax* provisions of using a family-owned company as the trustee of a trust." The omission of *income tax* issues from that formulation was a source of concern, because income tax issues have frequently been addressed in the relevant letter rulings. Indeed, in the first such letter rulings, Letter Rulings 9841014 and 9842007 (July 2, 1998), the only issue was whether a family-owned trust company was a "related or subordinate party" with respect to the living grantors of various trusts, within the meaning of section 672(c), an income tax rule.
  - iii. In the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 Plans (published after Notice 2008-63, which is discussed below), the description was a more comprehensive "Revenue ruling regarding the consequences under various income, estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer tax provisions of using a family owned company as a trustee of a trust."
  - iv. That reassurance of comprehensive treatment was maintained in the 2010-2011 Plan by describing the project as "Guidance concerning private trust companies under §§671, 2036, 2038, 2041, 2042, 2511, and 2601."
  - v. By dropping the reference to a revenue ruling, the 2010-2011 Plan suggested that Treasury and the IRS might be reviewing the basic approach of the proposed revenue ruling, which had attracted many diverse public comments after the publication of Notice 2008-63 (discussed below). But a revenue ruling as the vehicle for the guidance would be much easier to finalize than would, for example, amendment of the many regulations that would have to be amended.
  - vi. Following the first appearance of this project on the 2004-2005 Plan, the IRS identified the treatment of private trust companies for estate tax purposes under sections 2036, 2038, and 2041 as "areas under study in which rulings or determination letters will not be issued until the Service resolves the issue through publication of a revenue ruling, a revenue procedure, regulations, or otherwise." Rev. Proc. 2005-3, 2005-1 C.B. 118, §§5.07, 5.08 & 5.09. This designation has continued to the present. Rev. Proc. 2021-3, 2021-1 I.R.B. 140, §§5.01(12), (13) & (14).
- (b) The proposed revenue ruling in question was released with Notice 2008-63 on July 11, 2008, and published at 2008-31 I.R.B. 261 on August 4, 2008. The Notice solicited comments on

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the proposed revenue ruling, which affirmed favorable conclusions with respect to five tax issues faced by trusts of which a private trust company serves as trustee:

- i. Inclusion of the value of trust assets in a grantor's gross estate by reason of a retained power or interest under section 2036 or 2038.
- ii. Inclusion of the value of trust assets in a beneficiary's gross estate by reason of a general power of appointment under section 2041.
- iii. Treatment of transfers to a trust as completed gifts.
- iv. Effect on a trust's status under the GST tax either as a "grandfathered" trust or as a trust to which GST exemption has been allocated.
- v. Treatment of a grantor or beneficiary as the owner of a trust for income tax purposes.

While these are not the only issues that the use of private trust companies can present, these are the most common issues. It was especially encouraging to see grantor trust treatment addressed, in view of the omission of income tax from the formulation of this project on the then most recent 2007-2008 Plan.

- (c) The proposed revenue ruling posited several trusts, illustrating both the introduction of a private trust company as the trustee of a preexisting trust and the creation of new trusts with a private trust company as the trustee. The trusts had the following features:

- i. The trustee has broad discretionary authority over distributions of both income and principal.
- ii. Each successive primary beneficiary has a broad testamentary power of appointment (although not as broad as a power to appoint to anyone other than the beneficiary's estate, creditors, and creditors of the estate).
- iii. The grantor or primary beneficiary may unilaterally appoint (but not remove) trustees, with no restrictions other than on the ability to appoint oneself.

- (d) The proposed revenue ruling presented two situations – Situation 1, in which the private trust company is formed under a state statute with certain limitations, and Situation 2, in which the private trust company is formed in a state without such a statute but comparable limitations are included in the governing documents of the private trust company itself.

- (e) The basic premise of the proposed revenue ruling, as stated in the second paragraph of Notice 2008-63, was:

The IRS and the Treasury Department intend that the revenue ruling, once issued, will confirm certain tax consequences of the use of a private trust company that are not more restrictive than the consequences that could have been achieved by a taxpayer directly, but without permitting a taxpayer to achieve tax consequences through the use of a private trust company that could not have been achieved had the taxpayer acted directly. Comments are specifically requested as to whether or not the draft revenue ruling will achieve that intended result.

- (f) Consistently with this basic premise, the proposed revenue ruling provided that the hypothetical private trust companies it addressed would generally avoid tax problems by the use of certain "firewall" techniques. For example:

- i. A "Discretionary Distribution Committee" ("DDC") with exclusive authority to make all decisions regarding discretionary distributions "from each trust [meaning "all trusts"?] for which it serves as trustee." Anyone may serve on the DDC, but no member of the DDC may participate in the activities of the DDC with respect to a trust of which that DDC member or his or her spouse is a grantor or beneficiary, or of which the beneficiary is a person to whom that DDC member or his or her spouse owes an obligation of support.
- ii. In Situation 2, an "Amendment Committee" with exclusive authority to amend the relevant sensitive limitations in the private trust company's governing documents (which are imposed by statute in Situation 1). A majority of the members of the Amendment Committee must be individuals who are neither members of the relevant family nor

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persons related or subordinate (within the meaning of section 672(c)) to any shareholder of the company.

- (g) A paragraph near the end of the proposed revenue ruling identified three factual details that were not material to the favorable tax conclusions, explicitly confirming that the conclusions would not change if those details changed. No doubt the list of immaterial factual details could be expanded. Some likely examples (not exhaustive):
  - i. The designation of a “primary beneficiary” of each preexisting trust, possibly excluding so-called “pot” or “sprinkle” trusts.
  - ii. The possible requirement of a single independent “Discretionary Distribution Committee” for all trusts administered by the private trust company, possibly excluding a differently conceived body with a similar effect, a different committee for different trusts, and any exception for trusts for customers other than family members administered by family-owned trust companies that offer fiduciary services to the public.
  - iii. The explicit prohibition of certain express or implied reciprocal agreements regarding distributions, possibly excluding such prohibitions derived from general fiduciary law.
- (h) The project relating to private trust companies was omitted from the 2014-2015 Plan. Unlike decanting, however, it cannot be said that private trust companies are a priority, or that the contemplated guidance may be issued soon. But meanwhile, the principles reflected in the proposed revenue ruling, including the reliance on “firewalls,” will be relied on by those contemplating and organizing private trust companies and employing them as trustees of family trusts. If and when the IRS does issue guidance in this area, it is likely that such guidance will not be harsher in any material way than the guidance in the proposed revenue ruling.

## 6. The Other Way to Make Tax Law: Fact-Specific and Judge-Specific

### a. The Basics: *Gregory v. Helvering*

In the famous case of ***Gregory v. Helvering*, 293 U.S. 465 (1935)**, Evelyn Gregory wanted to sell stock that was held by a corporation of which she was the sole owner. She sought to reduce the income tax she would pay on withdrawal of that stock from her corporation (basically a dividend) followed by the desired sale. To that end, she created another corporation. Three days later, the first corporation transferred to the new corporation the stock she wanted to sell, for which the new corporation transferred all **its** stock to her. Another three days later, the new corporation dissolved and distributed that stock to her, and she immediately sold it. She claimed that this series of transactions was entitled to favorable tax treatment as what today we would call a “D reorganization,” and she cited the then existing predecessor of section 368(a)(1)(D).

It took the Supreme Court barely 300 words to dispatch the taxpayer’s argument:

When subdivision (B) [the predecessor of section 368(a)(1)(D)] speaks of a transfer of assets by one corporation to another, it means a transfer made “in pursuance of a plan of reorganization” ... of corporate business; and not a transfer of assets by one corporation to another in pursuance of a plan having no relation to the business of either, as plainly is the case here. Putting aside, then, the question of motive in respect of taxation altogether, and fixing the character of the proceeding by what actually occurred, what do we find? Simply an operation having no business or corporate purpose – a mere device which put on the form of a corporate reorganization as a disguise for concealing its real character, and the sole object and accomplishment of which was the consummation of a preconceived plan, not to reorganize a business or any part of a business, but to transfer a parcel of corporate shares to the petitioner. No doubt, a new and valid corporation was created. But that corporation was nothing more than a contrivance to the end last described. It was brought into existence for no other purpose; it performed, as it was intended from the beginning it should perform, no other function. When that limited function had been exercised, it immediately was put to death.

In these circumstances, **the facts speak for themselves** and are susceptible of but one interpretation. The whole undertaking, though conducted according to the terms of subdivision (B), was in fact an elaborate and devious form of conveyance masquerading as a corporate reorganization, and nothing else. The rule which excludes from consideration the motive of tax avoidance is not pertinent to the situation, because the transaction upon its face lies outside the plain intent of the statute. To hold otherwise would be to exalt artifice above reality and to deprive the statutory provision in question of all serious purpose.



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But on the way to this demolition of the taxpayer's argument, the Court acknowledged that “[t]he legal right of a taxpayer to decrease the amount of what otherwise would be his taxes, or altogether avoid them, by means which the law permits, cannot be doubted.” And that observation recalled the even more bold and memorable declaration of Judge Learned Hand, whose opinion the Supreme Court unanimously affirmed:

**Any one may so arrange his affairs that his taxes shall be as low as possible; he is not bound to choose that pattern which will best pay the Treasury; there is not even a patriotic duty to increase one's taxes.**

*Helvering v. Gregory*, 69 F.2d 809 (2d Cir. 1934).

**The Lesson.** So it's as simple as that! Any taxpayer by planning may choose a path to a substantive result that minimizes taxes. But if the planning does not have any substantive result, does not have any lasting effect on the conduct of a business or other underlying economic activity, such that the court just can't stand it, then the taxpayer's efforts are disregarded. That substantive result, that lasting effect on the conduct of a business or other underlying economic activity, is in modern times sometimes called a “legitimate and significant nontax reason” for engaging in a transaction at all, after the phrase the Tax Court used in *Estate of Bongard v. Commissioner*, 124 T.C. 95 (2005) (reviewed by the Court). The planner's job is to look at the facts of any particular transaction or set of transactions and guess which side it falls on. And that is what we turn to now in trying to understand the oft-discussed taxpayer losses in *Powell* and *Cahill*.

b. **Snapshot of *Powell* and *Cahill***

(1) ***Powell* – Bad Facts Make Bad Law**

In ***Estate of Powell v. Commissioner*, 148 T.C. 392 (2017) (reviewed by the Court)**, the decedent Nancy Powell and her son Jeffrey were both residents of California. Jeffrey, acting under a power of attorney from Nancy, contributed approximately \$10 million in cash and marketable securities to a limited partnership and took back, on Nancy's behalf, a 99 percent limited partner interest. Jeffrey and his brother contributed unsecured promissory notes in exchange for the other 1 percent interest, with Jeffrey's 0.5 percent interest being the only general partner interest and his brother's 0.5 percent interest being another limited partner interest. On the same day, Jeffrey purportedly contributed Nancy's limited partner interest to a charitable lead annuity trust (CLAT), even though his authority to make gifts under his power of attorney was limited to “a class composed of the principal's [Nancy's] children, any of such children's issue, or any or all to the full extent of the federal annual gift tax exclusion.” Already, Jeffrey on both sides of the transaction, the disproportionate contributions to the partnership, the flimsy contributions by the general partners, and the questionable transfer to the CLAT signaled this as a “bad facts” cases. But then Nancy died seven days later, with Jeffrey as executor. Seven concurring Tax Court judges viewed this as “what is best described as aggressive deathbed tax planning.”

Senior Judge Halpern, writing for only a plurality (eight judges, while nine judges concurred, seven in an opinion and two in the result only) found that section 2036(a)(2) applied to the decedent's transfer, but for that reason did not address section 2036(a)(1) or 2038.

According to the opinion, the executor did not even contest the application of section 2036 or 2038, other than to point out that the limited partner interest had been given to the CLAT pursuant to the power of attorney and was not held by the decedent at death. Unfortunately for that litigation strategy, even if the transfer to the CLAT had been authorized by the power of attorney and therefore successful in cutting off exposure under section 2036, section 2035(a) then would have brought the value of the property back into the decedent's gross estate anyway.

**Section 2043 and Double Taxation.** On his own, Judge Halpern explored a convoluted and seemingly unnecessary analysis of the effect of section 2043, which had not been raised, argued, or briefed by either of the parties. The opinion echoes themes like “recycling” and “pooling” that have been used to evaluate family limited partnerships in other contexts (see, e.g., *Estate of Harper v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2002-121) and offers its own metaphor of doughnuts and doughnut holes to refer, respectively, to retained interests and valuation discounts. While repeatedly using words like “limits” and “limiting” to refer to section 2043, the opinion, in footnote 7, observes that



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the result could be “a duplicative transfer tax” (translated double taxation) in some cases, although not this one.

## (2) Intergenerational Split-Dollar Arrangements: *Cahill* and *Morrisette*

**Introduction to Intergenerational Split-Dollar Arrangements.** Split-dollar life insurance arrangements have been in use a long time and were the subject of Treasury regulations in 2003. T.D. 9092 (Sept. 11, 2003); Reg. §§1.61-22, 1.83-3(e), 1.83-6(a)(5), 1.301-1(q) & 1.7872-15. Simply put, a split-dollar arrangement is an arrangement by which the cost of life insurance is split between the insured and another party. In a common early use, the payor was the employer of the insured. Then split-dollar arrangements began to be used by individuals or within families for estate planning purposes. A recent variation, the subject of the *Cahill* and *Morrisette* cases, involves the payment of premiums by a member of one generation for insurance on the life or lives of members of a younger generation – intergenerational split-dollar arrangements.

In each of these cases a revocable trust, which of course became irrevocable when the grantor died, made payments toward premiums on life insurance owned by irrevocable trusts created by the same grantor and insuring lives of family members in the next generation. (In this summary, that revocable trust will be called the “**premium-paying trust**” and that irrevocable trust will be called the “**policy-owning trust.**”) In each of these two cases, upon the death of an insured a portion of the death benefit equal to the greater of the total premiums paid or the cash surrender value of the policy immediately before the insured’s death would be payable to the premium-paying trust. Herein lies one perceived benefit of intergenerational split-dollar arrangements: because the insureds are members of the next generation, their deaths are actuarially likely to occur long after the grantor’s death, and this reimbursement right of the premium-paying (now irrevocable) trust is valued for estate tax purposes at a significant discount reflecting the time-value of money.

Each split-dollar agreement in these two cases provided that it could be terminated during the insured’s life by the mutual agreement of the trustees of the premium-paying trust and the policy-owning trust. If one of the split-dollar agreements were terminated during the insured’s life, the policy-owning trust could opt to retain the policy. In that case the policy-owning trust would be obligated to pay the premium-paying trust the greater of the total premiums the premium-paying trust had paid on the policy or the policy’s current cash surrender value.

In each case, gift tax returns reported the cost of the life insurance protection as gifts to the policy-owning trusts, in accordance with the presumably favorable “economic benefit regime” for the taxation of split-dollar arrangements under the 2003 regulations, Reg. §1.61-22. In each of these cases the Tax Court agreed that the economic benefit regime was appropriate because the policy-owning trusts received no additional economic benefit beyond the current life insurance protection, as explained in *Estate of Morrisette v. Commissioner*, 146 T.C. 171 (2016). But that still left open the determination of the amount includable in the grantors’ gross estates with respect to the arrangements, which in turn requires examination of the basis for inclusion.

**Cahill.** In the *Cahill* case, the grantor of the trusts was Richard F. Cahill, a resident of California. His son Patrick, a resident of the State of Washington, was the trustee of the premium-paying trust. In September 2010, Patrick, acting on behalf of Richard pursuant to a power of attorney, created the policy-owning trust, with Patrick’s cousin and business partner as the trustee. The purpose of this policy-owning trust was to take ownership of three whole life insurance policies, one on Patrick’s life and two on the life of Patrick’s wife. Patrick and his cousin, as the respective trustees, executed the governing split-dollar agreements with respect to those policies, reserving for the premium-paying trust a portion of each death benefit equal to the greater of the total premiums paid by the premium-paying trust or the cash surrender value of the policy immediately before the insured’s death. The total of the premiums for the three policies paid by the premium-paying trust was \$10 million, the total death benefit was \$79.8 million, and the aggregate cash surrender value at the date of Richard’s death in December 2011 (15 months after the split-dollar transactions) was \$9,611,624.

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A distinction of the *Cahill* case, in contrast to *Morrisette*, is that the premium-paying trust in the *Cahill* case financed its payment of the \$10 million in premiums by a \$10 million loan obtained from an independent lender by Patrick as trustee and guaranteed by Richard through Patrick's exercise of his power of attorney on Richard's behalf. If any balance on that loan is outstanding at the death of the insured, the split-dollar agreements provide that the premium-paying trust will be entitled to a portion of the death benefits equal to that outstanding balance, if it is greater than the premiums paid or cash surrender value the premium-paying trust would otherwise be entitled to. If the split-dollar agreements were terminated during the insured's life and the policy-owning trust did not opt to retain the policy, it would be required to transfer its interest in the policy to that independent lender, and in that case the premium-paying trust would be entitled to any excess of the cash surrender value over the outstanding loan balance with respect to the policy.

For estate tax purposes upon Richard's death, his executor (Patrick) valued the premium-paying trust's right to recover death benefits as \$183,700, reflecting the deferral of that recovery to the deaths of the younger Patrick and his wife. The IRS asserted that the value should be the cash surrender value at the time of Richard's death, \$9,611,624.

The executor moved for summary judgment that sections 2036, 2038, and 2703 did not apply in valuing Richard's interests in the split-dollar arrangements and in the premium-paying trust. The Tax Court (Judge Thornton) denied the motion. ***Estate of Cahill v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2018-84 (June 18, 2018)**. Citing *Strangi v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2003-145, *aff'd*, 417 F.3d 468 (5th Cir. 2005), and *Powell*, the opinion viewed the power of the decedent, through the revocable premium-paying trust, to terminate the split-dollar agreement and recover at least the cash surrender value as "clearly rights ... both to designate the persons who would possess or enjoy the transferred property under section 2036(a)(2) and to alter, amend, revoke, or terminate the transfer under section 2038(a)(1)."

The court was not impressed with the executor's argument that the premium-paying trust could exercise that power of termination only in conjunction with the policy-owning trust, because sections 2036(a)(2) and 2038(a)(1) explicitly use the phrases "in conjunction with any person" and "in conjunction with any other person." For purposes of the summary judgment motion, the court found many disputed facts regarding whether Patrick stood on both sides of the transaction so as to prevent it from being a "bona fide sale for an adequate and full consideration in money or money's worth" for purposes of sections 2036(a)(2) and 2038(a)(1), including whether it was "a legitimate and significant nontax reason" for the transaction that "in the view of decedent's trustee and attorney-in-fact (Patrick Cahill), decedent would have wanted, had he been able to manage his affairs, to ensure sufficient liquidity decades from now when the insured parties (Patrick Cahill and his spouse) die, so as to smooth the transfer of a business (apparently to be owned by Patrick Cahill) to decedent's grandchildren (Patrick Cahill's children)."

On the subject of adequate and full consideration, Judge Thornton noted that the executor valued the premium-paying trust's right of recovery at less than 2 percent of the cash surrender value (\$183,700 compared to \$9,611,624), meaning that in the initial transaction the premium-paying trust would admittedly have received value less than 2 percent of what it had paid.

The same reasoning about adequate and full consideration led the court to find that the "at a price less than the fair market value" requirement of section 2703(a)(1) was met. In addition, the policy-owning trust's right to veto any termination of the split-dollar agreement was a "restriction on the right to sell or use such property" that therefore met the requirement of section 2703(a)(2). The court did not consider the exception for a "bona fide business arrangement" under section 2703(b) because the executor and the IRS had not addressed it, although that analysis might have been similar to the court's analysis of the "bona fide sale" exception in sections 2036(a)(2) and 2038(a)(1).

In a stipulated Decision of December 12, 2018, the court approved a settlement of the case by the parties. The Decision states the net outcome of the settlement of all issues, not just the split-dollar issues on which the executor had moved for summary judgment. The executor reportedly accepted the IRS value of \$9,611,624, as well as a 20 percent accuracy-related penalty, and that is consistent

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with the stipulated Decision. And it is not a surprise, in view of skepticism about the transaction that is evident in the court's opinion.

**Morrisette.** In the *Morrisette* case, Clara Morrisette, a resident of Virginia, was the grantor of the trusts, including a revocable trust that she had established in 1994 with herself as the initial trustee, funded with all her shares in a group of family-owned moving and logistics companies with a history going back to 1943. In August 2006, a court appointed a company employee as the conservator of Clara's estate for a two-month term. Shortly thereafter, Clara's three sons, who were active in the business, became co-trustees of Clara's revocable trust, and the conservator established three irrevocable multigenerational trusts, one for each of Clara's sons and their families. All those trusts, Clara's sons, and other trusts holding interests in the business executed a shareholders agreement providing, among other things, that upon the death of any of the sons the surviving sons and their respective trusts would purchase the stock held by or for the benefit of the deceased son. On October 4, 2006, the three new irrevocable trusts became the policy-owning trusts by purchasing universal life insurance policies on the lives of the two other sons to fund the trusts' purchases under the shareholders agreement. On October 31, 2006, Clara's revocable trust became the premium-paying trust by forming two split-dollar arrangements with each policy-owning trust and contributing a combined \$29.9 million to those trusts, which the trusts used to make the lump-sum premium payments on the life insurance policies.

Clara died on September 25, 2009 (almost three years after the split-dollar transactions). Her executors, who were her three sons, reported on the estate tax return a total appraised value of \$7,479,000 for the split-dollar receivables.

The IRS asserted that she should have reported the \$29.9 million as gifts (rather than the \$636,657 of net economic benefit reported as gifts under the economic benefit regime for 2006 through 2009). The executors moved for partial summary judgment that the economic benefit regime applied, which the Tax Court granted pursuant to its 2016 decision.

With regard to the value of the split-dollar receivables included in the gross estate, the executors moved for partial summary judgment that section 2703 did not apply. Three days after the similar summary judgment motion was denied in *Cahill*, the Tax Court (Judge Goeke), citing *Cahill*, denied the motion. *Estate of Morrisette v. Commissioner*, Order, Docket No. 4415-14 (June 21, 2018). The court's order also notes that the IRS had raised sections 2036 and 2038 as alternative arguments.

The *Morrisette* case was tried in Washington, D.C., in October 2019 and briefed in the first quarter of 2020.

**Note (Levine):** A similar estate tax case including the issue of "the valuation of two split-dollar arrangements," *Estate of Levine v. Commissioner*, Docket No. 13370-13, was tried before Tax Court Judge Holmes in November 2017. Previously, a companion gift tax case had been decided on summary judgment in the taxpayer's favor, on statute of limitations grounds and also in recognition that the 2016 affirmation of the "economic benefit regime" in *Morrisette* controlled. In a contemporaneous order severing the two previously consolidated cases, Judge Holmes noted that "[t]he Court suspects that this decision and the recent decision in *Estate of Morrisette v. Commissioner* ... opens a window for productive settlement talks in the remaining case." *Estate of Levine v. Commissioner*, Orders and Decision, Docket No. 9345-15 (July 13, 2016). The case remains unsettled and undecided as of April 16, 2021.

## c. Reflections

### (1) The Application of Section 2036(a)(2) in *Powell*

- (a) The application of section 2036(a)(2), implying control of an entity and not just benefit from the entity, was unprecedented in a case involving a decedent who held only a limited partner interest. Although *Strangi* had involved similar facts, Mr. Strangi had been a director and 47 percent shareholder of the corporate general partner. Moreover, while the Tax Court did rely on section 2036(a)(2) as an alternative to its section 2036(a)(1) holding in *Strangi*, the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in footnote 7 of its affirmance, explicitly stated:

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Because we hold that the transferred assets were properly included in the taxable estate under § 2036(a)(1), we do not reach the Commissioner's alternative contention that Strangi retained the "right ... to designate the persons who shall possess or enjoy the property", thus triggering inclusion under § 2036(a)(2).

The Fifth Circuit having probably done all it could, as it was disposed to affirm the Tax Court on other grounds anyway, it wasn't enough for the court in *Powell*. *Powell*, and *Cahill*, were appealable to the Ninth Circuit.

- (b) As noted above, Judge Halpern, having decided *Powell* on the basis of section 2036(a)(2), did not address section 2036(a)(1) or 2038.

## (2) **More on "In Conjunction With Any Person"**

- (a) In *Cahill* and *Morrisette* the "in conjunction with" issue is presented by the ability of the premium-paying trust (essentially the decedent) to terminate the split-dollar agreement "in conjunction with" the policy-owning trust. On that issue, the *Cahill* court summarized the executor's argument as follows:

The estate contends that (1) because decedent's right to terminate the split-dollar agreements was held in conjunction with the trustee of MB Trust and (2) because it would allegedly never make economic sense for MB Trust to allow termination of the split-dollar agreements, termination was so unlikely that the termination rights had no value as of decedent's date of death.

- (b) The court rejected that argument, commenting that:

if the estate were correct, then the words "in conjunction with any person" in section 2036(a)(2), and "in conjunction with any other person" in section 2038(a)(1), would have no force or meaning.

- (c) As a factual matter, the executor's argument makes sense. As long as the split-dollar agreement is in effect, the policy-owning trust holds the policy at no cost, which is a valuable no-maintenance asset, even though the realization of that value is deferred until the deaths of the insureds. If the policy-owning trust consented to terminate the split-dollar agreement but elected to retain the policy, it could put itself in the same position, but only by paying the premium-paying trust the greater of the total premiums the premium-paying trust had paid on the policy or the policy's current cash surrender value. So why would the policy-owning trust ever consent to termination? This is not at all comparable to, say, the dissolution of a partnership, in which all partners who approve the dissolution receive a current liquidating distribution.
- (d) That argument would probably prevail if sections 2036(a)(2) and 2038(a)(1) included an exception for a power held in conjunction with a person having a substantial adverse interest in the property, like section 2041(b)(1)(C)(ii) has in the case of a general power of appointment. But they don't, so we are pretty much back to the conclusion of the *Cahill* court that under that argument the words of sections 2036 and 2038 "would have no force or meaning."
- (e) Perhaps one might just as well respond to the executor's argument by asking why, as an economic matter, these split-dollar arrangements include that termination right at all. But those are not the facts of the cases. And even if there were no termination right, section 2703 would not necessarily be avoided.

## (3) **Byrum "Fiduciary Duty" Limitation Distinguished**

- (a) In *United States v. Byrum*, 408 U.S. 125 (1972), the United States Supreme Court ruled that the value of stock the decedent had transferred in trust was not included in his gross estate merely because he retained the right to vote the stock.
- (b) The Government had argued that by retaining voting control over the corporations whose stock he had transferred, Byrum was in a position to select the corporate directors, which gave him control over the corporation's dividend policy, which in turn gave him the ability, by increasing, decreasing, or stopping dividends, to "regulate the flow of income to the trust" and thereby shift or defer the beneficial enjoyment of trust income between the present

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beneficiaries and the remaindermen for purposes of section 2036(a)(2). The Government analogized this retained voting power to a grantor-trustee's power to accumulate income in the trust, which it said the Court had treated as a power to designate the persons who shall enjoy the income from transferred property.

(c) The Supreme Court rejected the Government's reasoning, noting:

Whatever power Byrum may have possessed, with respect to the flow of income into the trust, was derived not from an enforceable legal right specified in the trust instrument, but from the fact that he could elect a majority of the directors of the three corporations. The power to elect the directors conferred no legal right to command them to pay or not to pay dividends. A majority shareholder has a fiduciary duty not to misuse his power by promoting his personal interests at the expense of corporate interests. Moreover, the directors also have a fiduciary duty to promote the interests of the corporation. However great Byrum's influence may have been with the corporate directors, their responsibilities were to all stockholders and were enforceable according to legal standards entirely unrelated to the needs of the trust or to Byrum's desires with respect thereto.

(d) In the Tax Reform Act of 1976 and Revenue Act of 1978, Congress enacted section 2036(b), overturning the Supreme Court's holding in *Byrum* with respect to the right to vote. Section 2036(b) is explicitly limited to stock of a corporation.

(e) In the *Powell* case, citing and relying heavily on the reasoning in *Strangi*, Judge Colvin distinguished the *Byrum* opinion (written, ironically, by Justice Powell) on three grounds:

- i. Besides being the general partner of the partnership, the decedent's son owed duties to her under the power of attorney that predated his creation of the partnership. Judge Halpern wrote that "[n]othing in the circumstances of the present cases suggests that Mr. Powell would have exercised his responsibility as general partner ... in ways that would have prejudiced decedent's interests." Moreover, in *Byrum* dividend distributions would have been made only to Byrum's trust, and distribution decisions would still have been left to an independent trustee.
- ii. "Because decedent held a 99% interest in NHP, whatever fiduciary duties limited Mr. Powell's discretion in determining partnership distributions were duties that he owed almost exclusively to decedent herself."
- iii. Unlike the facts of *Byrum*, there was no evidence that the Powell partnership "conducted meaningful business operations or was anything other than an investment vehicle for decedent and her sons."

**(4) The Effect of *Powell* as a Precedent**

- (a) Seventeen judges participated in *Powell*. Eight judges, counting Judge Halpern, joined Judge Halpern's opinion. Judges Foley and Paris concurred in the result only, while Judge Lauber, joined by six other judges, wrote a concurring opinion. Thus, while there was no dissent from what should have been a very easy decision in a case with extremely bad facts, Judge Halpern's opinion did not even speak for a majority of the judges. Judge Lauber wrote that "[t]he Court's exploration of section 2043(a) seems to me a solution in search of a problem." Yet, particularly because of the section 2043 detour, we now have a Tax Court opinion, dignified by the caption "Reviewed by the Court," that reaches one of the most understandable outcomes, but by way of one of the least understandable opinions, ever seen.
- (b) Now, with stretched IRS resources and possibly reduced hope for relevant regulatory guidance, a path to finding control in a totally nonvoting interest and the temptation of a new and open-ended "duplicative transfer tax" theory are just what the audits of gift and estate tax returns need!

**(5) Waiting for an Outcome in *Morrisette***

- (a) There may be less cause for anxiety in the case of the intergenerational split-dollar issue.



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- i. Although there is a lot of talk about intergenerational split-dollar arrangements, they may not be nearly as common as family limited partnerships. For many clients, paying a large cash premium for no immediate return may not as appealing as just signing some documents and hoping for the best.
  - ii. If *Morrisette* is not resolved by summary judgment, which is unlikely, or by settlement, which seems unlikely but is always possible, the Tax Court's opinion may be more focused and less open-ended than the *Powell* and *Cahill* opinions, and thus – good or bad – might provide greater clarity.
  - iii. In any event, the opinion promises to be a rare exposition of Chapter 14, more than three decades after it took effect on October 9, 1990.
- (b) The facts in *Morrisette* seem better than the facts in *Cahill*.
- i. The decedent lived for almost three years after the transaction in *Morrisette*, rather than only 15 months as in *Cahill* (although both are better than the seven days in *Powell*).
  - ii. Although both *Cahill* and *Morrisette*, like *Powell*, involve transactions undertaken by representatives of the decedent on the decedent's behalf, Clara Morrisette's representative was a court-appointed conservator who, unlike Jeffrey Powell, did not serve as a trustee.
  - iii. The estate tax value of the receivable reported by the executors in *Morrisette* was about 25 percent of the premiums paid, compared to a little less than 2 percent in *Cahill*.
  - iv. The premium payments were not financed with borrowing in *Morrisette*, as they were in *Cahill*. See the elaboration of this point in Part 6.d(7) below.
  - v. Perhaps most importantly, the context in *Morrisette* of a family-owned business that has been operating for 75 years should be more supportive of "bona fide sale" arguments under sections 2036(a) and 2038(a)(1) and a "bona fide business arrangement" argument under section 2703(b). It might come down to whether, even if the shareholders agreement is a bona fide business arrangement, the choice of an intergenerational split-dollar arrangement to fund it is so integral to the underlying shareholders agreement that such a favorable characterization must apply to that split-dollar arrangement as well.
  - vi. Some view the Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, to which *Morrisette* would be appealable, as more open to estate planning and tax planning than *Cahill*'s Ninth Circuit.
- d. **What To Do**

(1) **Have a legitimate and significant nontax reason.**

- (a) Most of the taxpayer victories in section 2036 cases have rested on the exception for "a bona fide sale for an adequate and full consideration in money or money's worth." In *Estate of Bongard v. Commissioner*, 124 T.C. 95, 118 (2005), the majority opinion by Judge Goeke (who now has the *Morrisette* case) embraced and applied the principle that (emphasis added):

In the context of family limited partnerships, the bona fide sale for adequate and full consideration exception is met where the record establishes the existence of a **legitimate and significant nontax reason** for creating the family limited partnership, and the transferors received partnership interests proportionate to the value of the property transferred.

- (b) *Bongard* was a "reviewed" decision with vigorously expressed concurring and dissenting views. (Notably, Judge Halpern, the author of the plurality *Powell* opinion, dissented from the *Bongard* majority's interpretation of the bona fide sale exception.)
- (c) The following are examples of legitimate and significance non-tax reasons:
- i. "Pooling" assets for efficiency and access to investments.
  - ii. Keeping special heirloom assets in the family.

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- iii. Institutionalizing intra-family communication.
  - iv. Simplifying transfers, including avoiding in-state or out-of-state probate.
  - v. Avoiding public litigation through alternative dispute resolution.
  - vi. Discouraging controversy with the “English Rule” (loser pays costs).
  - vii. Simplifying responses to divorce.
  - viii. Otherwise increasing asset protection.
  - ix. Allowing amendment without formalities of trust law.
- (d) It is good for a client to have such reasons, and the *Bongard* standard can offer a good opportunity to discuss with clients their true values, objectives, and priorities, for which saving tax is just a means, not an end.
- (e) Be wary of boilerplate that recites a lot of nontax reasons for tax reasons. It will be awkward when the signer of the document testifies that “I never read or talked about that.”
- (f) Even if there is not a significant nontax reason (“maintaining the culture and values of the business for future generations” does not work for everyone), try to be sure that there are lasting substantive nontax changes in relationships or other consequences. If not, like Evelyn Gregory and Jeffrey Powell learned, a court might see through it, because “the facts speak for themselves.”
- (2) Learn what people are doing in the commercial world.**
- (a) The structures and terms of “similar arrangements entered into by persons in an arms’ length transaction” can often be helpful in a family business planning or estate planning context too.
- (b) And incorporating those structures and terms, adapted as necessary, can certainly help with the fact-based and somewhat subjective test of section 2703(b)(3), as well as the “bona fide sale” tests of section 2036(a) and 2038(a)(1).
- (3) Avoid having the decedent’s actions taken by an agent.**
- (a) The incapacity of a parent (or other donor or actor) cannot be avoided or even predicted, and sometimes a parent’s incapacity, illness, or decline can be a necessary catalyst for estate planning. But there can be more obvious genuineness about the claim, as in *Cahill*, that “this future business-succession plan is what Dad would have wanted” if Dad actually participated.
- (b) But if the parent’s only contribution to the transaction was “All I want to do is to eliminate taxes,” that would not add very much. Acting while the parent is competent and engaged may reduce the likelihood, although it can never eliminate the possibility, of the parent’s imminent death, or even death within three years, thereby potentially taking some issues off the table.
- (4) If action by an agent is unavoidable, don’t make the agent the general partner.**
- (a) It was Jeffrey Powell’s dual role as his mother’s agent under the power of attorney and general partner of the partnership that made it possible for Judge Halpern to complain that he “was essentially negotiating with himself,” just as the *Strangi* court had observed that “decedent essentially stood on both sides of the transaction.”
- (b) Of course when there is one really trusted and capable family member or other person in the picture, it’s very easy to understand why that person would be the go-to selection for many or all positions of trust – attorney-in-fact, conservator, health care proxy, personal representative, trustee, general partner, LLC manager, etc. It might be hard to ask someone to be satisfied with a second choice. But case law shows how the appearance of multiple roles can be troublesome.

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**(5) If possible, eliminate the older-generation partner's ability to vote on dissolution.**

- (a) This might be as simple as eliminating the rule under default state law that limited partners must approve a nonjudicial dissolution. That apparently would have removed the section 2036(a)(2) issue in *Powell*.
- (b) The concern would remain that the ability of all partners of all classes to unanimously change any rules in the partnership agreement could have the same effect under section 2036(a)(2). But at least there would be the comfort of a true factual difference with *Powell* and an attenuated two-step scenario courts do not seem to have latched onto yet.
- (c) Persuading an able-bodied, clear-minded individual to give up all control can be a hard sell. But control must be relinquished sooner or later anyway, certainly by death. In some cases, maybe it is good to let the younger generation take full charge so the parent can see how it works out and possibility while the parent is still able to have a persuasive effect even without any legal standing or prearrangement.

**(6) Fund the entity.**

- (a) Judge Lauber, concurring only in the result in *Powell*, noted:

There are compelling reasons to question whether a valid partnership was ever formed here. In comparison with the \$10 million in cash and securities that the decedent relinquished for her alleged partnership interest, the other two supposed partners – her sons and heirs – contributed nothing more than unsecured promissory notes.

- (b) That impression could have been avoided with more robust contributions from the sons.
- (c) Alternatively, the decedent could have secured the effect of robust funding by more than one partner by simply making gifts of partnership interests. That could be riskier in some circumstances. But there is nothing magical about 1 percent, and a larger percentage of interests in the hands of other partners might make the transaction less offensive to a court. It would be harder to say, as Judge Colvin did in *Powell*, that “whatever fiduciary duties limited Mr. Powell's discretion in determining partnership distributions were duties that he owed almost exclusively to decedent herself.” And to the extent of any lifetime gifts of partnership interests, the partnership would no longer be so conspicuously a mere testamentary vehicle.

**(7) If possible, avoid borrowing altogether.**

- (a) In *Cahill*, Judge Thornton was really not impressed with the economics of the transaction. He asked:

(1) Were these arrangements actually intended to provide liquidity decades from now, or were they intended merely to eliminate the cash surrender value from decedent's estate? (2) The guaranteed return (3%) on the investment in the policies appears to be lower than the interest rate on the loan decedent used to purchase the policies (one month LIBOR plus 1.14%); taking into account all of the economic facts and circumstances, would this arrangement actually be capable of providing liquidity decades from now? How much liquidity, in present valued terms (i.e. valued to the date of execution)? At what cost, in present valued terms? And (3) why was an arrangement intended to provide liquidity potentially decades from now funded with a loan that required a balloon payment of the entire principal amount after only five years? That is, if decedent was acting as a prudent business person, why did he fund a long-term obligation with a short-term loan? Because such questions remain, summary judgment is inappropriate with respect to whether decedent's transfer of \$10 million was part of a bona fide sale.

- (b) Many of these questions would have been eliminated or diminished if there had been no borrowing.

**(8) If possible, divest all interests in the entity during life.**

- (a) Appropriate discounts might be easier to sustain in a gift tax context, and there would be nothing left at death for section 2036, for example, to apply to.

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(b) And, although there can never be a guarantee against mortality of course, it is preferable, as the Powell family learned, to do this at least three years before death if a gift tax is paid (section 2035(b)) or if section 2036, 2037, 2038, or 2042 might apply (section 2035(a)).

(c) Even if all interests cannot be divested, transferring some of the decedent's interests could mitigate the bad impression of owing fiduciary duties solely to oneself, discussed in paragraph (4) above.

**(9) Make all partners irrevocable trusts with independent trustees.**

(a) In that way, even if the decedent directly or indirectly, alone or in conjunction with others, could control distributions from the entity, that would still not "designate the persons who shall [beneficially] possess or enjoy the property or the income therefrom" as section 2036(a)(2) requires. The trustee does that, through the exercise of discretion over distributions. That was the case in *Byrum*.

(b) The argument might still be made that the decedent, "in conjunction with" other partners and the trustee, could control all the steps to the ultimate distributions. But an aggregation of independent parties whose authority does not overlap at all would be more aggressive than courts and even the IRS are known to have been, and would be expected to be a harder notion to sell to a court than the type of "conjunction" present in *Powell* and *Cahill*.

**(10) Accept estate inclusion under section 2036 or 2038 and, especially in an environment of a high estate tax exclusion amount, take a stepped-up basis.**

(a) This would, in a sense, give the IRS what it deserves for aggressively applying sections 2036 and 2038, right?

(b) But there can appear to be gamesmanship, even hypocrisy, and risk, with such a strategy.

## **7. Valuation, Including Tax-Affecting: Jones**

In May 2009, Aaron Jones made gifts to his three daughters, and to trusts for their benefit, of voting and nonvoting interests in a lumber and timber business he had founded in 1954. He reported the gifts on his gift tax return with a total value of about \$21 million, but the IRS notice of deficiency asserted a value of about \$120 million and a gift tax deficiency of about \$45 million. The Tax Court agreed with the taxpayer's appraiser that the value was about \$24 million, and the resulting gift tax owed will apparently be less than \$2 million.

The most significant issue to the taxpayer from a monetary standpoint is that the timber is valued under the income method rather than the net asset value method in this situation where there is an ongoing business operation and the facts are clear that the timber will not be liquidated and the transferee would have no ability to force the liquidation. But perhaps the most interesting issue for estate planners and especially the appraisal community is that the Tax Court concluded that "tax-affecting" the earnings of the S corporation and limited partnership was appropriate in determining the valuations of the entities under the income method. The Tax Court has been reluctant to accept tax-affecting following its decision twenty years ago in *Gross v. Commissioner*. That may be changing. ***Estate of Jones v. Commissioner, T.C. Memo. 2019-101 (August 19, 2019, Judge Pugh).***

### **(1) Basic Facts**

**a. Background.** The core business involved in the 2009 gifts was Seneca Sawmill Co. (SSC) of Eugene, Oregon. Mr. Jones founded SSC in 1954 as a lumber manufacturing business; in 1986 it elected to be an S corporation. The Tax Court opinion describes the significant growth of the business since 1954 and includes considerable detail about the operation and business environment of the lumber business. At the time of the gifts in 2009, SJTC (introduced and described in the next paragraph) held approximately 1.45 billion board feet of timber over 165,000 acres in western Oregon. Originally relying on timber from federal lands, SSC began purchasing its own land in 1989 when environmental regulations had reduced the access to federal lands. In 1992 Mr. Jones formed Seneca Jones Timber Co. (SJTC), an Oregon limited partnership, to hold timberlands intended to be SSC's inventory and to obtain debt financing

secured by the timberlands. SSC was the 10 percent general partner of SJTC and contributed to SJTC the timberland it had recently acquired. SSC and SJTC share a management team and share their headquarters in Eugene, which was built in 1996.

SSC's shareholders could not sell, give away, or otherwise transfer their SSC stock, except in compliance with a Buy-Sell Agreement. Any sale of SSC stock that caused SSC to cease to be an S corporation would be null and void under the Buy-Sell Agreement, unless SSC and the holders of a majority of its outstanding shares consented. If an SSC shareholder intended to sell, give away, or otherwise transfer SSC stock to a person other than a family member, the shareholder had to notify SSC, which had a right of first refusal to purchase those shares. If SSC declined to purchase the shares, the other shareholders were given the option to purchase them. If either SSC or other shareholders exercised their option to purchase shares, the purchase price was the fair market value of the shares, which was to be mutually agreed upon or, if the parties could not agree, determined by an appraisal. Under the Buy-Sell Agreement, the reasonably anticipated cash distributions allocable to the shares had to be considered and discounts for lack of marketability, lack of control, and lack of voting rights had to be applied in determining fair market value.

Under SJTC's partnership agreement, no transfer of SJTC partnership units was valid if it would terminate the partnership for federal or state tax purposes. The consent of all partners was required for the substitution of a transferee of SJTC partnership units as a limited partner. A transferee who was not substituted as a limited partner would be merely an assignee. Limited partners were also subject to a Buy-Sell Agreement, which mirrored SSC's Buy-Sell Agreement: Any transfers that would terminate SJTC's partnership status for tax purposes were void; SJTC and then the other limited partners were granted a right of first refusal before a limited partner could transfer units; and a determination of fair market value had to take into account lack of marketability, lack of control, lack of voting rights of an assignee, and the reasonably anticipated cash distributions allocable to the units.

**b. The 2009 Gifts.** On May 28, 2009, pursuant to succession planning that began in 1996, Mr. Jones formed seven family trusts, made gifts to those trusts of SSC voting and nonvoting stock, and made gifts to his three daughters of SJTC limited partner interests. The following tables show the ownership of SSC and SJTC before and after the gifts:

Ownership of SSC Before and After the 2009 Gifts				
Shareholder	Voting Shares		Nonvoting Shares	
	Before	After	Before	After
Aaron Jones	4,900	3,600	39,468	8,700
Voting Trust		1,300		
Family Trust	600	600		
Rebecca Jones*	1,500	1,500	544	10,800
Kathleen Jones Hall*	1,500	1,500	544	10,800
Jody Jones*	1,500	1,500	544	10,800

\* Aaron Jones's three daughters. Numbers for the nonvoting shares for each daughter include trusts for her and her family. After the gifts, Aaron and his daughters (or trusts for them and their families) each owned 12,300 total shares (voting and nonvoting).

Ownership of SJTC Before and After the 2009 Gifts				
Partner	General Partner Units		Limited Partner Units	
	Before	After	Before	After
SSC	5,550.092	5,550.092		
Aaron Jones			43,290.717	12,487.707
Rebecca Jones			2,220.037	12,487.707
Kathleen Jones Hall			2,220.037	12,487.707
Jody Jones			2,220.037	12,487.707



**c. Gift Tax Valuation Dispute.** Mr. Jones timely filed a 2009 gift tax return, reporting values based on accompanying appraisals that had determined values of \$325 per share of SSC voting stock, \$315 per share of SSC nonvoting stock, and \$350 per SJTC limited partner unit, resulting in total gifts of about \$20,895,000.

The IRS's notice of deficiency asserted that the corresponding values should have been \$1,395 per share of SSC voting stock, \$1,325 per share of SSC nonvoting stock, and \$2,511 per SJTC limited partner unit, resulting in total gifts of about \$119,987,000 and a gift tax deficiency (including other much smaller items which were not disputed in the Tax Court) of \$44,986,416.

Mr. Jones filed a petition in the Tax Court in November 2013. He died on September 14, 2014, and was replaced in the Tax Court proceeding by his estate and his personal representatives. The estate engaged another appraiser, Robert Reilly of Willamette Management Associates, whose appraisal, employing a discounted cashflow (DCF) method, determined values of \$390 per share of SSC voting stock, \$380 per share of SSC nonvoting stock, and also \$380 per SJTC limited partner unit, somewhat higher than the values reported on Mr. Jones's gift tax return but far smaller than the values asserted by the IRS.

An appraiser engaged by the IRS, using a net asset value (NAV) approach, determined the value of an SJTC limited partner unit to be \$2,530, slightly higher than the notice of deficiency. (The court explained that "Respondent did not submit a valuation of SSC and largely accepted the valuation methods and inputs Mr. Reilly used in his valuation of SSC.")

The following table summarizes those per-share and per-unit values:

	Gift Tax Return	Notice of Deficiency	Estate's Expert	IRS's Expert	Tax Court
SSC Voting	\$325	\$1,395	\$390		\$390
SSC Nonvoting	\$315	\$1,325	\$380		\$380
SJTC Limited	\$350	\$2,511	\$380	\$2,530	\$380

## (2) The Tax Court Opinion

A four-day trial was held in Portland, Oregon, in November 2017, and Judge Pugh's opinion in *Estate of Jones v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2019-101, was issued August 19, 2019, accepting all the values determined by Mr. Reilly.

In the court's view:

The primary dispute between the parties is whether SJTC should be valued using an income approach or an asset-based approach. The parties have several other points of dispute: (1) the reliability of the 2009 revised projections, (2) the propriety of "tax-affecting", (3) the proper treatment of intercompany loans from SSC to SJTC, (4) the proper treatment of SSC's 10% general partner interest in SJTC, and (5) the appropriate discount for lack of marketability.

**a. Income or Asset-Based Approach for SJTC.** Whether an income or asset-based approach is used for valuing the timberland in SJTC makes an enormous dollar difference in this case. The court noted that the parties did not dispute that SJTC is a going concern, but also noted that "SJTC has aspects of both an operating company ("SJTC ... plants trees and harvests and sells the logs") and an investment or holding company ("SJTC's timberlands are its primary asset, and they will retain and increase in value, even if SJTC is not profitable on a year-to-year basis")." The court stated:

[T]he less likely SJTC is to sell its timberlands, the less weight we should assign to an asset-based approach. See Estate of Giustina v. Commissioner, 586 F. App'x 417, 418 (9th Cir. 2014) (holding that no weight should be given to an asset-based valuation because the assumption of an asset sale was a hypothetical scenario contrary to the evidence in the record), rev'g and remanding T.C. Memo. 2011-141.

The court concluded that:

SJTC and SSC were so closely aligned and interdependent that, in valuing SJTC, it is appropriate to take into account its relationship with SSC and vice versa ...

We, therefore, conclude that an income-based approach, like Mr. Reilly's DCF method, is more appropriate for SJTC than [the IRS's expert's] NAV method valuation. See Estate of Giustina v. Commissioner, 586 F. App'x at 418.

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**b. Reliability of 2009 Revised Projections.** Mr. Reilly's valuation relied on revised projections that SJTC's management made less than two months after SJTC's annual report, out of concern that SJTC might violate its loan covenants. The revised projections were made in April 2009, and the gifts were made in May 2009. The IRS and its expert thought the revised projections "may have represented the worst-case scenario and were overly pessimistic."

The court acknowledged the ground for such alleged pessimism in its description of the background and history of the business, where it noted:

As of the valuation date SSC's dimension and stud lumber were used primarily to build houses and, therefore, its lumber sales were almost completely dependent on housing starts.

...

As of the valuation date the United States was experiencing severe economic turmoil amidst the subprime mortgage crisis, especially in the housing market. Housing starts, which measure new residential construction projects during a given period, declined in the United States from 2.3 million units in early 2006 to 490,000 units in early 2009. The crisis required SSC to reduce production. It also reduced the hours that its employees worked so that it could avoid layoffs.

Regarding the IRS's objection to the 2009 revised projections, the court turned the objection around and concluded:

The only ground for challenging the reliability of the revised projections is that the volatile economic conditions meant that they were not reliable for long. This is precisely why management wanted the revised projections. As they were the most current as of the valuation date, Mr. Reilly's use was appropriate.

**c. "Tax-Affecting."** Mr. Reilly "tax-affected" the earnings of SJTC and SSC by using a proxy for the combined federal and state income tax rates they would bear if they were C corporations, albeit taxed at individual, not corporate rates, in order to adjust for the differences between passthrough entities and C corporations (like the public companies used for comparison in the valuation process). The IRS objected to tax-affecting, arguing that there was no evidence that SJTC or SSC would lose its passthrough status and insisting that the Tax Court had rejected tax-affecting in cases such as *Gross v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1999-254, *aff'd*, 272 F.3d 333 (6th Cir. 2001), *Estate of Gallagher v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-148 (corrected), T.C. Memo. 2011-244, and *Estate of Giustina v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-141.

But the court explained that prior cases such as *Gross*, *Gallagher*, and *Giustina* did not prohibit tax-affecting the earnings of a flowthrough entity per se. Instead, Judge Pugh viewed the issue as fact-based, and noted that the court in those cases had simply concluded that tax-affecting was not appropriate for various reasons on the facts of those cases. In *Jones*, on the contrary, Judge Pugh concluded that Mr. Reilly's detailed tax-affecting analysis was appropriate:

We find on the record before us that Mr. Reilly has more accurately taken into account the tax consequences of SJTC's flowthrough status for purposes of estimating what a willing buyer and willing seller might conclude regarding its value. His adjustments include a reduction in the total tax burden by imputing the burden of the current tax that an owner might owe on the entity's earnings and the benefit of a future dividend tax avoided that an owner might enjoy. ... Mr. Reilly's tax-affecting may not be exact, but it is more complete and more convincing than respondent's zero tax rate.

As stated, *Jones* involves tax-affecting for both an S corporation (SSC) and a partnership (SJTC). The court's **discussion** of tax-affecting is addressed to the partnership, SJTC, which comes first in its opinion, probably so that the court could address first what it regarded as the "primary dispute" over the use of an income approach to value SJTC. But it should not be overlooked – and, it is hoped, won't be overlooked by the IRS and the judges in future valuation cases – that in the discussion specifically targeting SSC the court stated, without qualification:

Mr. Reilly used the same methodology to tax-affect his valuation of SSC except that he used a different rate for the dividend tax avoided because his analysis of the implied benefit for SSC's shareholders in prior years yielded a different rate. We accept Mr. Reilly's method of tax-affecting the valuation of SSC for the same reasons we accepted it for the valuation of SJTC.

**d. Intercompany Loans.** The IRS had argued that the intercompany debt (owed by SJTC to SSC) should be treated as a nonoperating investment asset and added to the value of SSC. Again emphasizing the interrelationship of the two companies, the court concluded:

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By eliminating SSC's receivable and SJTC's payable and treating their intercompany interest income and expense as operating income and expense, Mr. Reilly captured their relationship as interdependent parts of a single business enterprise. Because SJTC's intercompany interest income and expense were accounted for in the DCF method valuation, the intercompany debt need not be added in at the end as a nonoperating asset. See *Estate of Heck v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2002-34.

**e. SSC's General Partner Interest in SJTC.** The IRS had argued that SSC's 10 percent general partner interest in SJTC should be valued as a nonoperating asset and a **controlling** interest by valuing it at simply 10 percent of the value of SJTC, rather than on the basis of expected distributions as in Mr. Reilly's DCF valuation. Consistently with its view of SSC and SJTC as a single business enterprise, the court rejected that argument.

**f. Discount for Lack of Marketability.** The court noted that only 5 percent separated Mr. Reilly (35 percent) and the IRS's expert (30 percent) on the subject of lack-of-marketability discounts. The court adds that "Respondent contends that Mr. Reilly's 35% discount for lack of marketability was excessive and that he did not explain sufficiently how he arrived at the discount." There is no further elaboration of how the IRS found 35 percent to be excessive or how it defended its own expert's conclusion of 30 percent.

To the allegation that Mr. Reilly had not sufficiently explained how he arrived at a 35 percent discount, the court replied "We disagree" and provided a whole paragraph summarizing what Mr. Reilly had done (quoted in paragraph (4)d below). It then pointed out:

[The IRS's expert] did not consider the restrictions on transferability in the SJTC Buy-Sell Agreement, and he conceded at trial that it would likely increase the discount by "something like 1%, 2%". Because [the IRS's expert] was guessing at changes to his discount during the trial to account for considerations that he left out, we conclude that the proper discount for lack of marketability was 35%.

**g. Conclusion.** The court concluded simply that "we therefore adopt the valuations in Mr. Reilly's report." A taxpayer victory, a decade after the gifts.

### (3) Analysis

**a. Income or Asset-Based Approach.** The differences between an income approach and asset-based approach can be huge, particularly in a case involving standing timber that obviously is not harvested every year. In *Jones*, Mr. Reilly agreed with a valuation submitted by the IRS that SJTC's timberland had an estimated market value of \$424 million. Yet, using an income approach and comparisons to guideline operating companies, Mr. Reilly calculated the weighted enterprise value of SJTC to be \$107 million – barely one-fourth the asset value.

This is not first time the Tax Court has chosen between an income and asset-based approach to the valuation of a Eugene, Oregon, timber business. *Estate of Giustina v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-141, also presented that issue, and the counsel for the estate, the counsel for the IRS, and the estate's expert were all the same as in the *Jones* case. Rejecting Mr. Reilly's view in *Giustina*, the Tax Court (Judge Morrison) gave a 25 percent weight to a \$151 million value determined by an asset approach, compared to a value of \$52 million determined by a cashflow method and given a 75 percent weight. As Judge Pugh's reference to *Giustina* (quoted in paragraph (2)a above) acknowledges, that decision was reversed (586 Fed. Appx. 417 (2014)) by the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit's "holding that no weight should be given to an asset-based valuation because the assumption of an asset sale was a hypothetical scenario contrary to the evidence in the record." In fact, quoting from a previous opinion, the Ninth Circuit stated in *Giustina*:

As in *Estate of Simplot v. Commissioner*, 249 F.3d 1191, 1195 (9th Cir. 2001), the Tax Court engaged in "imaginary scenarios as to who a purchaser might be, how long the purchaser would be willing to wait without any return on his investment, and what combinations the purchaser might be able to effect" with the existing partners.

On remand in *Giustina*, Judge Morrison went along with the Ninth Circuit, T.C. Memo. 2019-114.

If the Tax Court in *Jones* had accepted an asset-based valuation, the estate could have appealed that decision to the Ninth Circuit. It is certainly plausible that the taxpayer's victory in *Jones*, at least on the

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issue of the asset-based approach, is attributable in part to the rebuke the Ninth Circuit had given the Tax Court in *Giustina*.

**b. The 2009 Revised Projections.** Neither is this the first time a court has been influenced in a gift tax valuation case by the gravity of the 2008 economic downturn. For example, judicial notice of that recession was a factor in *Kress v. United States*, 123 AFTR 2d 2019-1224 (E.D. Wis. March 26, 2019) (discussed in paragraph c.vi below), which was also a taxpayer victory that involved tax-affecting and the credibility and thoroughness of the taxpayer's valuation expert.

**c. Tax-Affecting.** "Tax-affecting" refers to the step in the valuation of a closely-held business that seeks to adjust for certain differences between passthrough entities and C corporations. Typically, the passthrough entity in mind is an S corporation, but tax-affecting can be applied in the partnership context too. Significantly, *Jones* involved tax-affecting for both an S corporation (SSC) and a partnership (SJTC).

**i. Core Justifications.** While many discussions of tax-affecting are quite technical, the core justifications for tax-affecting are generally (1) that a hypothetical willing buyer in the willing-buyer-willing-seller construct of fair market value is looking for a return on the investment and necessarily will enjoy and therefore evaluate that return only on an **after-tax** basis and (2) that comparable data to use in the valuation process typically comes from public sources and therefore largely comes from C corporations, for which earnings are, again, necessarily determined on an **after-tax** basis. Corollaries to those justifications are that passthrough status (3) confers a benefit of a single level of tax compared to a C corporation, but also (4) limits the universe of potential buyers and investors, who might not be able to buy or invest without forfeiting or jeopardizing (or at least complicating) the S corporation status or other passthrough status. Thus, tax-affecting sometimes includes adjustments to accommodate those corollaries, or sometimes is followed by the application of, for example, an "S corporation premium" as the next step following the tax-affecting.

**ii. Prior Internal IRS Guidance.** Some 20 years ago, the IRS's internal valuation guide for income, estate, and gift taxes explained tax-affecting (without calling it that) this way:

[S] corporations are treated similarly to partnerships for tax purposes. S Corporations lend themselves readily to valuation approaches comparable to those used in valuing closely held corporations. You need only to adjust the earnings from the business to reflect estimated corporate income taxes that would have been payable had the Subchapter S election not been made.

The IRS's internal examination technique handbook for estate tax examiners added:

If you are comparing a Subchapter S Corporation to the stock of similar firms that are publicly traded, the net income of the former must be adjusted for income taxes using the corporate tax rates applicable for each year in question, and certain other items, such as salaries. These adjustments will avoid distortions when applying industry ratios such as price to earnings.

**iii. *Gross v. Commissioner*.** While tax-affecting was not a new concept 20 years ago, it may have been overtly and directly raised and considered in a gift tax case for the first time in *Gross v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1999-254. In *Gross* the taxpayer's appraiser tax-affected the value of stock of an S corporation, by using an assumed undiscounted corporate income tax rate of 40 percent. Judge Halpern viewed that as "a fictitious tax burden, equal to an assumed corporate tax rate of 40 percent." He tied the idea of tax-affecting for an S corporation to the "probability" that the corporation would lose its S status and concluded that "[w]e do not ... think it is reasonable to tax affect an S corporation's projected earnings with an undiscounted corporate tax rate without facts or circumstances sufficient to establish the likelihood that the election would be lost." He acknowledged that the taxpayer's appraiser had discussed the disadvantage of S corporations in raising capital, due to the restrictions of ownership necessary to qualify for the S election, but concluded:

This concern is more appropriately addressed in determining an appropriate cost of capital. In any event, it is not a justification for tax affecting an S corporation's projected earnings under a discounted cash-flow approach. [The taxpayer's appraiser] has failed to put forward any cognizable argument justifying the merits of tax affecting [the corporation's] projected earnings under a discounted cash-flow approach.

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He also pointed out, although not in such words, that tax-affecting was counter-intuitive, noting (emphasis added) that “[w]e believe that the principal **benefit** that shareholders **expect** from an S corporation election is a **reduction** in the total tax burden imposed on the enterprise.”

Regarding the IRS internal guide and handbook (quoted in paragraph ii above), Judge Halpern stated:

Both statements lack analytical support, and we refuse to interpret them as establishing respondent’s advocacy of tax-affecting as a necessary adjustment to be made in applying the discounted cash-flow analysis to establish the value of an S corporation.

In a confusing set of opinions, in which the lead opinion was not “the holding of the court,” the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit affirmed. The judge who wrote the lead opinion stated:

I must recognize that we are merely determining those factors that hypothetical parties to a sale of [the corporation’s] stock would have considered as of the gift date. In this regard, I believe that past practices, which the IRS had not deemed to create a deficiency, are demonstrative of the idea that such hypothetical actors would have considered tax affecting [the corporation’s] stock. This fact in conjunction with the testimony of the experts informs my conclusion that the court’s decision to use a 0% tax affect in deriving the value of [the corporation’s] stock was implausible.

A judge who wrote an opinion “concurring in part, dissenting in part,” but joined by another judge, viewed the issue essentially as an issue of fact, stating:

Valuing closely held stock incorporates a number of alternative methods of valuation, and the appellate courts have afforded the tax court broad discretion in determining what method of valuation most fairly represents the fair market value of the stock in light of the facts presented at trial. See *Palmer v. Comm’r of Internal Rev.*, 523 F.2d 1308 (8th Cir. 1975). Moreover, “complex factual inquiries such as valuation require the trial judge to evaluate a number of facts: whether an expert appraiser’s experience and testimony entitle his opinion to more or less weight; whether an alleged comparable sale fairly approximates the subject property’s market value; and the overall cogency of each expert’s analysis.” *Ebben v. Comm’r of Internal Rev.*, 783 F.2d 906, 909 (9th Cir. 1986).

...

Valuation is a fact specific task exercise; tax affecting is but one tool in accomplishing that task. The goal of valuation is to create a fictional sale at the time the gift was made, taking into account the facts and circumstances of the particular transaction. The Tax Court did that and determined that tax affecting was not appropriate in this case. I do not find its conclusions clearly erroneous.

**iv. IRS Response to *Gross*.** The IRS jumped on the decision in *Gross*, viewed it as a Tax Court ban on tax-affecting, rewrote its internal guidance, and took very strong stands against tax-affecting in subsequent cases.

**v. Further Tax Court Litigation.** The Tax Court largely went along with the IRS. For example, in *Estate of Gallagher v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-148 (corrected, T.C. Memo. 2011-244), Judge Halpern, again, wrote (emphasis added):

As we stated in *Gross v. Commissioner*, ... the principal *benefit* enjoyed by S corporation shareholders is the *reduction* in their total tax burden, a *benefit* that should be considered when valuing an S corporation. [The estate’s expert] has advanced no reason for ignoring such a benefit, and we will not impose an unjustified *fictitious* corporate tax rate burden on [the corporation’s] future earnings.

In *Estate of Giustina v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-141, *rev’d on other grounds*, 586 Fed. Appx. 417 (9th Cir. 2014), *on remand*, T.C. Memo. 2019-114, Mr. Reilly had reduced each year’s predicted cashflows by 25 percent to account for the income taxes that would be owed by the owner of the partnership interest on that owner’s share of the partnership’s income. With very little discussion, but citing *Gross*, the Tax Court disallowed that adjustment. The Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit agreed with the Tax Court, stating that “[t]he Estate itself admits in its brief that ‘tax-affecting is ... an unsettled matter of law.’ We therefore cannot say that the Tax Court clearly erred....

**vi. *Kress v. United States*.** Then, earlier in 2019, ***Kress v. United States*, 123 AFTR 2d 2019-1224 (E.D. Wis. March 26, 2019)**, addressed tax-affecting in determining the gift tax value of stock in a family owned and operated S corporation, Green Bay Packaging, Inc. (referred to in the court’s opinion as “GBP”). GBP is a vertically integrated manufacturer of corrugated packaging, folding cartons, coated labels, and related products, founded in 1933 and headquartered in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Gifts of stock to younger family members in 2007, 2008, and 2009 resulted in gift tax deficiencies assessed by the IRS. The donors paid those gift tax deficiencies and then filed claims for refund and ultimately sued for refunds



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in the federal district court in Milwaukee. Both the taxpayers' expert (John Emory of Emory and Co. in Milwaukee, who had been preparing valuation reports for GBP since 1999) and the Government's expert (Francis Burns of Global Economics Group in Chicago) had tax-affected GBP's earnings to apply a C corporation level tax to compare the S corporation being valued to C corporations that were used as comparables. For example, the court noted that "[u]nder the income approach, Burns ... applied an effective tax rate to GBP as if it were a C-corporation and then applied an adjustment to reflect the value of GBP as an S-corporation." Overall, the court found that "Emory provided reliable valuations of the GBP minority-owned shares of stock" and accepted most of Mr. Emory's conclusions, including his conclusions regarding tax-affecting.

**vii. Jones, Looking to Experts.** Then, in *Jones*, back in the Tax Court with attorneys from the IRS rather than the Justice Department, Judge Pugh appeared to agree that tax-affecting had inappropriately become more an issue with examiners and lawyers than a factual inquiry informed by experts and that the experts needed to be listened to. She said:

While respondent objects vociferously in his brief to petitioner's tax-affecting, his experts are notably silent. The only mention comes in [the IRS's expert's] rebuttal report, in which he argues that Mr. Reilly's tax-affecting was improper, not because SJTC pays no entity level tax, but because SJTC is a natural resources holding company and therefore its "rate of return is closer to the property rates of return". They do not offer any defense of respondent's proposed zero tax rate. Thus, we do not have a fight between valuation experts but a fight between lawyers.

Rejecting that approach (as discussed in paragraph (2)c above), Judge Pugh viewed the issue as fact-based and distinguished the previous cases on their facts (which, among other things, explains why an opinion in a case the appraisal community and other observers view as so important is only a "T.C. Memo." opinion).

**viii. IRS Reaction.** It might be thought that the IRS would be embarrassed by a case in which it was caught ignoring the consensus of the appraisal community and keeping its "experts ... notably silent," and would take pains to avoid such a risk in the future. But it cannot be so easily assumed that the IRS will now give up its hostility to tax-affecting. One Tax Court loss (making the IRS's Tax Court record, in effect, 3-1) may encourage some in the IRS to work even harder to uphold its position in the next case, perhaps by choosing to litigate a case in which the facts provide less justification for tax-affecting or where (as apparently in *Gross*) the taxpayer's appraiser has taken a less thorough and balanced approach than the appraiser in *Jones*.

Moreover, the hostile view toward tax-affecting is not necessarily shared, or apparently even known and understood, uniformly within the IRS. There is informal anecdotal evidence of both the historical unevenness of resisting tax-affecting within the IRS and the survival of that resistance after *Jones*.

**ix. Cecil v. Commissioner.** On February 24-26, 2016, the Tax Court tried a case that includes tax-affecting for valuing S corporation stock as one of its issues. *Estate of William A. V. Cecil, Sr. v. Commissioner*, Docket No. 14639-14, and *Estate of Mary R. Cecil v. Commissioner*, Docket No. 14640-14. Briefs were filed in May and July 2016. As of April 16, 2021, almost five years later, there was still no decision, and the only additional entries on the Tax Court's dockets have been papers in January 2018 to change the captions of the cases to reflect both William and Mary Cecil's deaths and Petitioner's Notices of Supplemental Authority on April 12, 2019 (probably *Kress*, discussed in paragraph vi above), and August 20, 2019 (undoubtedly *Jones*), with IRS answers three days later in each case. In *Cecil*, as in *Kress*, both the taxpayer **and** the IRS's expert used tax-affecting in their analysis. This may be an example of the lack of uniformity or discipline within the IRS on this issue. Or it may mean simply that facts vary and facts matter and the presentation of facts matters. Also, tax-affecting is not the only issue in *Cecil*. But at a minimum the Tax Court may have a hard time rejecting tax-affecting as a matter of law in *Cecil* when both experts agree in its application, but it still depends both on the facts and on the presentation of the facts, as illustrated in *Jones*.

#### (4) Reflections

**a. The Importance of the Appraiser.** The outcome in *Jones* is additional confirmation of the importance of thorough and credible appraisals in Tax Court litigation. Willamette Management Associates had its beginning in Portland, Oregon, and Judge Pugh said of Robert Reilly (whom she called "Richard Reilly") that he "has performed approximately 100 business valuations of sawmills and timber product

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companies.” In rather stark contrast, she said of the IRS’s valuation expert only that he “has performed several privately held business valuations.” As seen in the foregoing discussion, she found Mr. Reilly’s work to be thorough and credible and adopted his judgment, for example, regarding his reliance on the rather atypical “revised projections” and his analysis of tax-affecting that brought her to conclude that “Mr. Reilly’s tax-affecting may not be exact, but it is more complete and more convincing than respondent’s zero tax rate.”

But Mr. Reilly, the appraiser whose opinion and work impressed Judge Pugh, apparently had not been engaged before the gift tax return was filed, but was engaged, like counsel was engaged, for the litigation. Nothing gets attention like a \$45 million notice of deficiency! It may even have given Mr. Reilly greater credibility that his valuation report actually came in a bit **higher** than the values on the gift tax return. But the Jones family may have been lucky that the new appraiser’s higher value was not any more higher, as it could have been awkward to disavow it.

**b. Good Facts.** There were some “good” facts in *Jones* that should not be overlooked in evaluating its precedential application.

- There was of course a legitimate 55-year-old family-owned operating business.
- There is no indication that Mr. Jones’ actions were taken for him under a power of attorney or any other agency arrangement.
- Mr. Jones’ gifts resulted in making his daughters and himself equal owners of the economic interests in both SSC and SJTC. There was no division like 99-1 to attract scrutiny.
- These were not “deathbed” gifts. Mr. Jones survived the gifts by more than five years. When a deathbed scenario is encountered, it is not possible to go back. But the point remains that often the best estate planning is the earliest estate planning. The counterpoint is that decisions irrevocably made can later become a source of regret and friction, and the desirability of flexibility should not be overlooked.
- Mr. Jones actually paid some gift tax with his return. The opinion tells us that in 1996 the Jones family built a new headquarters and began succession planning. The succession process was evidently deliberate and not hasty (and, as noted, not a “deathbed” scurry). Mr. Jones may have been advised to choose 2009 when business was down and a willing buyer would have paid less for the business, and there is nothing wrong with that. In 2010 the gift tax rate was scheduled to drop from 45 percent to 35 percent (with the exemption remaining \$1 million), but there was uncertainty, especially after the 2008 election, about what the law in 2010 would be. Overall, Mr. Jones seems to have been very well served by his advisors.

**c. Detailed Appraisal Approach Regarding Tax-Affecting.** Valuation experts have been critical of the refusal to allow any adjustment to reflect that an S corporation’s income is subject to shareholder-level taxes, and many appraisers have been tax-affecting the earnings of S corporations despite the Tax Court’s reluctance to accept tax-affecting. If the appraiser tax-affects earnings to be consistent with data available for the capitalization rate used in the capitalization of earnings method or the discount rate used in the discounted cash flow method, the appraisal should address in detail the reasons for doing so. Otherwise, the court will ask why the appraiser has adjusted for entity-level taxes when the entity pays no taxes. In addition, the report should take into consideration and balance any benefits that are associated with flow-through status.

The estate’s appraisal in *Jones* provides an excellent example of such a detailed approach that considered both the burden on net cashflow by the anticipated individual income taxes on the business income as well as the benefits of passthrough treatment. Mr. Reilly tax-affected the earnings of the partnership to reflect a 38 percent combined federal and state income tax that the owners would bear to calculate the net cashflow from the partnership as well as the cost of debt capital that was used to determine an appropriate post-tax discount rate. He also took into consideration the benefit of avoiding a dividend tax, including “by estimating the implied benefit for SJTC’s partners in prior years and considering an empirical study analyzing S corporation acquisitions” and applying a 22 percent premium to the business enterprise

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value (that was determined both by a weighted discounted cashflow method and by a guideline publicly traded companies method) to reflect the benefit of avoiding the dividend tax.

The court does not give a detailed description of the analysis used in tax-affecting the S corporation earnings, but said that Mr. Reilly used the same methodology except that “he used a different rate for the dividend tax avoided because his analysis of the implied benefit for SSC’s shareholders in prior years yielded a different rate.”

**d. Detailed Appraisal Approach Regarding Lack of Marketability Discount.** The *Jones* opinion also provides an excellent example of a detailed analysis of how an appraiser might arrive at an appropriate marketability discount:

Mr. Reilly attached an appendix to his report in which he explained the reasoning behind the discount for lack of marketability. In doing so, he explained in detail the common empirical models—studies on the sales of restricted stock and on private, pre-IPO sales of stock—and the two theoretical models—the option pricing model and the DCF model—summarizing the methodology and results of individual studies. He then discussed the effect that restrictions on transferability have on a discount, as well as the other factors listed in *Mandelbaum v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1995-255, *aff’d*, 91 F.3d 124 (3d Cir. 1996). Mr. Reilly arrived at a 35% discount on the basis of the studies he previously discussed and on SJTC’s unique characteristics, such as its Buy-Sell Agreement, its lack of historical transfers, a potentially indefinite holding period, its reported loss in the 12 months before to *[sic]* the valuation date, and the unpredictability of partner distributions.

**e. Section 2703.** The sometimes apparently random invocation of section 2703 is illustrated by a comparison of *Jones* with the District Court case of *Kress v. United States*, 123 AFTR 2d 2019-1224 (E.D. Wis. March 26, 2019) (discussed in paragraph (3)c.vi above).

**i. Interesting Dicta in *Kress*.** In *Kress*, the GBP Bylaws contained the following limitation on the transfer of Kress family shares:

Transfer of shares of the Corporation by shareholders who are members of the Kress Family ... is hereby restricted to transfers by gift, bequest or private sale to a member or members of the Kress family, provided, however, that the children of George and Marguerite Kress may transfer shares of the Corporation by gift to such child’s spouse or trust therefor and further provided that in the event of any such transfer as above provided to issue and descendants or spouse of a child or trust therefor of George and Marguerite Kress, that all of the restrictions set forth herein shall continue to be applicable to the shares of common stock then held by such issue and descendants or spouse or trust therefor as transferee.

The Government argued that the restriction should be disregarded under section 2703(a). The taxpayers argued that section 2703(b) applied, which exempts from section 2703(a)

any option, agreement, right, or restriction which meets each of the following requirements:

- (1) It is a bona fide business arrangement.
- (2) It is not a device to transfer such property to members of the decedent’s family for less than full and adequate consideration in money or money’s worth.
- (3) Its terms are comparable to similar arrangements entered into by persons in an arms’ length transaction.

The court determined, however that the requirement of section 2703(b)(3) **had not been met**:

Though Plaintiffs contend restrictions like the Kress Family Restriction are common in the commercial world, they have not produced any evidence that unrelated parties dealing at arms’ length would agree to such an arrangement.

But the court reduced the lack-of-marketability discounts in question only by 3 percent – from 30, 30, and 28 percent for the three respective years to 27, 27, and 25 percent. (In contrast, the Government’s expert had determined lack-of-marketability discounts of only 10.8, 11.0, and 11.2 percent.)

Despite the fact that all three requirements of section 2703(b) had to be met to qualify for the exception, the court opined that the requirements of section 2703(b)(1) and (2) **had been met**. The court, in effect, found the “bona fide business arrangement” requirement of section 2703(b)(1) to be obvious in the context of GBP, which the court described as “unmistakably an operating business.”

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As to the requirement of section 2703(b)(2), the court reasoned simply that the restriction could not be “a device to transfer such property to members of the decedent’s family for less than full and adequate consideration in money or money’s worth” because the gifts were *inter vivos* and the Kresses were not “decedents.” The court acknowledged that Reg. §25.2703-1(b)(1)(ii) substitutes “the natural objects of the transferor’s bounty” for the statutory term “members of the decedent’s family,” which the Government argued resolves the ambiguity of “decedent” in the statutory context of chapter 14. Reviving a debate that seemed to have been dormant since the early 1990s, the District Court found the word “decedent” to be unambiguous and in effect declared the regulation invalid – all, however, totally dicta!

**ii. Nothing in *Jones*.** In *Jones*, although there were comparable and relevant restrictions on transfer of family interests in the SSC and SJTC Buy-Sell Agreements (described in paragraph (1)a above), the IRS evidently did not raise the issue of section 2703. (The *Jones* petition was filed in late 2013 and the IRS’s answer was filed in early 2014, before the IRS successfully invoked section 2703, at least for purposes of summary judgment, in *Estate of Cahill v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2018-84 (June 18, 2018), discussed in Part 6.b(2) above).

## 8. Effect of Anticipated Merger on Value of Stock, CCA 201939002

**a. Synopsis.** IRS **Chief Counsel Advice (CCA) 201939002**, dated May 28, 2019, and released September 27, 2019, concluded that stock on a listed exchange had to be valued for gift tax purposes by taking into consideration an anticipated merger of the underlying company that was expected to increase the value of the stock. The co-founder and Chairman of the Board of Corporation A, a publicly-traded corporation, transferred shares of stock of the corporation to a GRAT on “Date 1.” Apparently extensive merger discussions had transpired before that date. The merger agreement apparently was based on a certain value being attributed to the shares of Corporation A, substantially greater than the value at which the shares were trading. Later, on “Date 2,” the merger with Corporation B was announced, which resulted in the value of the Corporation A stock increasing substantially, though less than the agreed merger price.

Prior to Date 1, when the gift was made, “negotiations with multiple parties” had ensued and eventually “exclusive negotiations with Corporation B” occurred. Not stated in the CCA is whether the merger negotiations had proceeded to the point of having an agreed, or at least strongly anticipated, merger price being attributed to the shares of Corporation A on Date 1 when the gift was made.

The issue is whether the shares should be valued under Reg. §25.2512-2(b)(1) at the mean between the highest and lowest quoted selling prices on the date of the gift, or by taking into consideration the anticipated merger. Reg. §25.2512-2(e) states that if the value determined from the mean between the high and the low selling prices does not represent the fair market value of the shares, then some reasonable modification of the value shall be considered in determining fair market value.

Fair market value for transfer tax purposes is the price that a hypothetical willing buyer would pay a hypothetical willing seller, neither being under any compulsion to buy or to sell, and both having reasonable knowledge of relevant facts. Reg. §25.2512-1. The CCA reasoned that the presumption of having “reasonable knowledge of relevant facts” applies even if the relevant facts were unknown to the actual owner of the property (citing *Estate of Kollsman v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2017-40, *aff’d*, 123 AFTR 2d 2019-2296 (9th Cir. June 21, 2019)). Both parties are presumed to have made a reasonable investigation of the relevant facts, *id.*, and reasonable knowledge includes facts that a reasonable buyer or seller would uncover during the course of negotiations, even though not publicly available (the hypothetical willing buyer is presumed “to have asked the hypothetical willing seller for information that is not publicly available”). *Id.*

The CCA repeats the oft-stated general rule that post-transfer events may be considered only to the extent they are relevant to the value on the transfer date. *E.g. Estate of Noble v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2005-2.

The CCA cites two cases for authority that the value should be determined after taking into consideration the anticipated merger. *Silverman v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1974-285, *aff’d*, 538 F.2d 927 (2d Cir.

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1976), *cert denied*, 431 U.S. 938 (1977) (gift of shares of preferred stock while in the process of reorganizing with the intent to go public; court rejected expert testimony that failed to consider the circumstances of the anticipated future public sale); *Ferguson v. Commissioner*, 174 F.3d 997 (9th Cir. 1999), *aff'g*, 108 T.C. 244 (1997) (taxpayer was an officer and director of a corporation of which the board of directors had approved a merger agreement; after the merger was “practically certain to go through” but before the actual merger occurred, the taxpayer gave shares to charities; when the charities sold the shares, the taxpayer realized the gain under the assignment of income doctrine). While *Ferguson* was an anticipatory assignment of income case rather than a gift tax valuation case, the CCA pointed to the many factual similarities with *Ferguson* (a target search to find merger candidates, exclusive negotiations before the final agreement, generous terms of the merger, and an agreement that was “practically certain” to go through) in relying on it for the proposition that “the facts and circumstances surrounding a transaction are relevant to the determination that a merger is likely to go through.” The CCA concluded:

Under the fair market value standard as articulated in § 25.2512-1, the hypothetical willing buyer and willing seller, as of Date 1, would be reasonably informed during the course of negotiations over the purchase and sale of Shares and would have knowledge of all relevant facts, including the pending merger. Indeed, to ignore the facts and circumstances of the pending merger would undermine the basic tenets of fair market value and yield a baseless valuation.

**b. Important Questions Left Open.** The CCA fails to even mention one critical fact in its analysis. The donor was the Chairman of the Board of the publicly traded corporation, and federal securities laws may have prohibited the donor from disclosing confidential information regarding the merger to a purchaser. The CCA does repeat a statement from various cases that “[t]he willing buyer and willing seller are hypothetical persons, rather than specific individuals or entities, and their characteristics are not necessarily the same as those of the donor and the donee [citing *Estate of McCord* and *Estate of Newhouse*],” and that they are both “presumed to be dedicated to achieving the maximum economic advantage [citing *Estate of Newhouse*].” The CCA does not discuss this statement in light of the personal characteristics of the actual donor (as Chairman of the Board, subject to securities law limitations on disclosure of information about the publicly-held company), and the cited cases do not turn on any specific characteristics of the donor.

What if the merger discussions were highly secret and not even rumors of the discussions were available, so that no one who was not prohibited from disclosing the information knew about the discussions? The donor would know that the “mean between the high and the low” value was not appropriate, but no hypothetical third party could know that even with the exercise of reasonable diligence. A hypothetical purchaser who was dealing with a hypothetical seller who knew about the information but could not disclose it would not be able to find out about the information even if the buyer made diligent and persistent inquiries. An answer to this theoretical dichotomy may be that a hypothetical **seller** with this knowledge would never sell at a price well below the anticipated merger price, even though that information could not be disclosed to a hypothetical buyer. Therefore, the donor’s knowledge of the information, even though it could not be disclosed, would still have to be taken into account in determining the fair market value.

Nevertheless, the CCA concludes categorically that “as of Date 1 [the date the GRAT was funded], the hypothetical willing buyer of the stock could have reasonably foreseen the merger and anticipated that the price of Corporation A stock would trade at a premium” and that “the hypothetical willing buyer ..., as of Date 1, would be reasonably informed during the course of negotiations over the purchase and sale of Shares and would have knowledge of all relevant facts, including the pending merger.” Although that may have been true on the full facts the IRS was considering, such confidence is not explained in the CCA itself. Under applicable case law, the CCA correctly views the willing buyer and willing seller in the valuation standard of Reg. § 25.2512-1 as “hypothetical.” The regulation deems those hypothetical parties to have “reasonable knowledge of relevant facts,” and the anticipated merger certainly seems to be “relevant” to the value of the shares. The question under the regulation is whether knowledge of the merger would be “reasonable” in the case of secrecy imposed by law or agreement. The CCA assumes that such knowledge would be “reasonable” without discussion and without even acknowledging the question.

It should also be noted that under this analysis a donor might be able to make a gift **knowing** that the reported gift tax value will substantially understate the real value because of insider information known by



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the donor. (At the other end of the spectrum, in addition to asserting an anticipatory assignment of income as in *Ferguson*, the IRS might be able to argue for a much smaller charitable deduction than the realistic full value of the stock.) That may be another reason that the conclusion of the CCA is entirely appropriate, but, again, without explanation or acknowledgment.

Moreover, even if the anticipated merger were taken into consideration, that would not necessarily mean that the anticipated merger price would be the fair market value at the time the GRAT was funded. There may have been some possibility that the merger would fall through, and even if the merger were consummated, the extent to which the merger actually affected the value of stock after the merger was announced would be uncertain. Indeed, the CCA acknowledges that “after the merger was announced, the value of the Corporation A stock increased substantially, though **“less than the agreed merger price”** (emphasis added). But the anticipated merger would still be considered as a factor in determining the fair market value of the stock.

One lesson from CCA 201939002 is that every word of a regulation can matter. If advice is received from the National Office of the IRS during the audit of a valuation issue, care must be taken to confirm that every assumption underlying the advice – whether explicit or implicit – is appropriate, and that a case against the taxpayer’s position is not overstated, even inadvertently. As stated above, the conclusion of CCA 201939002 might be entirely appropriate on the full facts of the case, but vigilance and scrutiny would be needed to confirm that.

If the case for which this CCA was issued proceeds to trial, no doubt these facts will be fully explored by the court, and the court’s discussion of the legal test of what is meant by “reasonable knowledge of relevant facts” in valuation cases like this may be quite interesting.

## 9. Another Taxpayer Valuation Victory: *Grieve*

**a. Synopsis.** *Grieve v. Commissioner, T.C. Memo. 2020-28 (March 2, 2020, Judge Kerrigan)*, upheld a donor’s gift tax valuation of 99.8% nonvoting interests in two limited liability companies that he had given in 2013 to a GRAT and to another irrevocable trust. The assets held by the LLCs were largely cash, cash equivalents, and marketable securities. The donor’s gift tax return applied entity-level discounts for lack of control and marketability totaling about 35%.

The Tax Court did not use an alternative approach the donor offered at trial that included discounting the value of interests in entities held by one of the LLCs being valued (resulting in “multiple-tiered discounts”) and applying slightly different entity-level discounts. The court explained that it had found no justification for using a net value significantly lower than the value to which the taxpayer had previously admitted on the appraisal attached to the gift tax return (without any specific criticism of the multiple-tiered discounting approach).

The court firmly rejected a valuation offered by the IRS that assumed that a buyer of the 99.8% interest would start by seeking to buy the 0.2% controlling interest, which would have almost eliminated any entity-level discounts (leaving a discount of just over 1.4%).

**b. Background Facts.** The donor, Pierson M. Grieve, resided in Florida when he filed his Tax Court petition, but from 1983 to 1996 he had been the chairman and chief executive officer of Ecolab, a public corporation headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota. Ecolab stock was the underlying asset involved in the funding of the GRAT, and the Tax Court trial in March 2019 was held in St. Paul.

Around 1990, Mr. Grieve established the Grieve Family Limited Partnership to preserve and manage his family wealth. The general partner of the limited partnership was the Pierson M. Grieve Management Corp. (PMG). In the early 2000s, Mr. Grieve’s daughter Margaret became involved in helping Mr. Grieve manage the family wealth, and in 2008 she purchased PMG from Mr. Grieve for \$6,200 and became its president.

In 2012, Mr. Grieve created an irrevocable trust for the benefit of his children, with South Dakota Trust Co., LLC, as the trustee.

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The LLCs in question, Rabbit 1, LLC (Rabbit), and Angus MacDonald, LLC (Angus), were created under the law of Delaware in 2013 and 2012, respectively. PMG owned the Class A voting units in each LLC, comprising 0.2% of the ownership interests of the LLC, and PMG's owner, Margaret, was the chief manager of the LLCs. The Class B nonvoting LLC units, comprising 99.8% of the ownership interests, were owned by Mr. Grieve's revocable trust in the case of Rabbit and by Mr. Grieve himself in the case of Angus. Margaret was the trustee of the revocable trust.

The assets of both LLCs were largely cash, cash equivalents, and marketable securities. The fair market values of those assets on the respective dates of transfer were \$9,067,074 for Rabbit (as adjusted by stipulation in the Tax Court) and \$31,970,683 for Angus.

Under the LLC agreements, the holders of all Class A voting units had to consent to the transfer of any units to anyone other than a lineal descendant of Mr. Grieve or his wife (who died in 2012), or a trust for the exclusive benefit of any one or more such lineal descendants and/or their spouses, or, in the case of Rabbit, a charitable organization.

**c. Gifts.** On October 9, 2013, Mr. Grieve's revocable trust transferred its 99.8% nonvoting ownership interest in Rabbit to a two-year GRAT, with annuity payments defined as percentages of what the opinion describes as "the fair market value of assets transferred to the trust for Federal gift tax purposes." The percentage increased by slightly less than 20% from the first payment to the second payment, and the percentages were designed to "zero out" the GRAT – that is, to produce a gift tax value of the remainder equal to zero after applying the section 7520 rate of 2.4% for October 2013.

On November 1, 2013, Mr. Grieve transferred his 99.8% nonvoting ownership interest in Angus to the 2012 irrevocable trust, in exchange for a single-life private annuity that on that date had a fair market value of \$8,043,675. Thus, Mr. Grieve made a gift to the irrevocable trust in the amount by which the value of the 99.8% interest exceeded \$8,043,675.

**d. Valuation Positions.** Mr. Grieve's 2013 gift tax return reported values for the 99.8% nonvoting interests that were based on appraisal reports prepared by Value Consulting Group (VCG), using a cost approach and adjusted net-asset method to determine the fair market value of the assets of the LLCs and applying lack of control discounts of 13.4% for Rabbit and 12.7% for Angus and lack of marketability discounts of 25% for each LLC. To determine these discounts, VCG looked at studies of closed-end mutual funds and closely held equity interests, including restricted stock studies. In the Tax Court, VCG's valuation of the Rabbit interest was adjusted slightly (from \$9,102,757 to \$9,067,074 by a stipulated change) to the fair market value of Rabbit's assets as of the transfer date of October 9, 2013.

The IRS issued a notice of deficiency substantially increasing the values of the LLC interests. See the table below.

In the Tax Court, Mr. Grieve offered additional valuation reports prepared by Will Frazier and others in the well-known valuation firm of Stout. These reports independently valued the assets held by the LLCs, including the application of minority interest and lack of marketability discounts to limited partnership interests and venture capital funds held by Angus (*i.e.*, employing multiple-tiered discounts) and determined combined values slightly less than the values VCG had used. The reports used a market approach and asset method similar to VCG's, but with different discounts for lack of control calculated separately for equity securities and for cash and short-term investments. The reports agreed with VCG's 25% lack of marketability discounts, supported by analysis that the Tax Court explicitly acknowledged "considered factors that we outlined in Mandelbaum v. Commissioner, T.C. Memo. 1995-255, *aff'd*, 91 F.3d 124 (3d Cir. 1996), [including] the holding period, the risk of the underlying assets, and the company's distribution policy." Finally, the Stout reports also introduced an income approach, which the court described as follows:

Mr. Frazier used the nonmarketable investment company evaluation (NICE) method which he developed as a valuation technique applicable to entities that hold a portfolio of investment assets. The NICE method determines a price that an investor would pay for the subject interest that lacks control and marketability by taking into consideration the investment risks and expected returns. In applying the NICE method, empirical studies were used

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to determine the incremental required rates of return in the light of information asymmetry (lack of control) and the cost of illiquidity (lack of marketability).

Giving equal weight to those market and income approaches, the Stout reports determined fair market values of the transferred 99.8% interests on the transfer dates that were slightly less than the values VCG had determined, which had been used on the gift tax return.

**e. Result in the Tax Court.** In a footnote to her opinion, Judge Kerrigan stated that “[w]ith agreement of the parties we directed the expert witnesses to testify concurrently. The procedure was implemented in substantially the same way as in *Rovakat, LLC v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-225 [affirmed, 529 Fed. Appx. 124 (3d Cir. 2013)].” In *Rovakat*, Judge Laro had explained:

To implement the concurrent testimony, the Court sat at a large table in the middle of the courtroom with all three experts, each of whom was under oath. The parties’ counsel sat a few feet away. The Court then engaged the experts in a three-way conversation about ultimate issues of fact. Counsel could, but did not, object to any of the experts’ testimony. When necessary, the Court directed the discussion and focused on matters that the Court considered important to resolve. By engaging in this conversational testimony, the experts were able and allowed to speak to each other, to ask questions, and to probe weaknesses in any other expert’s testimony. The discussion that followed was highly focused, highly structured, and directed by the Court.

The engagement of expert witnesses around a table like this has been referred to colloquially as “hot tubbing,” and Judge Laro actually cited an article titled “Experts in the Tub” (21 Antitrust 95, 97 (2007)).

The Tax Court totally rejected the approach of Mark Mitchell, which the IRS had relied on in this case and which has reportedly exasperated the appraisal community in other cases where the IRS has invoked it. The court described Mr. Mitchell’s approach this way:

In his valuation reports Mr. Mitchell sought the price at which a 99.8% noncontrolling interest would actually be bought or sold. According to Mr. Mitchell there was no empirical data on the sale of a 99.8% noncontrolling interest. His valuations were based upon the premise that the reasonable buyer of a 99.8% interest could be expected to seek to maximize his or her economic interest by consolidating ownership through the purchase of the 0.2% interest. Mr. Mitchell also contends that a willing buyer would consider the likelihood of purchasing the 0.2% interest.

Mr. Mitchell determined that a hypothetical willing seller would seek first to acquire the class A [voting] units for a premium. According to his reports and testimony, purchasing the class A units would result in consolidated control and further maximize the value of the class B [nonvoting] units by reducing any discount sought by a hypothetical willing buyer.

Judge Kerrigan bluntly noted that “[w]e do not engage in imaginary scenarios as to who a purchaser might be,” citing *Estate of Giustina v. Commissioner*, 586 F. App’x 417, 418 (9th Cir. 2014), *rev’g and rem’g* T.C. Memo. 2011-141. (In a similar context in *Estate of Jones v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2019-101, discussed in Part 7 above, Judge Pugh had also cited *Giustina*, in that case rejecting rather than affirming an asset-based approach.) In *Grieve*, Judge Kerrigan added:

Mr. Mitchell’s valuations relied on an additional action [that is, in addition to a hypothetical sale of the 99.8% class B units]. He concluded that to determine the value of what a willing buyer would pay and what a willing seller would seek for the class B [nonvoting] units, a premium to purchase the class A [voting] units has to be taken into account. Elements affecting the value that depend upon events within the realm of possibility should not be considered if the events are not shown to be reasonably probable [citing *Olson v. United States*, 292 U.S. 246, 257 (1934)]. The facts do not show that it is reasonably probable that a willing seller or a willing buyer of the class B units would also buy the class A units and that the class A units would be available to purchase. To determine the fair market values of the class B units we look at the willing buyer and willing seller of the class B units, and not the willing buyer and willing seller of the class A units.

Neither respondent nor Mr. Mitchell provided evidence to show support for his valuations. His reports did not include empirical data which back up his calculation of the 5% premium to purchase the class A units of either entity. He provided no evidence showing that his methodology was subject to peer review. Respondent cited no caselaw in support of Mr. Mitchell’s methodology. Accordingly, we reject Mr. Mitchell’s valuations of the class B units of Rabbit and Angus. See *Estate of Hall v. Commissioner*, 92 T.C. at 340; *Estate of Deputy v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2003-176, slip op. at 20; *Estate of Smith v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1999-368, slip op. at 40.

In contrast, Judge Kerrigan did not criticize Mr. Frazier’s reports, although she concluded that:

We are not convinced that the higher discount for lack of control for Rabbit and lower values in the Frazier reports should be substituted for the values that the parties stipulated and the discounts petitioner provided in the VCG reports. See *Estate of Hall v. Commissioner*, 92 T.C. at 337-338; *Estate of Deputy v. Commissioner*, slip op. at 12 n.6.

As a result, undoubtedly reassured by the very similar results in the Stout reports, the court accepted the values that had been reported on the gift tax return, with the slight adjustment that had been stipulated in the fair market value of the underlying assets owned by Rabbit. The following table summarizes the parties' positions and the court's conclusion:

Values Determined for the 99.8% Nonvoting LLC Interests Transferred (including the effective discount (rounded) from 99.8% of the value of the LLC's assets)					
LLC (including the value of the LLC's assets)	Initial Positions		Positions in Tax Court		Tax Court's Conclusion
	Gift Tax Return (VCG)	IRS Notice of Deficiency	Taxpayer (Will Frazier)	IRS (Mark Mitchell)	
<b>Rabbit</b> (\$9,067,074)	\$5,903,769 (35.0% *)	\$9,048,866 (0.4% *)	\$5,884,000 (35.0%)	\$8,918,940 (1.4%)	\$5,880,626 (35.0%)
<b>Angus</b> (\$31,970,683)	\$20,890,934 (34.5%)	\$31,884,403 (0.1%)	\$19,854,000 (37.8%)	\$31,456,742 (1.4%)	\$20,890,934 (34.5%)

\* Based on the \$9,102,757 estimated value of Rabbit's assets before the stipulated correction.

As noted above, the taxable gift in the case of Angus was the excess of this amount over the \$8,043,675 value of the annuity Mr. Grieve took back, in other words \$20,890,934 minus \$8,043,675, or \$12,847,259. Because Mr. Grieve's wife died in 2012, it is possible that he had a DSUE amount from a portability election to apply against that gift. (According to the opinion, the IRS's notice of deficiency would have increased the value of the Angus interest transferred to the irrevocable trust by \$10,993,469 (from \$20,890,934 to \$31,884,403), but, without explanation, would have increased the net value of the resulting gift by only \$7,852,480 (from \$9,966,659 to \$17,819,139). In any event, the court's decision of June 11, 2020, confirmed that there was no gift tax deficiency.

**f. Apparently No Section 2036(a)(2) Exposure Under *Powell* and *Cahill*.** *Grieve* is a gift tax case, and Mr. Grieve was alive when the Tax Court decided the case. Therefore there was no occasion for the IRS or the court to raise or address the issue that the 99.8% nonvoting interests might have "the right, ... in conjunction with any person, to designate the persons who shall possess or enjoy the property or the income therefrom," under section 2036(a)(2) as applied in *Estate of Powell v. Commissioner*, 148 T.C. 392 (2017) (reviewed by the Court), and *Estate of Cahill v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2018-84, discussed in Part 6.b(2) above. In light of *Powell* and *Cahill*, however, it may be noted in passing that neither Mr. Grieve nor his revocable trust retained any interest in Rabbit and Angus, and that in any event the Rabbit and Angus nonvoting units "could not vote on or participate in any proceedings in which the entity or its members took action."

**g. Formula Clause for GRAT Annuity Payments.** As noted in paragraph c above, for the GRAT to which Mr. Grieve's revocable trust contributed the nonvoting Rabbit units, the annuity payments were defined as percentages of what the opinion describes as "the fair market value of assets transferred to the trust for Federal gift tax purposes." As the court noted in a footnote:

The parties stipulated that petitioner will not owe additional gift tax if we determine that he understated the initial fair market value of assets transferred to the GRAT if, within a reasonable time, the GRAT pays to petitioner, or to his personal representative in the event of his passing, an amount equal to the difference of the properly payable annuity and the annuity actually paid.

Thus the formula clause worked, even though the GRAT was designed to produce a taxable gift of zero, which could have made the "final determination" of federal gift tax value less obvious. The formula clause used in *Grieve*, of course, is specifically authorized by Reg. §25.2702-3(b)(1)(ii)(B). Even so, for the IRS to force the formula clause to be respected, in this case by entering into the stipulation with the donor, is somewhat comparable to what we might have observed in the recent settlement of cases involving defined value clauses in the broader gift tax context. See *Estate of Donald Woelbing v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 30261-13) and *Estate of Marion Woelbing v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 30260-13) (petitions filed Dec. 26, 2013; stipulated decisions entered March 25 and 28, 2016); *Karen S. True v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 21896-16) and *H.A. True III v. Commissioner* (Tax Court Docket No. 21897-16) (petitions filed Oct. 11, 2016; stipulated decisions entered July 9 and 6, 2018).

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As such, *Grieve*, along with *Woelbing* and *True*, might provide a template for the resolution of cases involving defined value clauses, even as the IRS is probably still searching for a case in which it might successfully challenge the effectiveness of such a clause, standing alone, to prevent, defeat, or diminish a valuation challenge.

It also did not seem to matter in *Grieve* that the annuity payments determined by formula were, as the court put it, “to be paid within 105 days of [the respective anniversaries of the funding of the GRAT].” Specifically, neither the IRS nor the court seemed to be concerned that the explicit reference to the 105-day grace period of Reg. §25.2702-3(b)(3) even though it is not a governing instrument requirement might require valuation of the remainder for gift tax purposes to be based on the later permissible payment dates.

It is also interesting, as in Chief Counsel Advice (CCA) 201939002, discussed in Part 8 above, that the IRS is auditing GRATs at all, although in this case it is easier to understand in a context where clearly Mr. Grieve’s other transfer to an irrevocable trust in 2013 produced a taxable gift. The stipulation described in the court’s footnote might provide an explanation of why such audits make sense. If, to settle a case, the IRS requires the grantor of a GRAT to explicitly confirm an increase in the annuity payments, more value presumably will be brought back into the grantor’s estate to be taxed in the future, and the IRS is given one more tool to use in tracking and enforcing those annuity payments.

## 10. A Confusing Deathbed-Planning Taxpayer Loss: *Moore*

**a. Synopsis.** In a pre-death planning context beginning in late 2004, after contracting to sell a farm for about \$16.5 million the decedent transferred a 4/5ths interest in the farm to an FLP in return for a 95% limited partnership interest. A Management Trust (with two children as co-trustees) was the 1% general partner, but the decedent exercised practical control over the FLP and caused transfers of \$2 million of the sale proceeds to himself, \$2 million to his children (who gave notes for their transfers), and \$500,000 to a grandson as a gift.

The decedent subsequently gave \$500,000 to an Irrevocable Trust (for his children) and several weeks later transferred his 95% limited partnership interest to the Irrevocable Trust for a \$500,000 cash down payment and a \$4.8 million note (the gift and sale amount represented a discount of just over 50% for the FLP interest).

The decedent’s revocable trust provided a formula bequest to a charitable lead trust in an amount to “result in the least possible federal estate tax.” In addition, the Irrevocable Trust provided that the trustee would distribute to the revocable trust “the value of any asset of this trust which is includible in my gross estate.” Following the decedent’s death at the end of March 2005, the charitable lead trust apparently was funded with a substantial amount under the revocable trust’s formula transfer. An IRS examination resulted in this case alleging additional gift and estate taxes.

Not surprisingly, the court determined that the farm was included in the gross estate under section 2036(a)(1). The bona fide sale for full consideration exception in section 2036(a) did not apply because no businesses required active management, the children did not actually manage sale proceeds in the FLP, no legitimate creditor concerns existed, and the “whole plan” involving the FLP had a “testamentary essence.” The decedent retained enjoyment or possession of the assets transferred to the FLP under section 2036(a)(1) (at least by implied agreement) because, although he kept sufficient assets for personal needs, he instead “scooped into FLP assets to pay personal expenses,” and his relationship to the assets remained unchanged after the transfer to the FLP.

The court followed up on the discussion of section 2043 in *Estate of Powell v. Commissioner* with its own lengthy analysis, but on the facts of the case the application of section 2043 had little practical impact.

The court refused to allow any additional charitable deduction under the formula transfer provision in the Irrevocable Trust as a result of the inclusion of the farm in the gross estate because (1) specific wording in the formula limits any transfer, and (2) the charitable amount was not ascertainable at the decedent’s death but depended on subsequent events (the IRS audit and tax litigation). The *Christiansen* and *Petter* cases were distinguished because they merely involved valuation issues to determine what passed to charity, but in this case the charity did not know it “would get any additional assets at all.”



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The court also determined that (1) the \$2 million transfers to the children in return for notes were actually gifts (with a detailed review of factors considered in determining whether bona fide debt exists), (2) additional gift taxes resulting from those gifts must be included in the gross estate under section 2035(b) because the gifts were made within three years of death, and (3) a flat fee of \$475,000 for attorney's fees was not deductible because the evidence did not establish what services were performed for the fee and that it was necessarily incurred in the administration of the estate. ***Estate of Howard V. Moore v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2020-40 (April 7, 2020, Judge Holmes).**

## **b. Basic Facts**

- (1) **Background.** Mr. Moore's story is one of a compelling rise from poverty. He grew up in a home thatched out of arrowweed, left school after the eighth grade, became a "land leveler" in a local economy with so little cash that he was often paid with some of the land that was leveled, and slowly assembled over 1,000 acres that were consolidated into what became Moore Farms. He endured a long battle with alcoholism and had a dysfunctional family (including one son leaving for many years after he had borrowed a tractor belonging to one of his brothers, who then fired shots at the tractor, causing thousands of dollars of damage).

At age 88, Mr. Moore negotiated with potential buyers about selling the farm property, but before completing the sale he had a serious heart attack and was told he had less than six months to live. In December 2004, while in hospice care in the hospital, he worked with an estate planning attorney who developed an estate plan, focused primarily on Mr. Moore's stated goals of maintaining control and eliminating estate tax. As part of that plan, he created various trusts and a family limited partnership on December 20, 2004, four days after leaving the hospital.

## **(2) Trusts and Partnership**

- (a) **Living Trust.** Mr. Moore transferred all of his real and intangible personal property to a revocable trust (the "Living Trust"). On Mr. Moore's death, the trust provided for a formula transfer to a charitable lead trust of a fractional part of the trust assets to result in the "least possible federal estate tax." After paying expenses, claims, taxes, and specific distributions of personal property and real estate, the balance was left to the "Children's Trust" for the benefit of Mr. Moore's four children.
- (b) **Charitable Lead Annuity Trust.** It is not clear from the opinion when the charitable lead trust (the "Charitable Trust") was funded. The Living Trust contained a formula transfer to the Charitable Trust of a sufficient amount to minimize estate taxes so it may only have been funded under the formula transfer in the Living Trust following Mr. Moore's death. By the time of trial, the trust had distributed \$2.5 million, ultimately passing to various charities. The opinion is confusing about the funding following Mr. Moore's death, though, because it reports that the estate tax return claimed a deduction for a transfer to the Charitable Trust of \$4,745,671, but the IRS determined that only \$516,000 had been transferred to the Charitable Trust following Mr. Moore's death.
- (c) **Children's Trust.** The "Children's Trust" apparently was created under the Living Trust following Mr. Moore's death. It directed specific distributions of certain property among the four children in trust, with the remaining assets being held in equal shares in trust for the four children.
- (d) **Family Management Trust.** The only asset of the irrevocable "Management Trust" was a 1% general partner interest in the family limited partnership ("FLP") described below. The trustees were two of Mr. Moore's children. The trust assets were to pass to the four children following Mr. Moore's death.
- (e) **Irrevocable Trust.** The "Irrevocable Trust" was for the benefit of the four children. One son was the trustee. Following Mr. Moore's death, the trust was directed to "distribute an amount equal to the value of any asset of this trust which is includible in my gross estate for federal estate tax purposes" to the Living Trust to be distributed in accordance with its terms

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(i.e., under the formula distribution to the Charitable Trust and to the Children's Trust). As discussed below, Mr. Moore funded this trust in February 2005 from the Living Trust with \$500,000, and several weeks later he transferred all of his interest in the FLP to this trust.

- (f) **Family Limited Partnership.** The FLP was created with initial nominal contributions so the Management Trust held a 1% general partnership interest, and the limited partnership interests were held by Mr. Moore (95%) and by the four children (collectively 4%). The FLP was funded in early February 2005 with a 4/5ths interest in Moore Farms and with a separate farm, and in late February with \$1.8 million from an investment account held by the Living Trust. (The farm properties are collectively referred to as the "farm" below, but references to the farm properties are not clear in the opinion. Four-fifths of Moore Farms and all of the separate farm (called "Doval Farms") were transferred to the FLP, but the rest of the opinion just referred to "Moore Farms," and "Moore Farms" was included in the estate under section 2036. Whether that included all of the farms owned by the FLP is not clear in the opinion.)
- (3) **Sale of Farm.** Meanwhile, Mr. Moore had been engaged in negotiations with a prospective buyer of the farm, and before or shortly after his transfer of a 4/5th interest in the farm to the FLP there was a contract to sell the farm for about \$16.5 million. That sale closed very shortly after his transfer to the FLP. (**Observation:** The opinion is not clear about the exact timing, suggesting in some references that the transfer and sale occurred on the same day and in other references that they were separated by up to five days.) Upon closing of the sale, the FLP transferred its 4/5ths interest in the farm (and the Living Trust transferred its remaining 1/5th interest) to the buyer, with Mr. Moore being allowed to continue living on and to operate the farm property for the short remaining balance of his lifetime.
- (4) **Transfers.** Mr. Moore made various transfers over the next couple months. Some of the transfers were, as the court put it, "quite complex."
- The attorney was paid the \$220,000 balance of his \$320,000 design fee (80% came from the FLP and 20% from the Living Trust; Mr. Moore had paid \$100,000 upfront).
  - Mr. Moore directed the FLP to transfer \$500,000 to each of his four children in return for a five-year note bearing interest at a rate of 3.6% from each of the children. (The mid-term applicable federal rate for February 2005 was 3.83%. Rev. Rul. 2005-8, 2005-1 C.B. 466.) The notes had no amortization schedule, no payments were made, no efforts were made to collect the notes, and the court ultimately did not respect the notes. In addition, a grandson also received \$500,000 as a gift (he did not give a note to the FLP).
  - The FLP distributed \$2 million to the Living Trust, which was used to pay various expenses, including Mr. Moore's income tax attributable to the sale of the farm. Mr. Moore's daughter thought this was a loan from the FLP (the estate claimed a \$2 million debt deduction and treated the loan as a receivable of the FLP), but there was no further evidence that it was a loan and the Living Trust never repaid the FLP.
  - In late February, the Living Trust transferred \$500,000 to the Irrevocable Trust (treated as a \$125,000 gift to each of the four children).
  - "A couple weeks later," in early March 2005, the Living Trust transferred its entire limited partnership interest in the FLP to the Irrevocable Trust in return for \$500,000 cash (the cash that had been given to the Irrevocable Trust) and a note for \$4.8 million. (Footnote 9 of the opinion says that the purchase price was based on an \$11.5 million net asset value of the FLP minus a 53% discount, resulting in a purchase price of \$5.3 million. That math does not work precisely if Mr. Moore still owned a 95% interest in the FLP at his death.  $\$5.3 \text{ million} / (.95 \times \$11.5 \text{ million}) = .485$ , reflecting a 51.5% discount. If we assume that the Living Trust owned all of the partnership,  $\$5.3 \text{ million} / \$11.5 \text{ million} = .46$ , reflecting a 54% discount.)

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- (5) **Mr. Moore's Death.** Mr. Moore died at the end of March 2005. Mr. Moore was a resident of Arizona, and his personal representative and trustee was also a resident of Arizona when the petition was filed.

c. **Issues.** The court said that it had to decide the following issues

- (1) Is the value of the farm included in the gross estate under section 2036 despite its sale by the FLP?
- (2) If so, does the subsequent transfer of the Living Trust's interest in the FLP to the Irrevocable Trust remove that value from the gross estate?
- (3) Can the estate deduct the \$2 million ostensible debt from the Living Trust to the FLP, "future charitable contributions," and \$475,000 in attorney's fees?
- (4) Were the \$500,000 transfers to each of the children loans or gifts?

Interestingly, whether the transfer of the limited partnership interests for \$5.3 million (reflecting a 53% discount) was a gift (with resulting penalties and interest) was not an issue addressed by the court.

d. **Court's Analysis**

- (1) **Value of Farm is Included in Gross Estate Under Section 2036.** A three-part test is applied for determining whether section 2036(a)(1) applies to a transfer to an FLP – (1) a transfer of assets was made to an FLP, (2) the transfer was not a bona fide sale for adequate and full consideration, and (3) the decedent retained an interest or right in the transferred property (citing *Estate of Bongard v. Commissioner*, 124 T.C. 95, 112 (2005)).

- (a) **Bona Fide Sale for Full Consideration Exception to Section 2036 Not Satisfied.** "[I]n the context of a family limited partnership, a sale is *bona fide* only if the record establishes the existence of a legitimate and significant nontax reason for creation of the family limited partnership and the transfer of assets to it. *Estate of Bongard*, 124 T.C. at 118."

- **Motive.** The estate maintained that Mr. Moore's "principal reason for forming the FLP and transferring his interest in Moore Farms to it was to bring his family together so that they could learn how to manage the business without him." After discussing prior cases that had found that the bona fide sale exception was satisfied (*Mirowski*, *Stone*, and *Bigelow*), the court summarized that "the transfers that we've found were motivated by genuine nontax purposes were of businesses that required active management." (The court also acknowledged that the bona fide sale requirement could also be satisfied by "[t]he desire to consolidate marketable assets and manage them as a family asset for continuing investment purposes," citing *Purdue*.) The *Moore* facts did not meet that standard:

In these cases, there was no business to run. Moore sold Moore Farms just five days after he transferred four-fifths of it to the FLP. [But see the Observation in Item 3 of the Basic Facts Section above.] What's more, we find that he knew a month before the sale closed that he would sell it. This means as a practical matter that there was no farm for Moore's children to manage together. The only assets left in the FLP for Moore's children to manage were liquid, and they didn't even actually manage them. Other than the FLP's startup meeting, the children have never met to make and review investment decisions. They have an investment adviser who handles that for them, and there simply is no business to run.

- **Creditors.** The estate argued that the FLP would function as a protection from creditors. The court suggested that asset protection could never meet the bona fide sale exception, but in any event, Mr. Moore had no legitimate concern with creditor claims:

While protection from creditors can be considered a legitimate—though not significant—nontax reason to form an FLP, see *Estate of Mirowski* ..., there is no credible evidence that Moore or any of his children had a legitimate concern with possible creditor claims.

- **Other Factors.** The FLP was planned when death was imminent as "part of an attempt to avoid federal gift and estate taxes." The court would not "ignore the testamentary

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essence of the whole plan,” as evidenced by the absence of bargaining, negotiating, or questioning. The plan was implemented unilaterally by Mr. Moore.

- **Adequate and Full Consideration Requirement Not Addressed.** Footnote 16 of the opinion observes that because the transfer to the FLP did not meet the “bona fide” requirement, the court did not need to discuss whether it was made for full consideration.

- (b) **Retained Enjoyment.** The court addressed, as what it called “an alternate holding,” whether Mr. Moore retained “possession or enjoyment” of the assets transferred to the FLP. (**Observation:** This was not an “alternate” holding; a decedent’s retention of possession or enjoyment of transferred assets is an integral requirement for section 2036(a)(1) to apply.)

The court found that Mr. Moore “had, at the very least, an implied agreement to retain possession or enjoyment of the farm property upon the transfer of four-fifths of Moore Farms to the FLP and even after the sale of the entire farm.” Factors mentioned by the court to support this finding include the following:

- **Continued Occupancy.** “We’ve held time and time again that a decedent’s continued occupancy of property after its transfer to an entity is evidence of an implied agreement.
- **Use of Sale Proceeds in FLP “As His Own.”** Mr. Moore retained outside the FLP sufficient assets for his personal needs, but he “didn’t use them. Instead, he scooped into FLP assets to pay personal expenses.”
- **Relationship to Assets Remained Unchanged.** Mr. Moore’s relationship to his assets remained unchanged; he kept control over the FLP assets. Although two children were co-trustees of the Management Trust that was the general partner of the FLP, the “children typically did things because Moore asked them to, and giving them nominal ‘power’ was no different from Moore’s keeping that power.” An implicit understanding existed that Mr. Moore “would continue to use his assets as he desired and that his relationship with them changed formally, not practically.”

- (c) **Conclusion as to Section 2036(a)(1) Inclusion.** Because Mr. Moore “retained possession or enjoyment of the farm, and because his transfer of part ownership to the FLP lacked a substantial nontax purpose, the value of Moore Farms should be included in the value of the estate under section 2036(a)(1).” As discussed below regarding the application of section 2043, apparently the court is including 100% of the farm in the gross estate under section 2036, not just the 4/5ths transferred to the FLP.

**Observation:** Apparently, the court is combining two different transfers as triggering section 2036 inclusion – (1) the transfer of 4/5ths of the farm to the FLP and the attributable portion of the sale proceeds, and (2) the sale of 1/5th of the farm directly to a third party and the retention of enjoyment of the sale proceeds attributable to that 1/5th. Whether the 1/5th interest is included in the gross estate under section 2033 or section 2036(a)(1) makes no difference in this case, but the opinion is not explicit in its analysis of why the 1/5th interest is included under section 2036.

- (2) **Effect of Transfer of FLP Interests to Irrevocable Trust Not Addressed Directly.** The second issue for the court’s review (as summarized by the court) was not discussed, at least directly, in the opinion. The opinion did not refer to any transfers from the FLP to Mr. Moore or other use of FLP assets by him after he transferred his limited partnership interest to the Irrevocable Trust (but Mr. Moore did continue to live on the farm itself for the remaining few weeks of his life). (**Observation:** Even if Mr. Moore retained no possession or enjoyment of FLP assets after the transfer of his limited partnership interest, a relinquishment of his retained interest within three years of his death would cause inclusion of the transferred assets under section 2035(a)(2).)
- (3) **Application of Section 2043 Consideration Offset.** The court observed that prior to the *Powell* case in 2017, the analysis would end there regarding section 2036 inclusion. The proceeds from the farm’s sale would be included in the gross estate under section 2036 and the value of the

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FLP attributable to the contribution would be excluded. “But then we decided Estate of Powell v. Commissioner, 148 T.C. 392 (2017). We discovered and analyzed there, apparently for the first time, section 2043(a) of the Code as it applies to family limited partnerships.”

The court proceeded with an extended discussion of section 2043, fortunately avoiding *Powell's* doughnut and doughnut hole analogies, but applying a formula approach. The general formula applied by the court is:

$$\text{Value in Gross Estate} = \text{Consideration (d/o/death) included under §2033} + \text{FMV (d/o/death) of §2036 transfer} - \text{Consideration (d/o/transfer)}$$

Mr. Moore’s limited 95% partnership interest was valued at \$5.3 million by the estate and at \$8.5 million by the IRS. The opinion pointed out that the net value in the estate does not depend on which of these is correct because they net out in the formula.

In applying the facts to the formula, bear in mind that the opinion appears to treat all of the farm sale proceeds as includable under section 2036, including both the 80% in the FLP and the 20% paid to the Living Trust. Plugging the facts into the formula for the Moore estate, and taking into consideration that the values at the date of death and on the date of transfer to the FLP were roughly the same because the dates were within weeks of each other:

$$\text{Value in Gross Estate} = \text{Consideration (d/o/death) included under §2033} + \text{FMV (d/o/death) of §2036 transfer} - \text{Consideration (d/o/transfer) (the §2043 consideration offset)}$$

Consideration (d/o/death) included under §2033 = *Either \$5.3 million or \$8.5 million for the 95% LP interest in the FLP + (0.2 x value of farm at date of death)* – money that left the estate between the time of the sale and Mr. Moore’s death

+ FMV (d/o/death) of §2036 transfer = Value of farm at date of death

- Consideration (d/o/transfer) = *Either \$5.3 million or \$8.5 million for the 95% LP interest in the FLP + (0.2 x value of farm at date of death)*

Simplifying the equation (because the two items in italics above offset each other): Value in Gross Estate = Value of farm at date of death – money that left the estate between the time of the sale and date of death.

The opinion pointed out that further complexity would result if the distributions from the FLP to the Living Trust had not been fully spent. Example 5 in the opinion illustrates this phenomenon:

*Example 5: Discounted Interest, But Not Simple.* Now assume the same facts as example 4 [which described the transfer of land worth \$1,000 to a FLP in return for a partnership interest valued with a 25% discount for lack of control] except this time the FLP sells the land for \$1000. Then, the FLP makes a distribution of \$400 back to the aging father. Under the formula this produces a strange result. Included in the estate is \$400 cash (section 2033), \$450 for the FLP interest (section 2033),<sup>20</sup> \$1000 for the transferred land (section 2036), less \$750 (section 2043)—in all the estate now has a value of \$1100. Had the aging man just sold the land he would have only \$1000 in his estate.

<sup>20</sup> \$450 = \$600 (what’s left in the FLP after the \$400 distribution) × 0.75 (to reflect the 25% discount).

The amount included under section 2033 would be the date of death full **undiscounted** value of the remaining distribution proceeds plus the discounted value of the partnership interest, based on the value of partnership assets after the distribution. The section 2043 consideration offset would be the **discounted** value of the partnership interest at the date of transfer. The net value included in the estate would increase as a result of the distribution in an amount attributable to the difference between the undiscounted value of the remaining unspent distribution proceeds and the discounted value of the FLP at the date of transfer attributable to the amount of the later distributed assets. Thus, in the court’s example, the \$100 increase in the value of the estate (from \$1,000 to \$1,100) is the 25% discount multiplied by the \$400 distribution back to the father.



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(4) **Deductibility of Purported Loan to FLP and Attorney's Fees**

- (a) **Purported Loan to FLP Not Deductible.** Although the estate tax return reported the estate as owing \$2 million to the FLP as the result of the "loan" of \$2 million from the FLP to the Living Trust, the court found no evidence that the transfer was a loan. There was no promissory note, no interest charged or paid, no collateral, no maturity date, no payments made, and no demand for payments.
- (b) **Attorney's Fees Not Deductible.** A \$475,000 payment for "administrative attorney's fees" was not deductible because of the absence of evidence that the "fees were necessarily incurred in the administration of the estate." The fee was a flat fee, there was no detail about the intricacy of the work or the time put in, and when asked to describe the work performed for the estate, the attorney "was vague and testified only that his work continues to this day." There were no claims against the estate and all of Mr. Moore's property was in the Living Trust "so it's unclear what administration [the attorney] is responsible for." (Prior to Mr. Moore's death, the attorney was also paid a \$320,000 "design fee" for the structuring and implementation of the estate planning transfers.)

- (5) **No Charitable Deduction for Formula Transfer Attributable to Additional Value in Gross Estate Resulting From Estate Tax Audit.** Formula transfers to charity (to the Charitable Trust) were included in two places. (1) The Living Trust transferred to the Charitable Trust a portion of assets in the Living Trust sufficient to "result in the least possible federal estate tax payable as a result of my death." (2) The Irrevocable Trust (which owned the 95% limited partnership interest in the FLP) instructed the trustee to "distribute an amount equal to the value of any asset of this trust which is includible in my gross estate for federal estate tax purposes" to the Living Trust to be distributed in accordance with its terms (which included the formula charitable transfer described immediately above).

The IRS did not contest at least some of the charitable deduction claimed on the Form 706 for the formula amount left to the Charitable Trust based on values reported on the Form 706. Thus, the initial funding of the formula charitable transfer based on values of assets and deductions reported on the Form 706 was respected, at least in part. (See Item 10(11)(b) of the Observations Section below.)

The issue addressed by the court was whether an additional charitable deduction should be allowed as a result of "any increase in the value of Moore's estate" resulting from the estate tax examination and litigation. The court gave two reasons for denying "any charitable deduction for funds that might be transferred to the Charitable Trust under article 5, section 2 of the Irrevocable Trust": (1) a limitation based on the particular language of the trust agreement; and (2) a requirement that the charitable deduction must be ascertainable at a decedent's date of death.

- (a) **Particular Trust Language Limitation.** The literal language of article 5, section 2 of the Irrevocable Trust refers to transferring to the Living Trust "an amount equal to the value of any asset *of this trust* which is includible in my gross estate." (Emphasis in court opinion). The Irrevocable Trust owned the limited partnership interest, not the FLP assets. The additional amount included in the gross estate was an amount equal to the value of the farm transferred to the FLP, not the limited partnership interest itself. Therefore, the literal language of the Irrevocable Trust did not transfer any additional amount to the Living Trust.

**Observation:** In one respect, this is nit-picking over words (and suggests that different drafting might have avoided the court's analysis), but in a broader respect this raises the same issue that has been referred to in the marital deduction context (at the death of the first spouse) as the "marital deduction mismatch" issue. An "amount" is included in the gross estate equal to the full undiscounted value of the farm, but all the trust owns to leave to charity is a discounted partnership interest. Indeed, footnote 23 of the opinion indicates that the IRS made an alternative argument that even if the formula clause is respected, "the

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Irrevocable Trust lacks the assets to donate a sum large enough to eliminate the estate tax.” This issue is discussed in Item 10(11)(f) of the Observations Section below.

- (b) **Charitable Deduction Must be Ascertainable at Death.** A “much more general problem” is that charitable deductions cannot depend on actions of the decedent’s beneficiary or executor, and the charitable deduction must be ascertainable at a decedent’s date of death. Whether the Living Trust would get additional funds from the Irrevocable Trust to transfer to the Charitable Trust was not determinable at Mr. Moore’s death, but only after an audit that ultimately resulted in additional property being included in the gross estate. “For the exception to apply, it would have to have been *almost certain* that the Commissioner would not only challenge, but also successfully challenge the value of the estate.” (Emphasis added).

The court distinguished the *Christiansen* and *Petter* cases (in which, interestingly, Judge Holmes wrote the Tax Court opinions). In *Estate of Christiansen v. Commissioner*, 130 T.C. 1 (2008) (reviewed by the Court), *aff’d*, 586 F.3d 1061 (8th Cir. 2009), a sole beneficiary disclaimed all of the estate (under a fractional formula) in excess of a stated dollar amount, with the disclaimed assets passing to a charitable lead trust and foundation. In *Estate of Petter v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2009-280, *aff’d*, 653 F.3d 1012 (9th Cir. 2011), a gift was made of LLC units, with units up to a stated dollar value passing to trusts for the donor’s children and the excess units over that stated value passing to charity. Although both of those cases recognized formula-based transfers to charity, the court reasoned that in those cases “the transfer itself was not contingent on the happening of some event... [V]alue was at issue, but not whether there would be a transfer to the donee at all.” The court contrasted those situations with the *Moore* facts:

Article 5, section 2 of Moore’s Irrevocable Trust does not say that the Living Trust will receive a transfer of assets of unknown value. It says that whether the Living Trust will even receive a transfer of assets is unknown—contingent on an examination by the Commissioner. This is unlike *Estate of Christiansen*, where we *knew* the charity would get a transfer of assets, just not the value, or *Estate of Petter*, where we *knew* the charity would get some transfer of value, just not how much. Here, we *don’t know* if the charity would get any additional assets at all. (Emphasis in original).

The court seems to draw a big distinction between formulas based just on the *value* of assets and formulas based on other issues, such as what assets are in the gross estate or the amount of allowable deductions.

- (c) **Unknown From Case Facts.** The court’s actual holding is that no charitable deduction is allowed for funds that might be transferred from the Irrevocable Trust to the Charitable Trust under the formula transfer clause in the Irrevocable Trust. Even aside from a formula transfer from the Irrevocable Trust, the Living Trust itself made a formula transfer. Unless all of the Living Trust assets were originally allocated to the Charitable Trust under the Living Trust’s formula charitable transfer, additional assets should have been transferred to the Charitable Trust directly from the Living Trust in an amount to result in the “least possible federal estate tax.” The opinion does not directly address whether that transfer would be respected to qualify for a charitable deduction (but suggests that it would not).

Also, the opinion focused on not allowing an additional charitable deduction because of the inclusion of the farm in the gross estate. Would an additional charitable deduction be allowed for other reasons raised in the estate tax audit, such as disallowed deductions or gift tax paid within three years of death?

- (6) **Transfers in Return for Notes Not Respected as Loans, but Are Treated as Gifts.** Mr. Moore directed the FLP to transfer \$500,000 to each of his four children in return for a five-year note bearing interest at a rate of 3.6% from each of the children. The notes had no amortization schedule, no payments were made, and no efforts were made to collect on the notes. The IRS asserted that these transfers “were gifts and not loans because they lack a legitimate debtor-creditor relationship.” Various factors relevant in determining if a transfer creates a bona fide debt were summarized (citing *Estate of Rosen v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2006-115, as well

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as other cases). Even though the children signed notes and the debt was not proportionate to the children's ownership in the FLP (both of which weighed in favor of a bona fide debt), the court found it was "more likely than not" that these were gifts based on a variety of other factors:

- The notes had no fixed payment schedule;
- The children never made required interest payments;
- The FLP never demanded repayment of the loans;
- There was no evidence the children had the resources to repay the loans, and thin capitalization weighs against a finding of bona fide debt;
- Repayment depending solely on earnings does not support a finding of bona fide debt; The notes were not secured;
- Comparable funding from another lender was unlikely; The children did not set aside funds to repay the notes; and
- Most important, Mr. Moore had listed a desire that each of his children *receive* \$500,000 as one of his estate planning goals, and the attorney testified that the payments needed to be loans for tax purposes because "having [them] as a gift wouldn't be the best use of the tax laws."

These transfers from the FLP to the children, totaling \$2 million, were treated as gifts, and the additional resulting gift tax was included in the gross estate under section 2035(b) because the gifts had been made within three years of death.

- (7) **Epilogue.** According to the court's decisions dated August 17, 2020, the IRS had been advised that the son of Mr. Moore who had served as executor and trustee had died. In the absence of any motion to appoint a successor, the court accepted the IRS's Rule 155 calculations and found deficiencies of \$1,329,751 in gift tax and \$6,384,073 in estate tax. On September 28, 2020, the estate filed a notice of appeal to the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

#### e. Observations

- (1) **Long Delay.** This Tax Court memorandum decision (not a reviewed opinion involving negotiations with all Tax Court judges) was long delayed. The trial was held March 26, 2012, the last brief was filed February 13, 2013, and the docket sheet reflects no other actions until the memorandum opinion was filed April 7, 2020 – more than seven years later. Apparently, some of the issues in the case raised difficult issues for the court.

Altogether, the Moore family had to wait almost 11 years from the filing of the Tax Court petition in September 2009 and over 15 years from Mr. Moore's death in March 2005 to learn that it owed an additional \$7.7 million in taxes (and, as noted above, Mr. Moore's son who served as executor reportedly did not even survive the proceedings).

- (2) **Deathbed Planning.** Judge Holmes began his opinion by observing that after building a "thriving and very lucrative farm," the decedent's health went bad and he entered hospice care. "Then he began to plan his estate."

This is the latest in a string of cases in which judges are understandably skeptical when planning is implemented on death's doorstep that would result in huge discounts (an approximately 53% discount in this case) for tax savings purposes and would not serve a legitimate and significant nontax purpose. The IRS viewed the decedent's estate plan "as nothing more than a last-minute, last-ditch effort to avoid paying tax." In that context, the section 2036 result of this case is not at all surprising.

- (3) **Emphasis on Businesses Requiring Active Management to Satisfy "Legitimate and Significant Nontax Purpose" Requirement.** The opinion begins its analysis of the "bona fide" element of the bona fide sale for full consideration exception in section 2036(a) by saying that "whether a transfer was *bona fide* turns on motive" and reiterating the legitimate and significant

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nontax reason test announced fifteen years ago in *Estate of Bongard v. Commissioner*, 124 T.C. 95 (2005). (Some planners had believed that “bona fide” meant that a transfer occurred that was not a sham and represented something that really happened, but that position has been firmly rejected since 2005 in *Bongard*.) One sentence in the *Moore* opinion makes the observation that “[t]he desire to consolidate marketable assets and manage them as a family asset for continuing investment purposes is also a genuine nontax motive under section 2036. Estate of Purdue v. Commissioner, T.C. Memo. 2015-249.” Other than that one sentence, the opinion emphasizes that active management by family member partners is a necessary element in order for a court to find the existence of a legitimate and significant nontax reason for the FLP. The opinion states that prior cases finding that the bona fide test was satisfied involved “businesses that required active management.”

The opinion also states that protection from creditors cannot be a “significant” nontax reason to form an FLP. (It says that creditor protection “can be considered a legitimate – though not significant – nontax reason to form an FLP.”) It is startling to read that. If, because of wealth, background, profession, profile, reputation, personality, lifestyle, family connections, political history, or any other characteristic, a person is especially exposed to the threat of questionable claims by opportunistic claimants, then for that person protection against that threat is surely significant. For such a person, it appears that “significant” means almost the same thing as “legitimate.”

- (4) **Active Involvement of Other Family Member-Partners.** At a minimum, the opinion points out the desirability of having other family members actively involved in planning, discussing (i.e., “negotiating”) provisions about the partnership structure, having partner meetings, and being actively involved in decisions about the management of partnership assets.

This is especially important if a purpose of the FLP is to facilitate the family’s working together. Administer and manage the partnership in a way that is consistent with the stated purpose. The court observed:

Ronnie [one of Mr. Moore’s sons] also testified during trial that because the family was—as he put it—“dysfunctional,” the FLP was supposed to bring the family together. But if so, the FLP flopped. It doesn’t seem as if there has ever been a second meeting of the partners. An investment adviser handles all investment decisions according to a set of “investment objectives.” And neither Ronnie nor his siblings have vetoed any of the adviser’s decisions.

- (5) **Retention of Possession or Enjoyment of Transferred Assets.** Cases have made clear that the retention of “possession or enjoyment” of transferred assets to trigger the application of section 2036(a)(1) can be shown by an implied agreement. Planners have advised clients to retain assets outside the partnership for living expenses, so that no implication would arise that the decedent necessarily would be looking to use partnership assets for required living expenses. In this case, the court acknowledged that the decedent “kept sufficient assets for his personal needs,” but the fact that the decedent then proceeded still to use assets of the partnership for personal expenses evidenced retained possession or enjoyment of the transferred assets. From a planning standpoint, be wary of actually using partnership assets (or partnership distributions) for personal purposes.
- (6) **Treating Sale of Decedent’s Retained One-Fifth of Farm as Section 2036 Transfer; Use of Farm Property.** We are all very familiar with treating property contributed to an FLP or LLC as a section 2036 transfer, with the transferred property (undiscounted) being included in the gross estate. In this case 4/5ths of the farm was contributed to the FLP and included in the gross estate under section 2036(a)(1). But somewhat surprisingly, the remaining 1/5th interest that Mr. Moore retained in his Living Trust until the sale was treated as a transfer with retained enjoyment. Note — a sale to an unrelated party was treated as a section 2036 transfer! The use of the sale proceeds could not have been the reason for that; sales to third parties typically are not considered as section 2036 transfers no matter what the seller does with the sale proceeds. Typically the bona fide sale for full consideration exception would apply to third party sales. Clearly, there was a legitimate and significant nontax reason for selling the farm to a third party –

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it was to dispose of the farm. What was unusual in this case was that the decedent apparently contracted to continue living on the property, and to be in charge of making farm operations decisions, for the remainder of his very short life expectancy. (He lived about three months after the sale.) But even if that was treated as retained enjoyment, that would not explain why the bona fide sale for full consideration exception did not apply. Perhaps a small concession was made on the purchase price for the short period of time that the buyers agreed to allow their elderly neighbor to continue living on the property (though that seems unlikely and the court's opinion gives no hint of that). If such a price concession was made, that may have kept the full consideration requirement from being satisfied. But the court did not discuss why the bona fide sale for full consideration exception did not apply to the sale of the decedent's retained 1/5th interest in the farm.

As a practical matter, it made no difference in this case whether the sale proceeds from that 1/5th interest was included in the gross estate under section 2033 or section 2036, but the complete absence of any analysis of treating a sale of property to a third party as a section 2036 transfer is interesting, to say the least.

- (7) **Effect of Subsequent Transfer of All Interests in the FLP.** The court specifically listed as one of the four issues for consideration whether the subsequent transfer of the Living Trust's interest in the FLP to the Irrevocable Trust removed the value from the gross estate that was otherwise includable under section 2036, but the court did not, at least directly, discuss that issue. Footnote 17 of the opinion merely states that because the value of the farm is included in the gross estate under section 2036(a)(1) the opinion does not address "the subsequent transfer of the Living Trust's assets [i.e., the 95% interest in the FLP] to the Irrevocable Trust" and whether it "also triggers their inclusion under section 2036."

This is important because a way of defeating the inclusion of assets contributed to an FLP in the gross estate under section 2036(a)(1) is to transfer all of the interest in the FLP so that the decedent has not retained an interest in the assets contributed to the FLP "for life or for any period not ascertainable without reference to his death." That may not work to avoid section 2036 for two reasons: (1) the decedent continues to enjoy the transferred property even though he is no longer a partner, or (2) if, as in *Moore*, the transfer occurs in more than one step and is completed by the relinquishment of a retained interest described in section 2036 within three years of death (section 2035(a)(2)).

As to the first of those two reasons, interestingly, no distributions or transfers from the FLP appear to have been made after the decedent transferred his 95% interest to the Irrevocable Trust. However, Mr. Moore apparently did continue to make some use of partnership transfers that had been made to him prior to the date of the transfer of interests to the trust (including the payment of his income taxes attributable to his part of the pass-through income from the sale of the farm; the opinion states that Mr. Moore spent the \$2 million that he received from the FLP "before he died, mostly on income tax that he owed on the sale of the farm," but because Mr. Moore died in late March less than two months after the sale on February 4, it is likely that the income tax had not been paid before the date of death).

Undoubtedly, the second reason also would apply. Section 2035(a)(2) would have caused the property contributed to the partnership to continue to be in the estate because the retained interest that would otherwise cause inclusion under section 2036 was relinquished within three years of the decedent's death.

A few cases have recognized that a subsequent transfer of an interest in an FLP can prevent the inclusion of partnership assets under section 2036. Value attributable to interests that have been transferred at least three years earlier should not be subject to section 2036(a)(1) if no implied agreement of continued retained enjoyment exists (see the *Estate of Jorgenson*, *Estate of Kelly*, and *Estate of Rosen* cases).

- (8) **De Facto Trustee Discussion.** Several cases over the last several years have addressed situations in which a grantor effectively made all trust decisions, and have considered whether



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the grantor should effectively be treated as if he were the trustee. *E.g., United Food & Commercial Workers Unions v. Magruder Holdings, Inc.*, Case No. GJH-16-2903 (S.D. Md. 2019) (ERISA case in which court looked to whether section 678 applied to beneficiary's ability to withdraw assets as needed for health, education, support, and maintenance, but trustees never questioned whether withdrawn amounts were actually needed for those purposes; court reasoned that a "HEMS provision that exists only on paper cannot be said to restrict the power exercisable" by the beneficiary); *SEC v. Wyly*, 2014 WL 4792229 (S.D.N.Y. 2014) (failure to comply with fiduciary constraints regarding trust distributions caused a trust to be treated as a grantor trust for non-tax purposes).

The court in *Moore* had a similar discussion in the context of concluding that Mr. Moore's relationship to the assets contributed to the FLP did not change after the transfer: "Moore's children typically did things because Moore asked them to, and giving them nominal 'power' was no different from Moore keeping that power."

(9) **Section 2043 "Consideration Offset" Analysis**

(a) **Statutory Provision.** Section 2043(a) provides as follows:

(a) IN GENERAL.—If any one of the transfers, trusts, interests, rights, or powers enumerated and described in sections 2035 to 2038, inclusive, and section 2041 is made, created, exercised, or relinquished for a consideration in money or money's worth, but is not a bona fide sale for an adequate and full consideration in money or money's worth, there shall be included in the gross estate only the excess of the fair market value at the time of death of the property otherwise to be included on account of such transaction, over the value of the consideration received therefor by the decedent.

(b) **Reliance on *Powell* Section 2043 Analysis.** The opinion says that the Tax Court "discovered" and first analyzed section 2043(a) as it applies to family limited partnerships in *Estate of Powell v. Commissioner*, 148 T.C. 392 (2017). In that case, the plurality opinion raised the issue on its own with no argument or briefing from any party. (Whether the IRS raised the section 2043 issue in *Moore* is unknown.) The *Powell* case addressed the "double inclusion issue" when both the assets transferred to the partnership and the partnership interest itself are included in the gross estate. While reasoning that the reduction under section 2043 for the value received when assets were transferred to the partnership avoids a double inclusion, the analysis in *Powell* acknowledged that double taxation (which it called "duplicative transfer tax") could result if the assets contributed to the partnership appreciated between the date of contribution and the date of death.

The *Moore* opinion notes that example scenarios applying section 2043 in the FLP context "lead to what may seem odd results," but the court stated that it "must nevertheless apply the Code as it is written and interpreted in a Division Opinion." (A "Division Opinion" is more commonly referred to as a "T.C. opinion" – not, for example, a "memorandum opinion" – generally strengthened when an opinion, as in *Powell*, is "Reviewed by the Court." But see the discussion below.) However, the section 2043 discussion in *Powell* was controversial among the judges in that case and did not clearly have the support of a majority of judges participating in that opinion (and is likely dictum because the discussion had no impact on the ultimate outcome of the case). The "plurality" opinion (which espoused the double inclusion analysis) was joined by only 8 judges (including Judge Halpern (who wrote that opinion) and Judge Holmes (who also wrote the *Moore* opinion) , each of whom is now a Senior Judge, not one of the 16 current "regular" Tax Court judges, and therefore will not be participating in future decisions for which he was not the trial judge), a concurring opinion (that expressly rejected the double inclusion analysis) was joined by 7 judges, and 2 judges concurred in the plurality opinion in result only. The concurring opinion, which rejected the double inclusion analysis, reasoned that the inclusion of the partnership assets in the gross estate under section 2036 meant that the partnership interest itself was merely an alter ego of those same assets and should not also be included in the gross estate. That approach has been followed by the various FLP cases prior to *Powell* in which section 2036 was applied, and the IRS has not made that argument in *any* other FLP cases even though substantial additional estate tax liability would have resulted in cases with significant appreciation of partnership assets.

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- (c) **Section 2043 Background.** The section 2043 analysis was not actually “discovered” in *Powell*. The plurality opinion’s summary of how section 2043 applies in the context of section 2036 FLP cases is similar to what Professor Jeffrey Pennell has been telling planners for decades. See, e.g., Pennell, *Recent Wealth Transfer Developments*, ABA REAL PROP., PROB. & TR. LAW SECTION 14<sup>TH</sup> ANN. EST. PL. SYMPOSIUM, at 21-23 (2003).

In other contexts, the IRS has not used the double inclusion approach where doing so would result in unfair results. The IRS has previously ruled that life insurance proceeds received by a partnership should be not includible in the gross estate *both* under section 2042 and under section 2033 as to the decedent’s partnership interest under the reasoning that “unwarranted double taxation” would otherwise result. For example, in Revenue Ruling 83-147, 1983-2 C.B. 158, the IRS refused to include life insurance proceeds payable to a partnership both as part of a partner’s interest in the partnership and under section 2042 as a result of incidents of ownership attributed to the decedent as partner of the partnership, because doing so would result in “unwarranted double taxation”:

In *Estate of Knipp v. Commissioner*, 25 T.C. 153 (1955), *acq. in result*, 1959-1 C.B. 4, *aff’d on another issue* 244 F.2d 436 (4<sup>th</sup> Cir. Cir), *cert denied*, 355 U.S. 827 (1957), a partnership held 10 policies on the decedent’s partner’s life, at his death.... The court found that the decedent, in his individual capacity, had no incidents of ownership in the policies, and held that the insurance proceeds were not includible in the gross estate under the predecessor to section 2042(2) of the Code. The Service acquiesces in the result of *Estate of Knipp* on the basis that in that case the insurance proceeds were paid to the partnership and inclusion of the proceeds under the predecessor of section 2042 would have resulted in the **unwarranted double taxation** of a substantial portion of the proceeds, because the decedent’s proportionate share of the proceeds of the policy were included in the value of the decedent’s partnership interest. See also section 20.2042-1(c)(6) of the regulations (which adopts a similar rule with regard to life insurance proceeds paid to or for the benefit of a corporation). (Emphasis added.)

A distinction regarding life insurance inclusion under section 2042, however, is that section 2043(a) refers to transfers under sections 2035-2038 and 2041, but not transfers under section 2042.

Similarly, the regulations regarding GRATs state that if the GRAT assets are included under section 2036, the retained annuity interest payments that are payable after the decedent’s death are not also included under section 2033 “because they are properly reflected under this section.” Reg. §20.2036-1(c)(1)(i).

Over the last 23 years, 22 cases have held that assets contributed to a family limited partnership or LLC were included in a decedent’s estate under section 2036, but *none* of those cases, other than *Powell*, included both the FLP assets and the FLP interest in the gross estate. Despite this long history of FLP section 2036 cases and other examples of avoiding double inclusion described above, the *Moore* opinion responds:

Excluding the value of the partnership interest from Moore’s gross estate might appear to be the right result because it would prevent its inclusion in the value of the estate twice. The problem is that there is nothing in the text of section 2036 that allows us to do this.

- (d) **Major Practical Impact—Appreciation, Depreciation, Distributions.** Applying the double inclusion with a section 2043 consideration offset analysis (rather than simply including the section 2036 amount in the gross estate) has a practical impact on the overall result primarily in situations in which (1) the assets contributed to the entity have appreciated or depreciated by the time of death, or (2) distributions from the entity have been made that are still owned by the decedent at death.
- i. **Impact of Appreciation.** If the assets that were contributed to the entity have appreciated prior to the date of death, footnote 7 of the *Powell* plurality opinion acknowledged that “duplicative transfer tax” would apply because the date of death asset value is included in the gross estate under section 2036 offset only by the *date of contribution* discounted value of the partnership interest. The date of death value of the LP interest would also be included under section 2033, so all of the post-contribution appreciation of the assets would be included under section 2036 AND the discounted

post-contribution appreciation also would be included under section 2033. The effects in different example situations are summarized in various scenarios:

- (1) **No FLP.** Do nothing; continue owning assets directly
- (2) **FLP/No §2036.** Create FLP and §2036 does not apply
- (3) **FLP/Simple §2036.** Apply §2036 without double inclusion or §2043 analysis
- (4) **FLP/Double Inclusion §2036.** Apply §2036 with double inclusion and §2043 adjustment

**Example.** \$10 million contributed to FLP; Assets appreciate to \$12 million, 25% discount.

Under the double inclusion with section 2043 adjustment approach: Inclusion

$$\begin{aligned} &= \text{FLP Interest (DOD)}(\$2033) + [\$2036 \text{ Value (DOD)} - \text{FLP Interest (DOT)}] \\ &= (\$12 \text{ million} \times 0.75) + [\$12 \text{ million} - (\$10 \text{ million} \times 0.75)] \\ &= \$9 \text{ million} + [\$12 \text{ million} - \$7.5 \text{ million}] \\ &= \$13.5 \text{ million} \text{ [Observe: \$1.5 million more than if no FLP transfer.]} \end{aligned}$$

Inclusion Comparisons:

Scenario	Inclusion
(1) No FLP	\$12 million
(2) FLP/No §2036	$(\$12\text{M} \times 0.75) = \$9 \text{ million}$
(3) FLP/Simple §2036	\$12 million
(4) FLP/Double Inclusion §2036	\$13.5 million

**Observation: Double Inclusion Section 2036 vs. Simple Section 2036 (or No FLP) results in double taxation of \$1.5 million of gross estate value.**

As a result, more value would be included in the gross estate than if the decedent had never contributed assets to the FLP. Whether a court would actually tax the same appreciation multiple times (or whether the IRS would even make that argument) is unclear, but the *Powell* and *Moore* opinions do not even hint that a court would refuse to tax the same appreciation twice in that situation.

- ii. **Impact of Depreciation.** Footnote 7 of the *Powell* plurality opinion also stated that a “duplicative reduction” would result if the assets depreciated after being contributed to the FLP. The analysis is not that simple though. If the assets have depreciated in value, a net reduction in value likely does not occur by having section 2036 apply with the section 2043 adjustment as compared to section 2036 not applying. Section 2043(a) indicates that if section 2036 applies the excess of the fair market value at the time of death over the value of consideration received is included in the estate, indirectly saying that the net amount included under a string statute is merely reduced to zero (a negative number cannot be created).

**Example.** \$10 million contributed to FLP; Assets depreciate to \$6 million, 40% depreciation, 25% discount.

Under the double inclusion with section 2043 adjustment approach: Inclusion

$$\begin{aligned} &= \text{FLP Interest (DOD)}(\$2033) + [\$2036 \text{ Value (DOD)} - \text{FLP Interest (DOT)}] \\ &= (\$6 \text{ million} \times 0.75) + [\$6 \text{ million} - (\$10 \text{ million} \times 0.75)] \text{ but not less than zero} \\ &= \$4.5 \text{ million} + 0 \\ &= \$4.5 \text{ million} \text{ [Observe: Applying section 2036 has no impact; discount still allowed.]} \end{aligned}$$

Inclusion Comparisons:

Scenario	Inclusion
(1) No FLP	\$6 million
(2) FLP/No §2036	\$4.5 million
(3) FLP/Simple §2036	\$6 million
(4) FLP/Double Inclusion §2036	\$4.5 million

**Observation: Double Inclusion Section 2036 vs. Simple Section 2036 – Double Inclusion Section 2036 has the same result as if no section 2036 (25% discount is still permitted), but the Simple Section 2036 approach does not allow use of the 25% discount.**

Thus, creating an FLP may result in lower estate inclusion than doing nothing, even if section 2036 applies, if the assets should experience significant subsequent depreciation (40% depreciation in this example).

If an FLP is created, if section 2036 applies under a double inclusion/section 2043 adjustment approach, and if depreciation occurs, the net inclusion amount is the same whether or not section 2036/2043 applies if the depreciation percentage is equal to or greater than the discount percentage in valuing the FLP interest. For example, using the example above, if the discount percentage for valuing a limited partnership interest is 25% and if the assets depreciate by 25% from \$10 million to \$7.5 million, the net inclusion under the double inclusion section 2036/2043 approach is (\$7.5 million) minus (\$10 million x 0.75) or zero.

For an explanation (with examples) of the impact of appreciating and depreciating values, see Larry Katzenstein and Jeff Pennell, *Estate of Moore v. Commissioner – Discount Planning Debacle*, LEIMBERG INFORMATION SERVICES ESTATE PLANNING EMAIL NEWSLETTER #2790 (April 20, 2020).

- iii. **Distributions.** The other practical impact occurs if distributions are made from the entity that are still owned by the decedent at death, illustrated by Example 5 in the *Moore* opinion, discussed in Item 3 of the Opinion Section above. A brief summary of that example follows—

**Example 5** in *Moore* opinion: \$1,000 land contributed to FLP that is sold, 25% discount, but section 2036 applies, \$400 distribution that is unspent. Inclusion:

$$\begin{aligned} &= \text{Unspent distribution} + \text{FLP interest } (\$2033) + [\$2036 \text{ Value (DOD)} - \text{consideration (DOT)}] \\ &= \$400 + (\text{remaining } \$600 \times .75) + [\$1,000 (\text{land value}) - (\$1,000 \times .75)] \\ &= \$400 + \$450 + [\$1,000 - \$750] \\ &= \$1,100 \text{ (compared to } \$1,000 \text{ if no distribution is made)} \end{aligned}$$

**Observe:** Additional amount = Unspent distribution x 25% discount (\$400 x 0.25 = \$100).

Inclusion Comparisons:

Scenario	Inclusion
(1) No FLP	\$1,000
(2) FLP/No §2036	\$850
(3) FLP/Simple §2036	\$1,000
(4) FLP/Double Inclusion §2036	\$1,100

- (e) **Summary: Double Inclusion Analysis Going Forward in FLP Context.** Using the Double Inclusion section 2036 approach rather than the Simple Section 2036 approach results in

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“unfair” double taxation if *appreciation* occurs and still allows the partnership discount if significant *depreciation* occurs. From a policy standpoint, the Simple Section 2036 Approach seems preferable.

The fact that eight (but less than a majority) of the judges in *Powell* and now *Moore* adopted the double inclusion analysis may embolden the IRS to take that position in future cases. But we do not yet know how a majority of the Tax Court judges would rule as to that issue.

In any event, the double inclusion analysis applied in *Powell* and *Moore* raises a risk that contributing assets to an FLP (or for that matter, any entity) may leave a taxpayer in a significantly worse tax position than if the taxpayer had merely retained the assets, if the assets appreciate between the time of contribution to the entity and the date of death.

(10) **No Discussion of Section 2036(a)(2).** The IRS argued, in the alternative, that the FLP assets should be included in the gross estate under section 2036(a)(2). Footnote 17 of the opinion states that the court does not address the IRS’s section 2036(a)(2) arguments in light of the fact that the FLP’s assets are included in the gross estate under section 2036(a)(1).

(11) **Formula Transfer Following Resolution of Estate Tax Examination Not Recognized.** The opinion addresses whether a “future” charitable contribution deduction should be allowed with respect to “any increase in the value of Moore’s estate,” particularly with respect to the transfer of additional funds from the Irrevocable Trust to the Living Trust. (That would include assets in the Irrevocable Trust includable in the gross estate, such as value attributable to the FLP, but would not literally include additions to the net estate value by the disallowance of a deduction for the attorney’s fee or the inclusion of gift taxes attributable to an additional gift made within three years of death.)

(a) **No Impact on Defined Value Clause Cases.** Various cases have recognized the effectiveness of clauses leaving amounts to charity under formulas based on the valuation of hard-to-value assets. Defined value clauses use a formula to allocate assets that are transferred, with a certain value passing for family members and the excess that was transferred passing to another (non-taxable) person or entity (see *Succession of McCord*, *Hendrix*, *Estate of Christiansen*, *Estate of Petter*). *Moore* does not impact those cases, because its formula was based on determinations other than valuation (i.e., whether assets are included in the gross estate). The court carefully distinguished formulas based on valuation as compared to other issues impacting whether a transfer is made; indeed Judge Holmes authored the Tax Court opinions in the *Christiansen* and *Petter* cases approving defined value clauses involving formula charitable transfers.

The defined value clause cases addressed, among other arguments, a public policy argument based on *Commissioner v. Procter*, 142 F.2d 824 (4th Cir. 1944), *cert. denied*, 323 U.S. 756 (1944). *Moore* has none of that type of discussion, and its refusal to recognize the formula clause was not based on any public policy concerns.

(b) **Confusion Regarding Charitable Deduction Based on Assets as Reported on Form 706.** The opinion is confusing as to the IRS’s treatment of the charitable deduction and the court’s ultimate determination of the allowable charitable deduction. The opinion indicates that the estate claimed a deduction for \$4,745,671 on the Form 706 as filed, but the IRS determined that only \$516,000 should be allowed. Presumably, the \$4,745,671 reported on the Form 706 did not take into account the inclusion of FLP assets under section 2036, but was based only on values as reported. The opinion does not address the discrepancy of the amount of allowable charitable deduction based on assets as reported on the estate tax return.

(c) **Formula Transfer Based on Determinations Following Estate Tax Examination; Distinction Between Valuation Issues and Other Issues.** The primary concern addressed by the court is that charitable deductions must be ascertainable at a decedent’s date of death, and the Living Trust would get additional funds from the Irrevocable Trust (which could pass to charity under the formula transfer in the Living Trust) only after an audit and ultimate determination that additional value should be included in the estate. A problem with the



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“ascertainable at the date of death” argument in this context is that the *Christiansen* case allowed a charitable deduction under a formula disclaimer based on values as finally determined for estate tax purposes, and value changes determined in litigation following the estate tax examination in that case resulted in additional charitable deduction.

The Tax Court in *Christiansen*, in an opinion written by Judge Holmes, who (as noted above) decided the *Moore* case, reasoned as follows regarding the estate tax examination contingency argument:

The transfer of property to the Foundation in this case is not contingent on any event that occurred after Christiansen’s death (other than the execution of the disclaimer [which is recognized in charitable deduction regulations])—it remains 25 percent of the total estate in excess of \$6,350,000. **That the estate and the IRS bickered about the value** of the property being transferred doesn’t mean the transfer itself was contingent in the sense of dependent for its occurrence on a future event. Resolution of a dispute about the fair market value of assets on the date Christiansen died depends only on a **settlement or final adjudication of a dispute about the past, not the happening of some event in the future.** Our Court is routinely called upon to decide the fair market value of property donated to charity—for gift, income, or estate tax purposes. And the result can be an increase, a decrease, or no change in the IRS’s initial determination. (Emphasis added.)

The Eighth Circuit affirmance in *Christiansen* also emphasized that a regulation about charitable lead trusts recognizes that references to values “as finally determined for Federal estate tax purposes” are sufficiently certain to be considered “determinable” for purposes of qualifying as a guaranteed annuity interest. Reg. §20.2055-2(e)(2)(vi)(a). 586 F.3d 1061 (8th Cir. 2009).

The *Moore* opinion draws a distinction between estate tax examinations and court determinations of value in the context of other issues. A contingency based on ultimate determination of valuation issues is not a “transfer ... contingent on the happening of some event.” The court reasoned that in *Christiansen* and *Petter*, “we knew the charity clearly would receive assets, just not how much. Here we *don’t know* if the charity would get any additional assets at all.” (Emphasis in original.)

Under this approach, formula transfers to charity that depend on IRS or court determinations as to any issues other than values are suspect. The *Moore* opinion, however, offers no support for making a distinction between a court resolution of valuation issues vs. the resolution of other issues (such as section 2036 inclusion) that impacts the amount passing to charity under a formula bequest. Both involve significant uncertainties about how the issues will ultimately be resolved, based on a set of facts that existed at the date of death. For example, the opinion cites *Estate of Marine v. Commissioner*, 97 T.C. 368, 378-79 (1991), *aff’d*, 990 F.2d 136 (4th Cir. 1993), in support of its position that charitable deductions must be ascertainable at the decedent’s date of death. But in *Marine*, the personal representative could make bequests to compensate individuals chosen by the representative who contributed to the decedent’s well-being, with no limit on the number of persons who could receive such bequests, which would reduce the amount that could pass to charity under the residuary estate. That is a contingency based on future events and exercises of discretion involving distributions to an unlimited number of non-charitable beneficiaries, far different from a court determination of the tax effects of facts as they existed at the date of death. A court determination of the tax effects of transactions that had occurred involving the FLP by Mr. Moore is something that “depends only on a settlement or final adjudication of a dispute about the past” (to quote Judge Holmes’ reasoning in *Christiansen*). “It should make no difference whether inclusion as of the date of death is the trigger, rather than the value of the gross estate. Both cases turn on resolution of a dispute involving the ultimate size of the gross estate.” Larry Katzenstein and Jeff Pennell, *Estate of Moore v. Commissioner – Discount Planning Debacle*, LEIMBERG INFORMATION SERVICES ESTATE PLANNING EMAIL NEWSLETTER #2790 (April 20, 2020).

Mr. Moore’s executor and trustee filed notices of appeal to the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit on September 28, 2020.

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- (d) **Contrast with Marital Deduction Formula Transfers.** Classic testamentary marital deduction formula clauses traditionally take into account a wide variety of factors, not just valuation issues, to leave enough assets to a surviving spouse in order to avoid or minimize federal estate tax (analogous to the “least possible federal estate tax” formula charitable clause in *Moore*). Adjustments in estate tax examinations or litigation are taken into consideration in applying the formula marital bequest. If the formula transfer in the *Moore* case had been to a surviving spouse or marital trust, presumably the formula bequest would have been respected, assuming sufficient estate assets were available to satisfy the formula bequest. *E.g.*, *Turner II* (discussed in paragraph (f) below).
- (e) **Formulas Regarding Terms of Charitable Lead Trust.** Regulations acknowledge that the terms of a charitable lead trust may be determined under a formula, as long as the amount to be paid to charity is determinable.

An amount is determinable if the exact amount which must be paid under the conditions specified in the instrument of transfer can be ascertained as of the appropriate valuation date. For example, the amount to be paid may be a stated sum for a term of years, or for the life of the decedent’s spouse, at the expiration of which it may be changed by a specified amount, but it may not be redetermined by reference to a fluctuating index such as the cost of living index. In further illustration, the amount to be paid may be expressed in terms of a fraction or a percentage of the net fair market value, as finally determined for Federal estate tax purposes, of the residue of the estate on the appropriate valuation date, or it may be expressed in terms of a fraction or percentage of the cost of living index on the appropriate valuation date. Reg. §20.2055-2(e)(2)(vi)(a).

In particular, the regulation acknowledges that the annuity amounts can be based on values “as finally determined for Federal estate tax purposes.” PLRs have recognized various formula structures for determining the terms of testamentary charitable lead annuity trusts in order to “zero out” the value of the remainder interest. *E.g.*, PLRs 199927031, 9840036, 9631021, 918040, 9128051, 8946022. Private rulings have approved clauses designed to limit the remainder interest in a charitable lead annuity trust to the amount of the testator’s remaining GST tax exemption. *E.g.*, PLRs 200714009, 199927031, 984036. *See* Mary Hester, *Charitable Lead Trusts: The Time is Right*, 110 J. TAX’N 4 (Jan. 2009).

Those rulings do not recognize a formula that determines the *amount passing to* a charitable lead trust, as opposed to a formula that determines the *terms of* a charitable lead trust. Cases, however, such as *Christiansen* and *Petter*, have approved formulas that determine the amount that passes to charity, and there would seem to be no reason that a formula could not be used similarly to determine the amount that passes to a charitable lead trust. The issue raised in *Moore* is what types of such formulas will be recognized (in particular, whether formulas based on what assets are included in a decedent’s gross estate after an estate tax examination will be recognized).

- (f) **Analogy to “Marital Deduction Mismatch” Issue.** The first rationale in *Moore* for not respecting the formula transfer provision in the Irrevocable Trust was that the clause directed the transfer to the Living Trust of any assets of the Irrevocable Trust that were included in the decedent’s gross estate, but the Irrevocable Trust merely owned a limited partnership interest, not the FLP assets that were included in the estate under section 2036. This raises the same issue that has been referred to as the “marital deduction mismatch” issue in the marital deduction context (at the death of the first spouse). An “amount” is included in the gross estate equal to the full undiscounted value of the farm, but all the trust owns to leave to charity is a discounted partnership interest. Footnote 23 of the opinion indicates that the IRS made an alternative argument that even if the formula clause is respected, “the Irrevocable Trust lacks the assets to donate a sum large enough to eliminate the estate tax.”

This issue in the marital deduction context was summarized by the Tax Court in *Estate of Turner v. Commissioner*, 138 T.C. 306, 313-14 (2012) (sometimes referred to as “*Turner II*”) (footnote omitted):

In some cases the Internal Revenue Service has taken the position that even when section 2036(a) applies, the marital deduction is measured by the value of what actually passes to the surviving spouse,

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which is a discounted partnership interest, and not by the value of the underlying assets. *Estate of Black v. Commissioner*, 133 T.C. 340, 342 (2009); *Estate of Shurtz v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2010-21. This produces a mismatch between values for the gross estate inclusion and the marital deduction calculation. However, this type of mismatch is not present in this case: respondent allowed an increased marital deduction that he calculated on the basis of the value of assets transferred in exchange for the partnership interests that Clyde Sr. held at death, rather than on the basis of the discounted values of the general and limited partnership interests that Clyde Sr. owned at death, to the extent that they passed to Jewell [Clyde Sr.'s wife]. The estate recognizes that, and we leave this mismatch problem for another day.

- (g) **No Concern With Transfer Under Formula Even Though Not Respected for Tax Purposes.** A concern with some defined value clauses is that the clause may require a transfer (for example, to a spouse, a charity, or a retention by the grantor) according to the contract even though the transfer is not respected for tax purposes. That would not happen under the formula clause in the Living Trust in *Moore* because the amount left to charity under that clause was an amount that resulted in the least possible federal estate tax. The court determined that an additional transfer to charity would not reduce the estate tax, so the additional transfer presumably would not be made under the terms of the agreement.

## 11. A Taxpayer Valuation Victory (Mostly): *Nelson*

**a. Synopsis.** This gift tax case determined the value of gifts and sales of interests in a limited partnership, the primary asset of which was 27% of the common stock of a holding company that directly or indirectly owned 100% of eight subsidiaries (six of which were operating businesses). The gifts and sales were of limited partner interests having a specified dollar value on the transfer date "as determined by a qualified appraiser within ninety (90 days) of the effective date of the Assignment" (180 days in the case of the sale). An appraisal was prepared for the holding company, which was then used to prepare an appraisal for the transferred limited partner interests. The percentage limited partner interests that were transferred were based on those appraisals and documented in the partnership's records and used for preparing subsequent income tax returns.

The IRS took the position that the transfers resulted in additional gifts of about \$15 million. The taxpayers first argued that the transfers were actually of interests worth a particular dollar value rather than of particular percentage interests. The court disagreed, observing that the clauses in the assignments "hang on the determination by an appraiser within a fixed period; value is not qualified further, for example, as that determined for Federal estate tax purposes."

**Observation:** This is a practical approach that is often used in structuring assignments of hard-to-value assets. The IRS did not object to this type of assignment (determining the percentage interest transferred on the basis of an appraisal completed relatively soon after the transfer) as abusive, but merely proceeded to enforce the assignment as drafted and then value the interests so transferred.

The court ultimately determined that the 27% interest that the partnership owned in the holding company was valued using a 15% lack of control discount (slightly lower than the taxpayers' expert's position of a 20% discount but higher than the IRS's expert's 0% discount) and 30% for lack of marketability (agreed to by experts for both the taxpayers and the IRS). The holding company value was then used to determine the value of the limited partner interests, which the court determined using a 5% lack of control discount (compared to 15% by the taxpayer's expert and 3% by the IRS's expert) and a 28% lack of marketability discount (compared to 30% by the taxpayers' expert and 25% by the IRS's expert). The values determined by the court resulted in an additional gift value of about \$4.5 million. ***Nelson v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2020-81 (June 10, 2020, Judge Pugh).**

### b. Basic Facts

- (1) **Founding of WEC.** In 1971, Johnny Warren, Mrs. Nelson's father cofounded (with another family) a company providing gas compression equipment for the oil and gas industry. In 1975, Mr. Warren and his brother-in-law bought the other family's interest in that business. In 1985, Mr. Warren purchased the assets of a Caterpillar dealership. In 1990, Warren Equipment Co. (WEC) was organized as a Delaware corporation that served as a holding company owning 100% of six subsidiaries with operating businesses (including one business that the court analyzed as a

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subsidiary of WEC even though it was actually wholly owned by one of the other subsidiaries, making it an indirect, or third-tier, subsidiary of WEC), a seventh subsidiary that provided administrative services to the businesses, and an eighth subsidiary that owned the real estate on which the various businesses operated. The businesses were successful and acquired other related businesses. Mr. Warren died in 1999, and by 2008 WEC was owned primarily by his four children (including his daughter, Mrs. Nelson).

- (2) **Creation of FLP.** Mrs. Nelson transferred her shares, representing about 27% of the common stock of WEC, to an FLP on October 1, 2008. As the court described it, the FLP “was formed as part of a tax planning strategy to (1) consolidate and protect assets, (2) establish a mechanism to make gifts without fractionalizing interests, and (3) ensure that WEC remained in business and under the control of the Warren family.” Mrs. Nelson’s WEC stock comprised 99% of the value of the FLP’s assets.

Mrs. Nelson and her husband were the sole general partners (collectively owning the 1% general partner interest), and Mrs. Nelson owned most of the limited partner interests (93.88%), with the balance of the limited partner interests being owned by custodianships and trusts for family members.

Both WEC and the FLP had transfer restrictions in their governing documents, but the appraisals did not seem to apply any reduction in the value of the stock of WEC or the partnership interests of the FLP by reason of the transfer restrictions (so no section 2703 issue was raised).

- (3) **Gift and Sale of FLP Interests.** About three months after the FLP was formed, Mrs. Nelson made a gift on December 31, 2008, of an interest in the FLP to a trust (the “Trust”) for her husband and her four daughters of which her husband was the trustee (this was what has come to be referred to as a spousal lifetime access trust, or “SLAT”). The gift assignment provided:

[Mrs. Nelson] desires to make a gift and to assign to \* \* \* [the Trust] her right, title, and interest in a limited partner interest having a fair market value of TWO MILLION NINETY-SIX THOUSAND AND NO/100THS DOLLARS (\$2,096,000.00) as of December 31, 2008 \* \* \*, as determined by a qualified appraiser within ninety (90) days of the effective date of this Assignment.

Two days later, on January 2, 2009, Mrs. Nelson sold additional limited partner interests in the FLP to the Trust in return for a \$20 million note. The note provided for 2.06% interest on unpaid principal, was secured by the limited partner interest that was sold, and required annual interest payments through the end of 2017 (suggesting that it was a 9-year note). (The interest rate was the mid-term AFR for January 2009, applicable for debt instruments over 3 years but not over 9 years). The Sale and Assignment document provided:

[Mrs. Nelson] desires to sell and assign to \* \* \* [the Trust] her right, title, and interest in a limited partner interest having a fair market value of TWENTY MILLION AND NO/100THS DOLLARS (\$20,000,000.00) as of January 2, 2009 \* \* \*, as determined by a qualified appraiser within one hundred eighty (180) days of the effective date of this Assignment \* \* \*.

- (4) **Appraisals of WEC and FLP Interests, Determination of Percentage Interests Transferred.** Mrs. Nelson engaged Barbara Rayner of Ernst & Young to appraise the WEC stock owned by the FLP (which she determined to be \$860 per share, or about \$56.6 million). That value was then used by Roy Shrode to appraise the limited partner interests in the FLP, and he determined that a 1% limited partner interest was worth \$341,000 and that the gift and sale equated, respectively, to transfers of 6.14% and 58.65% limited partner interests (rounded).

The partnership agreement was subsequently amended to reflect transfers of 6.14% and 58.65% limited partner interests to the Trust, and these ownership percentages were reflected on the Schedules K-1 for the FLP from 2008 through 2013, and proportional cash distributions from the FLP were based on those percentage ownerships of limited partner interests.

- (5) **Gift Tax Returns.** Mr. and Mrs. Nelson reported the 2008 gift by Mrs. Nelson as a split gift. Their 2008 Form 709s each reported a gift to the Trust “having a fair market value of \$2,096,000 as determined by independent appraisal to be a 6.1466275% limited partner interest,” and half of

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that amount was a gift by each spouse for gift tax purposes. The sale was not reported on the 2009 gift tax returns for the Nelsons.

The IRS selected the 2008 and 2009 gift tax returns for examination. A proposed settlement agreement was negotiated in the administrative appeals process. In light of those settlement discussions, the partnership agreement was amended to reduce the percentage interest owned by the Trust by 26.24%, from 64.79% to 38.55%, resulting in a proportional 40% reduction in the interest owned by the Trust). The settlement was never completed. (As discussed in Item (3) of the Observations, query if the family is much better off with the result of the *Nelson* opinion than if the settlement had been completed and the percentage ownership reductions had been required?)

- (6) **IRS Appraisal Expert.** The IRS engaged Mark Mitchell as its expert appraiser. (He has served as a valuation expert for the IRS in other cases, including *Hoffman v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2001-209, and *Grieve v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2020-8.)
- (7) **Texas Residents.** Mr. and Mrs. Nelson were residents of Texas when they filed their petitions.

### c. Court's Analysis

- (1) **Burden of Proof.** The taxpayers argued that the burden of proof shifted to the IRS under section 7491(a) because they produced credible evidence as to factual issues, but the court ruled that was moot because it resolved the issues on the basis of a preponderance of the evidence.
- (2) **Transfers of Percentage Interests Based on Appraised Values Rather Than Transfers of Dollar Values Based on Values as Finally Determined for Gift Tax Purposes**

The taxpayers argued that Mrs. Nelson transferred limited partner interests worth \$2,096,000 and \$20 million as finally determined for gift tax purposes, despite the language in the Assignment documents. They contended that this intent was evidenced by their subsequent actions to modify the purported transferred amounts to reflect settlement discussions with the IRS about the values of the limited partner interests.

The court disagreed, looking to the plain language of the assignments, which transferred interests worth specified dollar amounts “as determined by a qualified appraiser within” 90 days for the gift and 180 days for the sale. The court contrasted the defined value cases that addressed transfers of property worth specified dollar amounts based on values as finally determined for gift or estate tax purposes (*Wandry, Hendrix, Petter, Christiansen*):

Therefore, to decide whether the transfers were of fixed dollar amounts or fixed percentages, we start with the clauses themselves, rather than the parties’ subsequent actions.

...

The transferred interests thus are expressed in the transfer instruments as an interest having a fair market value of a specified amount as determined by an appraiser within a fixed period. The clauses hang on the determination by an appraiser within a fixed period; value is not qualified further, for example, as that determined for Federal estate tax purposes....

... By urging us to interpret the operative terms in the transfer instruments as transferring dollar values of the limited partner interests on the bases of fair market value as later determined for Federal gift and estate tax purposes, petitioners ask us, in effect, to ignore “qualified appraiser \* \* \* [here, Mr. Shrode] within \* \* \* [a fixed period]” and replace it with “for federal gift and estate tax purposes.” While they may have intended this, they did not write this. They are bound by what they wrote at the time. As the texts of the clauses required the determination of an appraiser within a fixed period to ascertain the interests being transferred, we conclude that Mrs. Nelson transferred 6.14% and 58.35% of limited partner interests in [the FLP] to the Trust as was determined by Mr. Shrode within a fixed period.

- (3) **Valuation of WEC (Holding Company, 27 Percent of the Common Stock of Which Was the FLP's Primary Asset)**

The six underlying operating company subsidiaries were valued separately by the taxpayers’ expert. Three of the subsidiaries (the Caterpillar dealership and two smaller subsidiaries also involved in heavy equipment dealer operations) were valued on a net asset value method, which



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Ms. Rayner had viewed as common for that industry. One other subsidiary was valued using the income approach, and two other subsidiaries were valued using a combination of the income approach and market approach. The value of the subsidiary that owned the real estate was determined by a third-party appraiser. The administrative subsidiary (which provided administrative services to all of the businesses) was ignored for valuation purposes (agreed to by both the taxpayers' and IRS's experts). Those values were combined and the value of WEC's debt and preferred stock were subtracted to determine that WEC's common equity was worth \$363.7 million on a controlling basis before discounts. The appraiser then applied lack of control and lack of marketability discounts in valuing the 27% of common stock of WEC that was owned by the FLP.

The taxpayers' expert applied a 20% lack of control discount. The IRS's expert used no lack of control discount, reasoning that the analysis of the underlying values of the subsidiaries resulted in noncontrolling interest values. Both experts agreed that a 30% lack of marketability discount was appropriate. The court ultimately determined that the minority interest that the partnership owned in the holding company was valued using a 15% lack of control discount and 30% lack of marketability discount.

The court primarily addressed two issues regarding the valuation of WEC. First, the experts disagreed as to whether the valuation of the various subsidiaries was of a controlling or noncontrolling value and therefore whether lack of control discounts should be applied in valuing the 27% of common stock of WEC that was owned by the FLP. The court concluded that the separate values of the subsidiaries reflected "at least some elements of control," but that "some discount should apply in valuing a minority interest in WEC common stock." The court reduced the lack of control discount from 20% to 15%.

Second, the taxpayer's appraiser used both the income approach (reflecting a value of \$335.1 million) and market approach (reflecting a value of \$269.8 million) to value two of the operating subsidiaries, concluding that the value of the two was "reasonably represented as \$309.0 million." The court concluded that the evidence was not sufficient to support using a market approach to value those subsidiaries, suggesting that the undiscounted value of the two subsidiaries should have been \$335.1 million rather than \$309 million, but it is not clear how the court took that difference into consideration in concluding that the value of the WEC stock was \$912 per share. (The taxpayers' expert valued the FLP's WEC stock at \$860 per share, and the court's \$912 per share number appears almost totally attributable to applying a 15% rather than a 20% lack of control discount [ $\$860 \times 85\%/80\% = 913.75$ , close to \$912].) Perhaps the court did not mention this difference because the IRS's expert had not disagreed with the taxpayers' expert's undiscounted value of the holding company.

#### **(4) Discounted Value of Limited Partner Interests**

The taxpayers' expert began with using the appraised value of WEC and adding the other FLP assets and making adjustments for lack of control and lack of marketability discounts to value the transferred limited partner interests.

##### **(a) Lack of Control Discount**

Both experts based their lack of control discounts on the lack of control discounts in the case of what they viewed as comparable closed-end funds. The taxpayers' expert concluded that a 15% lack of control discount applied.

The IRS's expert analyzed 30 closed-end funds but reasoned that the FLP was not comparable to any of them. Without explaining the expert's reasoning, the opinion states that "[h]e determined that there would be almost no possibility of a lack of control disadvantage for a minority owner of [the FLP] except 'under certain circumstances, the precise nature of which cannot be exactly determined with reference to empirical/market data.'" He applied a 5% discount "to account for that remote possibility," which he reduced by another 2% because of the low probability that the FLP "would undertake any significant change in its operating profile," resulting in a 3% lack of control discount.

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The court stated that none of the closed-end funds were comparable, and rejected both experts' analyses. The court found the IRS's expert's explanation of how he arrived at his discount unconvincing, but then seemed to adopt that expert's analysis, concluding that "we do agree with him that the possibility of a lack of control disadvantage for a minority owner is remote. We therefore adopt a 5% lack of control discount ..."

**Observation:** Neither the expert (so far as the opinion reveals) nor the court explained *why* "the possibility of a lack of control disadvantage for a minority owner is remote."

(b) **Lack of Marketability Discount**

The taxpayers' expert relied on certain studies of sales of restricted stock and sales of private, pre-IPO stock in applying a 30% discount.

The IRS's expert similarly examined several studies of sales of restricted stock and pre-IPO stock, but involving more recent data, and also used "quantitative models that looked at the role of liquidity premiums in calculating the value of a forgone put option on the basis of the Black-Scholes model." Applying that analysis, he concluded that the approximate range of discounts was 20% to 35%, and used 25% "because 25% was approximately equal to the mid-point of these two ranges."

**Observation:** The actual average, or arithmetic mean, or "mid-point," of 20% and 35% is 27.5%, and the geometric mean is approximately 26.5%, neither of which would have been difficult to compute.

The court reasoned that prior cases had disregarded the studies that had been used by the taxpayers' expert and that the IRS's expert's analysis was more thorough. Without explanation, the court found as reasonable the IRS's expert's reasoning that the FLP's lack of marketability discount "should be incrementally lower than WEC's [lack of marketability] discount because the marketability of WEC shares was considered in computing the WEC discount."

**Observation:** What??? If the subsidiary businesses were fairly marketable resulting in low marketability discounts for them, the marketability discount for the intra-family FLP that was controlled by the parents had to be even lower? Why are those two marketability discounts tied to each other? That reasoning would seem to suggest that the lack of marketability discount for partnerships owning marketable securities should be zero. Perhaps the court has a reasonable justification for approving this statement, but the opinion does not describe that reasoning.

The court stated that "[w]hile the IRS's expert's contention is reasonable, he provides no support for his conclusion that 25% is appropriate other than his claim that 25% was equal to the median of the ranges (we note that 28% is the median)." Therefore, the court used a 28% marketability discount.

(5) **Conclusion**

The court ultimately determined that the 27% interest that the partnership owned in the holding company WEC was valued by using discounts of 15% for lack of control (slightly lower than the taxpayers' expert's position of 20%) and 30% for lack of marketability (agreed to by experts for both the taxpayers and the IRS). The holding company value was then used to determine the value of the limited partner interests, which the court determined by using discounts of 5% for lack of control (compared to 15% by the taxpayer's expert and 3% by the IRS's expert) and 28% for lack of marketability (compared to 30% by the taxpayers' expert and 25% by the IRS's expert).

The fair market values of the gift and sale transfers, as compared to the anticipated amounts, are as follows.

	Value of Transfer Anticipated by Taxpayers	Value of Transfer (and Increase in Value) Asserted by IRS	Value of Transfer (and Increase in Value) Determined by Court
<b>Gift</b>	\$2,096,000	\$3,522,018 (+\$1,426,018)	\$2,524,983 (+\$428,983)
<b>Sale</b>	\$20,000,000	\$33,607,038 (+\$13,607,038)	\$24,118,933 (+\$4,118,933)
<b>Total</b>	\$22,096,000	\$37,129,056 (+\$15,033,056)	\$26,643,916 (+\$4,547,916)

Applying the 45% gift tax rate that was in effect in 2008 and 2009, the court, on July 28, 2020, issued orders and decisions determining the total gift tax deficiencies to be \$2,016,564. But a comparison of the amounts in the above table shows that this is only about 30% of what the IRS was demanding, making the case, in effect, a 70% taxpayer victory.

#### d. Observations

##### (1) Not a Rejection of Defined Value Clauses

The court's refusal to treat this as a transfer of a dollar amount based on values as finally determined for gift tax purposes might on first blush be viewed as a rejection of a defined value transfer. That is not the case. The transfer was of a defined value of interests not as finally determined for gift tax purposes but as determined by a qualified appraisal that would be completed shortly after the date of the transfer.

##### (2) Importance of Using Grantor Trusts With Defined Value Transfers

The facts of *Nelson* illustrate the importance of using grantor trusts with defined value transfers. If the amount transferred depends on values as finally determined for gift tax purposes, the amounts actually transferred may not be determined for years. In the meantime, income tax returns are filed, reflecting the anticipated amounts that were transferred. In *Wandry v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2012-88, the IRS argued that "if petitioners prevail it will likely require the preparation and filing of numerous corrective returns." A much preferable planning design is to make the gifts and sales to grantor trusts. Even if the ownership percentages change as a result of a gift tax audit, all of the income and deductions will have been reported on the grantor's income tax return in any event, and no corrective returns should be necessary (unless the parties wish to file corrected entity level returns to make clear the appropriate sharing of profits and losses of the entity's owners).

In *Nelson*, the taxpayers attempted to make adjustments in the percentages that were transferred on the basis of settlement discussions with IRS appeals. The *Nelson* court's analysis indicates that adjusting the percentage interests transferred was not appropriate. But if the percentage interests transferred had changed, no amended income tax returns would have been needed because the transfers were made to the Trust, which was a grantor trust (if for no other reason, because the grantor's spouse was a beneficiary of the trust), so all of the income was reported on Mrs. Nelson's income tax return, whether the interests were owned by Mrs. Nelson or by the Trust.

##### (3) Potential Disadvantage of Defined Value Clauses

This case illustrates a potential disadvantage of using defined value clauses. This case did not involve a defined value clause, so the percentage interests transferred did not have to be adjusted to reflect the values determined by the court. Instead, the donors made additional taxable gifts and may have had to pay additional gift taxes. The court ultimately determined that the taxpayers made additional gifts of about \$4.5 million, resulting in additional gift taxes of just over \$2 million.

As a result of the settlement discussions with IRS Appeals, the taxpayers attempted to adjust the percentage interests transferred from 64.79% (for the gift and sale) to only 38.55%. If that had been the effect of the assignment clauses, the parties would have decreased the Trust's

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interest in the FLP (with underlying assets of about \$60.7 million) by 26.24%, or a reduction of the Trust's value by about \$15.9 million, without counting subsequent appreciation and income. It might have been thought that the family in retrospect would be delighted that they "lost" their argument that the assignments were defined value transfers. They might have been happy to pay an additional \$2 million of gift tax in order to keep in the Trust an additional \$15.9 million (effectively, at a 45% gift tax rate, locking in an initial valuation discount of about 72%), plus untold subsequent appreciation and income (unreduced by income tax because the grantor pays it) that has accumulated in the Trust during the intervening twelve years. Nevertheless, the taxpayers filed notices of appeal to the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit on October 16, 2020.

**(4) Support of Planning Alternative for Transferring Hard-To-Value Assets; 90 vs. 180 Days for Appraisals**

As a practical matter, valuing hard-to-value assets on the date of the transfer is impossible. A formula transfer of a dollar value worth of a particular asset, based on an appraisal to be obtained within a specified term in the near future, is routinely used, and is not viewed by the IRS as abusive. By the time the gift tax return is filed, the appraisal will be at hand, and a specific number of shares or units that have been transferred pursuant to the formula will be known and listed on the gift tax return. *See* Rev. Rul. 86-41, 1986-1 C.B. 300 ("In both cases, the purpose of the adjustment clause was not to preserve or implement the original bona fide intent of the parties, as in the case of a clause requiring a purchase price adjustment based on an appraisal by an independent third party retained for that purpose").

The IRS apparently raised no objections to these assignments based on values as determined by appraisals within a short time after the transfers, and indeed simply proceeded to enforce the terms of the assignments.

Obviously, that approach provides no protection against gift taxes in the event of an audit. The key distinction of a classic defined value type of transfer is that the formula dollar value being transferred is based on values as finally determined for federal gift tax purposes.

The assignments in *Nelson* provided that the appraisal would be determined within 90 days for the gift transaction and within 180 days for the sale transaction. The gift and sale were made two days apart. Surely the plan was to use the same appraisals for both purposes. Why different time periods were allowed for obtaining the appraisals for the two different transactions is unclear. Perhaps the parties realized that, as a practical matter, obtaining an appraisal of a holding company that owned six operating subsidiaries and two other non-operating subsidiaries, and then subsequently using that appraisal to obtain an appraisal of the limited partner interests all within 90 days was not realistic. Or perhaps they did not want to extend the due date of the gift tax return (maybe in the hope of attracting less attention) and therefore needed the appraisal for the December 31 gift before April 15. Whether the appraisals were indeed obtained within 90 days is not addressed in the opinion. Even if the appraisals were obtained outside that window, they were used to determining the percentage interests that were transferred, and the IRS raised no objections about the specific time frame in which the appraisals were completed.

**(5) Partnership Respected by IRS Despite Being Created Shortly Before Transfers**

The FLP was created only about three months before the transfers, but the IRS did not argue that the partnership should be ignored as simply an artificial device to produce more valuation discounts.

**(6) Transfer Restrictions Not Addressed in Appraisals, So No Section 2703 Issues Arose**

Both the WEC corporate documents and the FLP agreement contained transfer restrictions, generally just allowing transfers to family members. For the corporation, shareholders could also sell their shares back to the corporation or other shareholders, and for the FLP, the partners could also sell interests with the approval of the general partners (who happened to be Mr. and Mrs. Nelson) or subject to a right of first refusal by the FLP and the other partners. None of the experts applied any valuation discounts because of the transfer restrictions. Therefore, no issues

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arose as to whether the restrictions should be disregarded in valuing the transfers under section 2703.

**(7) Sale for Note Using AFR Was Respected**

The sale in early 2009 in return for a note using the mid-term AFR that was secured by the limited partner interest that was sold was respected by the IRS. The IRS did not attempt to argue that the note's value should be discounted because the interest rate was less than a market interest rate.

Anecdotal indications are that the IRS has recently raised questions in some audits as to whether notes using the AFR in sale transactions should be discounted in value because of the interest rate. So far, there is no case law supporting that position. *But see* PLR 200147028, in which the IRS seemed to embrace a market interest rate standard when it ruled that partitioned and reformed trusts "will retain their GST tax exempt status ... [i]f the trustee elects to make one or more loans to the beneficiaries ... provided that such loans are adequately secured and subject to a market rate of interest." There is no indication in the ruling whether the taxpayers who had requested the ruling had included that proviso on their own or if perhaps the IRS had required them to add it. (The ruling states that the taxpayers had asked a court to grant that discretion and the court had agreed, but it doesn't indicate whether that request had been made at the suggestion of the IRS after the ruling request had been submitted).

Most planners use the applicable federal rate, under the auspices of section 7872, as the interest rate on notes for intra-family installment sales. Section 7872 addresses the gift tax effects of "below-market" loans, and section 7872(f)(1) defines "present value" with reference to the "applicable Federal rate." Using section 7872 rates would seem to be supported by the position of the IRS in a Tax Court case and in several private rulings.

In *Frazee v. Commissioner*, 98 T.C. 554 (1992), the IRS urged, as its primary position, that the interest rate under section 7872 (rather than the interest rate under section 483 or any other approach), should apply for purposes of determining the gift tax value of a promissory note in the context of a sale transaction. Whether the section 7520 rate or some other market rate should apply was not strictly before the court, because the IRS proposed using the lower section 7872 rate. However, the court analyzed section 7872 and concluded that it applied for purposes of valuing a note given in a seller financed sale transaction:

Nowhere does the text of section 7872 specify that section 7872 is limited to loans of money. If it was implicit that it was so limited, it would be unnecessary to specify that section 7872 does not apply to any loan to which sections 483 or 1274 apply. The presence of section 7872(f)(8) signaled Congress' belief that section 7872 could properly be applicable to some seller financing. We are not here to judge the wisdom of section 7872, but rather, to apply the provision as drafted. 98 T.C. at 588.

The opinion concluded with an acknowledgement that this approach was conceded by the IRS in its position that section 7872 applied rather than valuing the note under a market rate approach: "We find it anomalous that respondent urges as her primary position the application of section 7872, which is more favorable to the taxpayer than the traditional fair market value approach, but we heartily welcome the concept." *Id.* at 590. The concept is welcome, probably because rates under section 7872 are objective and do not burden the court with the need for evidence, argument, and judgment.

The use of the section 7872 rate for intra-family note transactions was subsequently approved in *True v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2001-167 ("We concluded in *Frazee v. Commissioner*, supra at 588-589, that section 7872 does not apply solely to loans of money; it also applies to seller-provided financing for the sale of property. In our view, the fact that the deferred payment arrangement in the case at hand was contained in the buy-sell agreements, rather than in a separate note as in *Frazee*, does not require a different result."), *aff'd on other grounds*, 390 F.3d 1210 (10th Cir. 2004).



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Private letter rulings have also taken the position that using an interest rate that is equal to or greater than the AFR will not be treated as a gift, merely because of the interest rate that is used on the note. *E.g.*, PLRs 9408018; 9535026.

**(8) No Issue of “Equity” in the Sale Transaction**

Although PLR 9535026 (which often is cited as the IRS’s first approval of an installment sale to a grantor trust) does not refer to any “equity” in the trusts, such as other property to help secure the debt or property with which to make a down payment, it is well known that the IRS required the applicants for the ruling to commit to such an equity of at least 10% of the purchase price. *See generally* Michael Mulligan, *Sale to a Defective Grantor Trust: An Alternative to a GRAT*, 23 EST. PLAN. 3, 8 (Jan. 1996). (In PLR 9251004, the IRS had held that a transfer of stock to a trust with no other assets, in exchange for the trust’s installment note, “must be considered a retention of the right to receive trust income” for purposes of section 2036.)

In *Nelson*, a gift to the Trust believed to be \$2,096,000 was followed by a sale of property believed to have a value of \$20,000,000. That would have resulted in “equity” of only about 9.5%. No mention was made of that in the opinion, and it cannot be determined whether that was a part of the IRS’s concerns about the transactions. Of course, after the gift component had been adjusted by the Tax Court to a total of \$6,643,916 (\$2,524,983 as the December 31, 2008, gift plus \$4,118,933 as the additional gift at the time of the January 2, 2009, sale) and the sale component remained \$20,000,000, this issue disappeared.

**(9) Multi-Tiered Discounts**

The IRS did not question applying substantial discounts at both the level of assets owned by the FLP and also of interests in the FLP itself.

Discounts at multiple levels of interests owned by partnerships was allowed in *Astleford v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2008-12. The court in *Astleford* allowed full lack of control and marketability discounts at both the subsidiary level and the parent level. The cases cited by the court suggest that this is appropriate when there are minority interests being valued at both levels. Footnote 5 of the *Astleford* opinion cites four Tax Court and Tax Court memorandum cases that have allowed multi-level discounts where there were minority interests in both levels. (*Estate of Piper*, *Janda*, *Gow*, and *Gallun*.) However, cases have refused to apply multi-level discounts where minority interests in subsidiaries were a significant portion of the parent entity’s assets (*Martin*) or for a subsidiary that was the parent’s “principal operating subsidiary” (*Estate of O’Connell*). The multi-tiered discounts were not questioned in *Nelson* even though both of those conditions (addressed in *Martin* and *Estate of O’Connell*) were applicable.

*Grieve v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2020-28 (March 2, 2020), rejected on procedural and prudential grounds the approach offered by the taxpayer’s expert at trial for the taxpayer to apply tiered discounts that would have resulted in a value considerably lower than the value reported on an appraisal attached to the gift tax return. The court explained that it had found no justification for using a net value significantly lower than the value to which the taxpayer had previously admitted on the appraisal attached to the gift tax return (without any specific criticism of the multiple-tiered discounting approach).

**(10) Split Gift Election for Gift to SLAT**

Mrs. Nelson made a gift to the Trust on December 31, 2008, and Mr. Nelson consented to making the split gift election with respect to that gift. The effect of the split gift election is that the transfer is treated as having been made one-half by each of the spouses for gift and GST tax purposes (meaning that the consenting spouse’s gift and GST exemption could be used), but not for estate tax purposes. Because the election does not treat the spouses as making equal transfers to the trust for *estate* tax purposes, Mr. Nelson could be a beneficiary of the trust without causing estate inclusion under section 2036(a)(1) and Mr. Nelson could serve as trustee without risking estate inclusion for him under section 2036(a)(2) or section 2038.

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The case has no discussion of any problems with the split gift election (other than to note that any resulting gifts are made one-half by each of the spouses). A potential problem, however, with making the split gift election for a transfer to a SLAT is that split gift treatment is not allowed if the consenting spouse is a beneficiary of the trust unless the spouse's interest in the trust is ascertainable, severable and de minimis, so that the gift amount by the spouse is the amount of the transfer other than the spouse's severable interest (because one cannot make a gift to himself or herself). See Rev. Rul. 56-439, 1956-2 C.B. 605; *Wang v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1972-143 (no split gift election allowed where consenting spouse's interest in trust receiving gift assets was not ascertainable); *Robertson v. Commissioner*, 26 T.C. 246 (1956) (gift splitting allowed for full amount transferred); see generally D. Zeydel, *Gift-Splitting — A Boondoggle or a Bad Idea? A Comprehensive Look at the Rules*, 106 J. TAX'N 334 (June 2007). Interestingly, Letter Ruling 200130030 allowed gift splitting for the full amount of the transfer without discussing the value (in particular, that it had no value) of the donee spouse's severable interest.

While the *amount* that can qualify for gift splitting may be limited for gift purposes, the regulations appear to provide that if any portion of the transfer qualifies for gift splitting, a full one-half of the transferred amount shall be treated as having been transferred by the consenting spouse for GST purposes. Reg. §26.2652-1(a)(4).

For a more complete discussion of the relevant cases and letter rulings, see Item 5.k.(3) in the December 2012 "Estate Planning Current Developments and Hot Topics" found [here](#) and available at [www.bessemertrust.com/for-professional-partners/advisor-insights](http://www.bessemertrust.com/for-professional-partners/advisor-insights).

Gift splitting should be allowed in full if:

- Distributions of both income and principal to the donee-spouse are subject to an ascertainable standard of distribution under section 2514, preferably a standard based upon the spouse's accustomed standard of living;
- The trustee must consider other resources available to the spouse before exercising its discretion to distribute income or principal to the spouse; and
- The resources that are, and are expected to be, available to the spouse for the remainder of his or her lifetime are sufficient to meet the spouse's living expenses, such that the likelihood that the trustee will need to exercise its discretion to distribute income or principal to the spouse is so remote as to be negligible.

## 12. Different Values for Gross Estate and for Charitable Deductions: *Warne*

**a. Synopsis.** Ms. Warne made gifts of interests in five LLCs owning real estate investments in 2012 and died owning (actually in a revocable trust) majority interests in the LLCs (all over 70% and three over 80%). The operating agreements all gave significant powers to the majority interest holders (including the power to dissolve the LLCs and to remove and appoint managers). Ms. Warne owned 100% of one LLC at her death, which she left 75% to a family foundation and 25% to a church. The real estate interests were substantial; the remaining LLC interests owned by Ms. Warne at her death were valued on her estate tax return at about \$73.7 million. The parties agreed on most of the values, but the court determined the values of three leased fee interests at the date of the gift and at the date of death.

The court also determined appropriate lack of control and lack of marketability discounts for the LLC majority interests owned at death. The court suggested that it might have found zero lack of control discount for the majority interests, but the parties had agreed that some level of lack of control discount should apply. The court generally adopted the approach of the estate's expert, who compared premiums from completely controlling interests in companies (90%-100% interests) with premiums from interests that lacked full control (50.1%-89.9% interests) and concluded that the discount should be in the 5%-8% range (compared to the IRS's expert's 2% lack of control discount). However, in reaching that conclusion the expert took into consideration that strong opposition and potential litigation would arise if the majority holder attempted to dissolve. The court found no evidence of future litigation risks and lowered the lack of control discount to 4%.

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Both experts used restricted stock studies to determine the lack of marketability discount (5%-10% by the estate's expert and 2% by the IRS's expert). The court concluded that a 5% lack of marketability discount was appropriate.

The estate argued that the 100% interest in the LLC that was left to two charities should be completely offset by the estate tax charitable deduction (because the 100% interest was donated entirely to charities), but the court concluded that a charitable deduction was allowed only for the value passing to each charity. The parties had agreed that a 27.385% discount applied for the 25% passing to the church and a 4% discount applied for the 75% passing to the foundation. (Applying discounts to the charitable deduction reduced the charitable deduction by over \$2.5 million.)

The failure to file penalty was applied for the late filing of the gift tax return because the estate offered no evidence of reasonable cause for the late filing.

The case is appealable to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals if it is appealed. *Estate of Warne v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2021-17 (February 18, 2021, Judge Buch).

**b. Basic Facts.** Mr. and Ms. Warne amassed various real estate properties beginning at least in the early 1970s. Over time, the real estate properties were owned in five separate LLCs. Mr. Warne died in 1999. Ms. Warne made gifts of various minority interests in the LLCs to her two sons in 2012, and Ms. Warne died in 2014. The 2012 gift tax return was filed (late) at the same time as Ms. Warne's estate tax return (which was timely filed), in May 2015.

At the time of Ms. Warne's death, the Warne Family Trust (the "Family Trust," apparently a revocable trust), the value of the assets of which was included in Ms. Warne's gross estate, owned the following majority interests in the five LLCs: 78%, 72.5%, 86.3%, 87.432%, and 100%. The remaining minority units were owned in various amounts by one of more of the sons, by three granddaughters, and by a sub-trust of the Family Trust. All of the LLC agreements "grant significant power to the majority interest holder, such as the ability to unilaterally dissolve the LLCs and appoint and remove managers."

The LLC of which the Family Trust owned 100% was Royal Gardens, LLC ("Royal Gardens"), and the trust agreement provided that following Ms. Warne's death the Royal Gardens units were left 75% to the Warne Family Charitable Foundation and 25% to a church.

The estate tax return listed the values of the Family Trust's majority interest in each of the LLCs at \$18,006,000, \$8,720,000, \$11,325,000, \$10,053,000, and \$25,600,000 (Royal Gardens), respectively, or a total value of \$73,704,000. Those values were determined by first valuing the underlying real property interest in each LLC, and by applying lack of control and lack of marketability discounts to the LLC interests owned by the Family Trust.

The IRS asserted a gift tax deficiency for the 2012 gifts (and before trial increased the deficiency to \$368,462) and asserted an estate tax deficiency of \$8,351,970.

The unresolved issues addressed at trial were (i) the date of gift value of three leased fee interests (that were owned by two of the LLCs), (ii) the date of death value of those same three leased fee interests, (iii) the appropriate discount for lack of control and lack of marketability of the majority interests in the LLCs held by the Family Trust at Ms. Warne's death, (iv) whether discounts apply to the 25% and 75% interests left to separate charities in Royal Gardens LLC, and (v) whether a failure to file penalty under section 6651(a)(1) applies for the 2012 gift tax return that was filed late. Apparently, the parties came to agreement with respect to the values of the remaining real estate properties and as to the appropriate lack of control and lack of marketability discounts for the gifted LLC interests.

The two sons were co-executors of Ms. Warne's estate, and they both resided in California when the petitions were filed (so the case would be appealable to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals if it is appealed).

### **c. Court's Analysis**

- (1) **Values of Leased Fee Interests.** Three leased fee interests were valued by appraisers for the estate and for the IRS. The appraisers, in appraiser-speak fashion, referred to various approaches such as the "direct capitalization approach" (which the court determined was inappropriate for

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the particular property involved), “yield capitalization approach,” appropriate discount rates, “discounted cashflow analysis,” “sales comparison approach,” and “buildup method” (for determining a discount rate).

- (2) **Lack of Control Discount for Majority LLC Interests.** The estate and the IRS each used an appraiser to determine appropriate lack of control and lack of marketability discounts for the majority percentage interests owned by the Family Trust at Ms. Warne’s death different from the appraiser who had valued the underlying leased fee interests.

The court emphasized that majority interests were being valued and that the LLCs all grant significant powers to the majority interest holder (including the power to dissolve and to remove and appoint managers). The court pointed to several cases that have held that no lack of control discount applies in similar situations (*Estate of Jones v. Commissioner*, 116 T.C. 121, 135 (2001); *Estate of Streightoff v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2018-178) and hinted that it might have concluded that *no* lack of control discount was allowed, but “[b]ecause the parties agree to a discount for lack of control, we will find one; however, given the control retained by the Family Trust, the discount should be slight.”

The IRS’s expert used data from nine closed-end funds to estimate a lack of control discount of 2%. The estate argued that discounts from closed-end funds are sometimes used to discern minority-interest discounts, but not discounts for lack of control for a majority interest. The court was sympathetic to that position, citing the *Richmond* (T.C. Memo. 2014-26), *Kelley* (T.C. Memo. 2005-235), and *Perracchio* (T.C. Memo. 2003-280) cases as examples of using closed-end funds for valuing *minority*-interest discounts, and noting that while the *Grieve* case (T.C. Memo. 2020-28) had used closed-end funds for analyzing the lack of control discount for majority interests in LLCs, the majority interests valued in *Grieve* lacked voting rights, making the interests more similar to minority interests. The court also thought the nine closed-end funds selected as comparables were too dissimilar to the LLCs in the estate, and that a larger sample size should be used when comparables are more dissimilar (citing *Lappo*, T.C. Memo. 2003-258, and *Heck*, T.C. Memo. 2002-34). Because the IRS’s expert’s database was inappropriate, the court refused to adopt its 2% discount.

The estate’s expert compared premiums from completely controlling interests in companies (90%-100% interests) with premiums from interests that lacked full control (50.1%-89.9% interests), and after considering qualities specific to the five LLCs (including “strong opposition and potential litigation” if the majority owner attempted to dissolve), concluded that a lack of control discount of 5%-8% should apply. The court found no evidence that the minority interest holders were litigious or would pursue litigation to contest a dissolution. Citing *Olson v. United States*, 292 U.S. 246, 257 (1934), for its statement that potential occurrences “not fairly shown to be reasonably probable should be excluded from consideration,” the court concluded that no adjustment should be made for future litigation risks so the discount should be lower than the 5%-8% range suggested by the estate and that a **4% lack of control discount** was appropriate.

- (3) **Lack of Marketability Discount.** Both experts used restricted stock equivalent discounts to determine the lack of marketability discount. The estate’s expert determined that a 5%-10% discount should apply and the IRS’s expert used a 2% discount. The court concluded that the estate’s expert “considered additional metrics and provided a more thorough explanation of his process.” Furthermore, the IRS’s expert reached a 14.5% restricted stock equivalent discount but from that determined a mere 2% discount for lack of marketability “without justifying the substantial decrease in the discount.” The court accepted the 5%-10% range suggested by the estate’s expert but believed that the lower end of the range was appropriate, so concluded that a **5% lack of marketability** discount applied.
- (4) **Charitable Deduction Discount.** The Family Trust’s 100% interest in Royal Gardens passed entirely to charity, but was split between two charities, 25% to a church and 75% to a family foundation. The estate maintained that applying a discount in determining the charitable deduction because each charity received less than 100% was not appropriate:

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The estate insists that discounts are inappropriate and would subvert the public policy of motivating charitable donations. It claims that because 100% of Royal Gardens was included in the estate and the estate donated 100% of Royal Gardens to charities, the estate is entitled to a deduction of 100% of Royal Gardens' value.

The court disagreed, applying a two-step analysis. First, the court reasoned that in valuing the gross estate, "we value the entire interest held by the estate, without regard to the later disposition of that asset." Second, the court noted that a charitable deduction is allowed "for what is actually received by the charity" (quoting *Ahmanson Foundation*, discussed immediately below). "In short, when valuing charitable contributions, we do not value what an estate contributed; we value what the charitable organizations received."

The court cited *Ahmanson Foundation v. United States*, 674 F.2d 761 (9th Cir. 1981), in support of both of those steps of the analysis. In *Ahmanson*, the decedent owned the one voting share and all 99 nonvoting shares of a corporation. The voting share was left to the decedent's sons and the 99 nonvoting shares were left to a charitable foundation. The gross estate value of the 100 shares took into consideration that the decedent held full voting control of all of the shares, but "the estate's deduction attributable to the donation of the 99 nonvoting shares necessitated a 3% discount to account for the foundation's lack of voting rights." The fact that the asset in *Ahmanson* was split between an individual and a charity rather than between two charities made no difference because that did not affect the value of the church's and foundation's respective interests that they received "and it is the value of the property received by the donee that determines the amount of the deduction available to the donor."

The parties reached agreement regarding the amounts of discounts if the court determined that discounts were appropriate in determining the charitable deduction for the charitable transfers to the church and to the foundation. The parties stipulated a 27.385% discount for the 25% passing to the church and a 4% discount for the 75% passing to the foundation. Discounting the interests passing to the separate charities resulted in a reduction of the charitable deduction of over \$2.5 million, a quite significant reduction.

- (5) **Failure to Timely File Penalty.** The IRS met its burden of showing that the taxpayer filed late, but the estate did not meet its burden of establishing reasonable cause, offering no evidence in support of that position. Therefore, the failure to timely file penalty under section 6651(a)(1) was applicable as to any gift tax deficiency.

#### d. Observations

- (1) **Small Lack of Control and Marketability Discounts Allowed for Controlling Majority Interest in LLCs.** Lack of control and lack of marketability discounts were determined for the estate tax value of the estate's super-majority in five LLCs owning real estate (all over 70% and three over 80%). Several of the LLCs owned multiple real estate investments; one owned multifamily apartment buildings and a retail shopping center and another owned a multifamily apartment complex and another unleased property. The other three LLCs each owned a single real property investment (an operating farm, property surrounding a gas station, and a mobile home park). The LLC operating agreements all "grant significant power to the majority interest holder, such as the ability unilaterally to dissolve the LLCs and to appoint and remove managers." Even so, the 4% lack of control discount and 5% lack of marketability discount, a combined seriatim discount of 8.8% ( $.04 + [.05 \times .96] = .088$ ), might seem low for interests in LLCs owning real estate.

Fractional undivided interests in real estate are often valued with a 15%-25% discount or more, (but a few cases have allowed lower discounts). *E.g., Estate of Mitchell v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2011-194 (estate and IRS stipulated to the following fractional interest discounts: Beachfront property: 32% discount for 5% gifted interest and 19% discount for 95% interest owned at death; Ranch property: 40% discount for 5% gifted interest and 35% discount for 95% interest owned at death); *Ludwick v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2010-104 (17.2% discount for 50% interests in Hawaiian vacation home); *Estate of Baird v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2001-258 (60% discounts for undivided interests in timberland). A distinction from the fractional



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undivided interest situation, however, is that the majority interest holder of an LLC generally may have the power to appoint a manager who could decide to sell the assets and divide the proceeds among the members, without a court supervised partition proceeding.

- (2) **Discounts Considered for Estate Tax Charitable Deduction Purposes.** *Warne* is consistent with other cases and rulings that have considered the values actually passing to specific charities in determining the estate tax charitable deduction.

The *Ahmanson* case is described in the *Warne* opinion (and summarized above).

*Estate of Schwan v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2001-174, also determined the estate tax charitable deduction based on the value actually passing to a charity, which was less than the value in the gross estate. The decedent in *Schwan* owned two-thirds of the voting and non-voting stock of a corporation. The decedent's estate plan provided that the shares would be distributed to a charitable foundation, and a redemption agreement provided that the voting shares would be redeemed. The court determined that the value to be included in the gross estate was a unitary unrestricted two-thirds interest in the corporation. However, the redemption agreement provided that the voting stock left to the foundation would be redeemed, leaving the foundation with only non-voting stock. The IRS took the position that the foundation received a bequest of money equal to the value of the voting stock and the non-voting stock – which should be valued at a discount for purposes of determining the amount of the charitable deduction. Thus the amount of the deduction was less than the value in the gross estate. The estate argued that the foundation had the right to require the redemption of all of its stock because it received two-thirds of the voting stock and, before its redemption, it would have control and the ability to recapitalize the corporation and remove any distinction between the two classes of stock. The court concluded that it could not grant the estate's summary judgment motion on this issue because of the possibility under state law of rights of minority shareholders that would restrict the foundation's right to recapitalize and to force the redemption of all of its stock.

The IRS took a similar position in a 2006 Technical Advice Memorandum. Tech. Adv. Memo. 200648028 (minority interest applies for charitable deduction purposes).

- (3) **Charitable Deduction Discount Analysis Is Similar to Comparable Marital Deduction Cases.**

If a controlling interest in an asset is left to the marital share, a control premium may be appropriate in determining the value of that asset. See *Estate of Chenoweth v. Commissioner*, 88 T.C. 1577 (1987) (bequest of 51% of stock of family company to surviving widow entitled to premium "control element" to increase marital deduction). However, this principle also works in reverse. The IRS took the position in several Technical Advice Memoranda that valuation discounts should be considered in funding marital bequests. In Tech. Adv. Memo. 9050004, the decedent left 51% of the stock of a closely held corporation to a trust for his son, and the remaining 49% to a QTIP trust. The IRS, referring to the *Chenoweth* case, concluded that the stock passing to the QTIP trust should be valued with a minority interest discount. Tech. Adv. Memo. 9403005 concluded that the minority stock interest that passed to the surviving spouse had to be valued as a minority interest for purposes of the estate tax marital deduction, even though the decedent owned a controlling interest in the corporation. See AOD CC-1999-006, describing acquiescence in *Estate of Mellinger v. Commissioner*, 112 T.C. 26 (1999), and stating that "[t]he proper funding of the QTIP trust should reflect, for example, the value of minority interests in closely-held entities or fractional interests in real estate that are used in satisfying the marital bequest."

A 1999 Tax Court memorandum case is the first case recognizing that the value of assets passing to a spouse must take into account minority interests for purposes of determining the marital deduction. In *Estate of Disanto v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 1999-421, the surviving wife signed disclaimers so that only a minority interest in closely held stock passed to the wife. The court held that the stock passing to the wife must be valued as a minority interest for purposes of determining the amount of the marital deduction.

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- (4) **Planning Alternatives to Avoid Reduction of Charitable Deduction.** Under the *Warne* facts, if the Family Trust had left the entire 100% LLC interest to the foundation or a donor advised fund (DAF), and if 25% of the LLC had been later distributed to the church from the foundation or the DAF (perhaps based on knowing the decedent's desires, but under no legal obligation or even formal understanding to do so), the overall economic effect would have been the same, but no reduction of the charitable deduction would have applied because the entire 100% interest would have passed from the estate to a single charity.
- (5) **Entire Interest Passing to Charity and Spouse.** A similar situation arises if the entire interest in an asset owned by an estate (or the entire estate) passes partly to a charity and partly to a surviving spouse. The intuitive reaction may be that all of the interest is passing in a manner that qualifies for a deduction, thus resulting in no estate tax, but the rationale of *Warne* (and *Disanto* and *Ahmanson*) results in a reduction of the overall charitable and marital deduction when the valuation of the asset is subject to discounts, possibly resulting in an estate tax being due.
- (6) **Somewhat Analogous "Marital Deduction Mismatch" Argument for §2036 FLP Situations.** The IRS has made the similar argument in cases involving family limited partnership cases if the undiscounted value of the assets contributed to the partnership is included in the gross estate under section 2036, arguing that a marital deduction is allowed only for the discounted limited partnership interest that actually passes to the surviving spouse. This situation arises when a spouse contributes assets to an FLP, retains most of the partnership interests until his death, and dies with a formula marital deduction clause that leaves assets to the surviving spouse to minimize estate taxes, and the value of the assets contributed to the partnership is included in the gross estate under section 2036. In two reported cases (*Estate of Black v. Commissioner*, 133 T.C. 340 (2009), and *Estate of Shurtz v. Commissioner*, T.C. Memo. 2010-21) the IRS has made the argument that while the value of the partnership *assets* is included in the gross estate (without a discount), the estate actually owns only a limited partnership or LLC interest and does not own the assets directly. The IRS's brief in *Black* stated the argument as follows:

Petitioner overlooks the fact that §§2036 and 2035 include the value of property that has previously been transferred, while the marital deduction is limited to the value of the property actually passing to the surviving spouse. There is good reason for this limitation. On the death of the surviving spouse, only that property (here, the discounted value of the BILP interest) will be includable in the spouse's gross estate under I.R.C. §2044.

All the estate can leave the spouse (i.e., all that can "pass" to the spouse for marital deduction purposes under section 2056) is a discounted entity interest. Thus, there would be estate inclusion at a high level (without a discount) but the marital deduction would be allowed at a much lower level (taking into account discounts). That difference would first reduce the amount passing to the bypass trust, but if that difference were more than the remaining estate tax exemption amount available to the estate, there would be estate taxes due at the first spouse's death. See generally Angkatavanich, *Black Shirts (Black, Shurtz) and the Marital Deduction Mismatch*, TRUSTS & ESTATES 37 (June 2010).

The Tax Court considered a different marital deduction issue in *Estate of Turner v. Commissioner*, 138 T.C. 306 (2012). (That is the second of three reported cases involving that fact situation and is sometimes referred to as "*Turner II*.") The estate argued that the decedent's will contained a formula marital deduction clause and that the marital deduction should offset any value included in the gross estate under section 2036. The marital deduction issue addressed in this supplemental opinion is whether a marital deduction is allowed for partnership assets attributable to 21.7446% limited partnership interests that the decedent had given to various family members (other than his spouse) during his lifetime. The court concluded that because the surviving spouse did not receive those 21.7446% limited partnership interests, no marital deduction is allowed for the value of assets attributable to those interests that is included in the gross estate under section 2036. The court reasoned that the statutory and regulatory marital deduction provisions as well as the overall structure of the wealth transfer system support that result.

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The Tax Court did not have to address the marital deduction mismatch issue in *Black* and *Shurtz* because the court held that section 2036 did not apply in those cases. The classic marital deduction mismatch issue did not arise in *Turner II* because the IRS allowed a marital deduction for the full value of assets attributable to partnership interests that the decedent owned at his death and could pass to the surviving spouse under the formula marital deduction bequest.

No court has yet faced the marital deduction mismatch issue in the context of a section 2036 FLP case. A tax fiction deems the value of the assets that were transferred in the section 2036 transaction to be in the gross estate, and the issue is whether that same tax fiction is applied for deduction purposes as well. On the one hand, the estate owns only the discounted limited partnership interest, so arguably that is all that can “pass” to the surviving spouse for purposes of the marital deduction’s “passing” requirement. On the other hand, a sense of consistency and fairness arguably may suggest that the fiction should apply for marital deduction purposes as well as estate inclusion purposes. The concept of the marital deduction is that a couple can avoid estate taxes at the first spouse’s death, deferring estate taxes until the second spouse’s death, and it may not be possible to avoid having to pay large estate taxes at the first spouse’s death if a full marital deduction is not allowed. Take the simple situation in which all of the estate is passing to the surviving spouse and the estate owns a 99% interest in the partnership that is left to the spouse. That is not a situation (like in *Turner II*) where the decedent had made gifts of most of the partnership interests to persons other than the spouse. The spouse is receiving all of the estate and all of the partnership interest related to the value of the assets included under section 2036, so arguably there should be a marital deduction for all of that value. Or consider a situation in which the decedent made a lifetime gift of all of his partnership interests to the surviving spouse, but the court applies section 2036. Again, the very asset that gives rise to section 2036 also ends up in the hands of the surviving spouse, and a sense of consistency may suggest that the marital deduction should match the inclusion amount. The effect of allowing a full marital deduction for the undiscounted value included under section 2036, however, is that no particular disadvantage exists for having section 2036 apply at the first spouse’s death regarding assets contributed to the FLP by that spouse (and section 2036 would not apply at the surviving spouse’s subsequent death as to assets contributed to the FLP by the first-decedent spouse).