



## Corporate tax dodging threatens public safety

By Dan Cougill 11:14 p.m. CDT October 29, 2014



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I'm usually a fan of the Whopper, but recently I haven't set foot inside a Burger King. In August, the company announced it would renounce its U.S. corporate "citizenship" to avoid paying its fair share of taxes.

As a professional firefighter, I know that tax dodging by huge corporations can drain resources we need for firefighters, police, the military, and other important things. The more I thought about it the angrier I got. Now I've lost my taste for everything on the Burger King menu.

Burger King is just the latest corporation to exploit a loophole that allows an American company to transform itself into a foreign company while actually maintaining all its operations here. This make-believe move — called a "corporate inversion" — lets the company enjoy the privileges of operating in this country but dodge its responsibility to help pay for them.

When corporations duck out on their portion of the bill that pays for public services, the rest of us pay the price in higher taxes or slashed services. I know firsthand that federal aid to fire departments across the country has been cut in recent years, making all of us less safe.

Corporate tax dodging also hurts small business. Growing up in Aurelia, I watched my dad struggle to keep afloat his fuel delivery service and small gas station until a big chain finally forced him out of business. Huge corporations already have enough advantages over the little guy. They don't need offshore tax loopholes, too.

This being election season, I'd really like to know where the candidates we see in all those TV commercials stand on this issue. I have some sense about Bruce Braley, who has voted on these issues in Congress — usually on the side of ordinary people. But I want to hear more from Joni Ernst. She's signed a pledge from a group in Washington that would make it next to impossible to close tax loopholes so that the wealthy and big corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

Most politicians pay attention to polls, and on this issue popular opinion is clear. Seven out of 10 Iowans are opposed to corporate inversions, and they specifically oppose Burger King's move, according to a recent poll. Clearly, the company's lack of patriotism isn't playing well in the heartland.

Iowans rightly understand that our tax system is rigged against them — and they want change. Seven out of 10 Iowans say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who wants to make sure corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes. And more than eight out of 10 Iowans would support a candidate who wants to pay for better public services by closing corporate tax loopholes.

When such high numbers of Iowans agree on anything, politicians should pay close attention.

Some big-time CEOs claim that corporations pay too much in taxes. Then how do they explain 26 well-known corporations like General Electric, Verizon and Priceline.com paying exactly zero in federal income taxes from 2008 to 2012? You and I paid more in taxes in one year than all 26 of these companies put together paid over five.

When a corporation like Burger King discards its American identity like an old burger

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wrapper, I think about the brave men and women who have served our flag, here and abroad. I think about my son-in-law, who saw military service in Afghanistan and Iraq. Did they sacrifice so big American corporations could switch national flags to save a few bucks?

People like you and me helped build those companies: as consumers, workers and taxpayers. Not only have I downed my share of Whoppers, but when a grease fire gets out of hand, its folks like me who ride to Burger King's rescue. Burger King wants the firefighters to show up when they're needed, but it doesn't want to foot its part of the bill for that lifesaving service.

We need to close tax loopholes and require that corporations contribute their fair share. We have a say in the matter: We can demand that our elected officials put an end to these outrageous tax dodges. And if companies like Burger King insist on abandoning America to pad their bottom lines, we all can do something about it — eat somewhere else.

#### THE AUTHOR

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