

Large Ticket Items

*Do You Qualify?
Are They For You? Do You Need
To Act Now To Save?*

Retirement Plan Contributions.

The limit on contributions to 401(k), 403(b) and most 457 Plans for 2019 increased over 2018 by \$500 to \$19,000. If you are age 50 or older, then additional catch-up contributions are allowed up to \$6,000.

☛ **Roth and Traditional IRA Contributions.** Limits for 2019 increased by \$500 over 2018 limits

to \$6,000 with an additional \$1,000 catch-up for those age 50 and older.

☛ **Re-align Your Portfolio.** Many taxpayers have taken gains (or losses) on investments up to this point in 2019. The markets have become increasingly volatile and by selling some losing investments to offset the taxable gains (or selling investments with gains to offset losses) you may also reduce your risk to further downturns in the markets. Remember, if you have more losses than gains the IRS will allow you to take up to \$3,000 of net losses to reduce your income with the remaining amounts carried forward to future years.

Mandatory Actions

Required Minimum Distributions (RMD). Once you reach age 70½, you're generally required to start taking required minimum distributions (RMDs) from Traditional IRAs and employer-sponsored retirement plans (special rules apply if you're still working and participating in your employer's retirement plan), and even some inherited Roth accounts. You must make the required withdrawals by the date required—by the end of the year for most individuals-or a 50% penalty tax applies. Regular Roth IRA accounts do not require a minimum required distribution (RMD).

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TAX NEWS & TIPS

YEAR END 2019

Time To Review 2019: *What To Expect*

Health Insurance

NEW for calendar year 2019, the dollar amount of the penalty for not maintaining minimum essential health coverage is \$0. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act eliminated the penalty which was at least \$695 per adult for 2018 and could have been much higher based upon family members and household income.

Alimony

While alimony that was required before 2019, was deductible by the payor and taxable to the payee, the rules have changed for 2019. The new law repeals the deduction, and inclusion in taxable income, for alimony paid/received under an agreement executed after 2018. Modifying existing agreements (pre 2019) remain deductible/taxable unless they expressly state that the new rules apply.

Inflation Adjustments

The items for tax year 2019 of greatest interest to most taxpayers include the following dollar amounts:

The standard deduction for married filing jointly rises to \$24,400 for tax year 2019, up \$400 from 2018. For single taxpayers and married individuals filing separately, the standard deduction rises to \$12,200 for 2019, up \$200, and for heads of households, the standard deduction will be \$18,350 for tax year 2019, up \$350.

The personal exemption for tax year 2019 remains at \$0, as it was for 2018. This elimination of the personal exemption was a provision in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

Annual Gift Limits

The annual exclusion for gifts is \$15,000 for calendar year 2019,

remains the same as it was for calendar year 2018.

Medical & Dental Expenses

Taxpayers can still deduct the part of their medical and dental expenses that exceeds 10 percent of their adjusted gross income in 2019 up from 7.5% in 2018.

State & Local Taxes

The current law limits the deduction of state and local income, sales, and property taxes to a combined total deduction of \$10,000. The amount is \$5,000 for married taxpayers filing separate returns. Taxpayers cannot deduct any state and local taxes paid above this amount.

Miscellaneous Deductions

The current law suspended the deduction for job-related expenses or other miscellaneous itemized deductions that exceed 2 percent of adjusted gross income. This includes unreimbursed employee business expenses, uniforms, union dues and the deduction for business-related meals and travel.

Home Mortgage Interest

Beginning in tax year 2018, taxpayers can deduct the interest on up to \$750,000 of qualified home loans (\$375,000 for Married Filing Separate). The new amount decreased from \$1 million under 2017 rules. But if you secured your home loan before Dec. 15, 2017, the \$1 million limit still applies to your deduction.

The Tuition and Fees Deduction

This deduction, which expired at the end of 2017, was available for up to \$4,000 for qualifying educational

expenses like tuition and required fees and materials. **However**, many people who pay educational expenses can still use tax credits like the American Opportunity Credit or Lifetime Learning Credit.

Frequently Missed Info!

Take extra time to make sure that you have all the necessary facts if any of the following situations applies to you.

☛ **Child Care Expenses.** I need the full name, address, telephone number and tax ID number of your care providers, and the total paid per child for each caregiver.

☛ **Estimated Federal Tax Payments.** Find the date and amount for payments. April 15, 2019, June 15, 2019, September 15, 2019 and January 15, 2020. A Federal January 2019 payment would have been claimed on your 2018 return.

☛ **Sales of Property.** The most important thing is the Final Settlement Statement. Include a list of home improvements in all prior years since purchase.

☛ **College Tuition.** Form 1098-T lists tuition paid. These forms are generally available electronically to the student. Make sure that the "student" checks for these forms and gives them to you. I need these forms as well as details on the courses, all education-related expenses for equipment and fees, when

See "Missed Info" on page 2

Inside This Issue

- "Important Tax Info Enclosed"
- Myth vs. Truth
- Social Security Updates
- Tax Tips for you...Now!
- Your Tax Calendar

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Your Tax Calendar

Dec 31 - A check mailed today counts for 2019. Last chance for deductions.

Jan 15 - 4th Quarter estimated tax payments due.

Jan 31 - W-2s and 1099s due to recipients.

Apr 15 - 2019 Tax Returns due without extensions.

Anytime you have any questions, don't hesitate to call me.

Tax Tips For You.. Now!

☐ Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)

You'll be able to make qualified charitable contributions (QCDs) of up to \$100,000 from an IRA transferred directly to a qualified charity if you're 70½ or older. Such distributions may be excluded from income and count toward satisfying any RMDs you would otherwise have to receive from your IRA.

☐ Increase or Accelerate Your Charitable Contributions

The joys of giving can also help

you as your donations to charitable organizations may count as tax deductible expenses! Make sure that all contributions are made by December 31 and that a "Thank You" letter or receipt of your gift is included in your tax documents.

☐ Other Deductions

Medical expenses such as hospital and doctor's bills and prescriptions can create sizable itemized deductions. Look for any balances still owed on medical

See "Tax Tips" on page 2

“Tax Tips” from page 4

related bills and consider paying them before the end of 2019.

☐ **529 Plan - Expanded Uses**

Originally intended to help parents save for their child’s future college tuition, a 529 can now be used to pay for up to \$10,000 of primary or secondary education per year. These funds may also be used for private or religious schools.

☐ **Moving Expenses Are No Longer Deductible**

Under previous tax law, an individual who relocated for their job could deduct any related expenses, including movers, gas, and more. This deduction is no longer available other than for certain military personnel.

☐ **Rent Your Residence Less Than 15 Days?**

There’s a special rule if you use a dwelling unit as a residence and rent it for fewer than 15 days. In this case, don’t report any of the rental income and don’t deduct any expenses as rental expenses.

“Missed Info” from page 1

each item was paid and who the “student” was.

📌 **Sales of Stock.** Form 1099-B shows sale prices. If this form does not show the original purchase information, you will need to provide this.

📌 **New Tax Rules On Pass-Through Entities Continue In 2019.** Schedule K-1 from partnerships and S-Corps always seem to arrive late. Don’t worry. We can do the rest of your return and be ready to finish when the elusive K-1 arrives.

📌 **Social Security Benefits.** Look for Form 1099-SSA. We must report the gross amount and not just your net monthly benefit. Your Medicare Premiums listed on the Form may also get you a medical deduction.

📌 **Employees – Last Pay Stub.** Your W-2 is critical, but your last pay stub may reveal tax deductions that don’t usually show up anywhere else.

📌 **Special Accounts.** Do you contribute to an IRA, Roth IRA or Health Savings Account? These and others can affect your taxes. Make sure I have all 1099s and information on contribution amounts and dates.

📌 **Complex Transactions.** Please call if you have a foreclosure, sale or exchange of real estate, casualties such as a natural disaster.

January’s “Important Tax Information Enclosed” Is Coming. Let’s Be Prepared!

Most of the needed tax records to prepare your tax return will show up in the mail or online in January 2020. Collecting all your tax related documents is important so that we report a complete and accurate return.

The IRS also gets copies of many of these documents and will match your tax return to their records.

Let’s review what you should be looking for...

W-2s. Read them carefully. Contact your employer if there is a discrepancy or if you don’t receive them by the end of January.

1099s. You should receive 1099-INT or 1099-DIV forms for any accounts that pay interest or dividends. Even tax-exempt interest must be reported. IMPORTANT: “Corrected” forms are always a possibility. Be alert for such announcements.

1095-A, 1095-B & 1095-C. You will receive a 1095-A if you purchased Health Care through the Health Insurance Marketplace and had part of your premiums offset by the Advance Payments of Premium Tax Credit. You will receive a 1095-B or 1095-C for health insurance purchased or provided by your employer on company sponsored insurance plans.

Other 1099s. Real estate sales are often reported on 1099-S. Stock sales on 1099-B or Consolidated 1099. Pension, 401K and IRA distributions are reported on 1099-R. Pay special attention to forms 1099-A and 1099-C. These report foreclosures and debt consolidations or debt cancellations which may or may not result in taxable income. We need to see them to correctly prepare your return.

Form 1098. Reports mortgage interest paid to a bank, savings & loan or credit union. These forms may also report real estate taxes (if payments are escrowed by the lender).

Other Income. Look for 1099s of state tax refunds, unemployment income, prizes or gambling winnings or rents that you collect. Read each one carefully and keep them with all your other tax documents. Gambling winnings can also be reported on Form W-2G.

Your Records. Review records for possible income or deductions. Add up medical expenses and any taxes paid. If you recall paying a deductible expense but don’t have a receipt, jot it down and we will discuss before I prepare your return. Charitable contributions are different – you must have receipts, or your deduction could be challenged and denied! If you are missing a receipt contact the charity to see if you can get the document(s) needed.

Tax Rules by Age

Age 13 – Cannot claim childcare credit for children once they are age 13 or older unless the child is physically or mentally incapable of self-care.

Age 17 – Cannot claim \$2,000 child tax credit for children age 17 or older at the end of the tax year.

Age 25 – Taxpayers with no children qualify for Earned Income Credit.

Age 50 – Eligible for catch-up contributions to IRAs, Simple IRAs, 401(k), 403(b) and 457 plans.

Age 55 – Eligible for penalty-free withdrawal from employer plan (but not an IRA) if separated from service.

Age 59 ½ – Penalty for early withdrawal from retirement accounts expires.

Age 65 – Taxpayers with no children no longer qualify for Earned Income Credit.

Age 65 – Eligible for additional standard deduction of \$1,300 if married and \$1,650 if unmarried.

Age 70 ½ – Contributions no longer allowed to traditional IRAs. Legislature is now looking to extend this age. Law has not been enacted as of this time.

Age 70 ½ – Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from retirement plans (other than regular Roth IRAs) must begin (exceptions for employees still working). Legislature is now looking to extend this age to age 72.

Law has not been enacted as of this time.

Myth vs. Truth

Myth:

I don’t need to claim any dependents on my tax return since there is no longer an exemption deduction for dependents.

Truth:

Many credits (Child Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit, Other Dependent Credit and Educational Credits) are based upon the taxpayer having one or more eligible dependents. Be sure to include all dependents to maximize use of tax credits. Note that many individual State Income Tax Returns allow for dependent deductions for residents and/or non-residents.

Myth:

I can fully deduct my home equity interest as an itemized deduction.

Truth:

Taxpayers can no longer deduct interest paid on most home equity loans unless they used the loan proceeds to buy, build or substantially improve their main home or second home.

Myth:

My private mortgage insurance is an itemized deduction.

Truth:

This deduction expired at the end of 2017. Taxpayers no longer can deduct the amounts they paid for private mortgage insurance in the same way that they could mortgage interest on a primary residence.

Myth:

I donated my car to charity and plan to claim a charitable deduction for \$1,000 but the charity did not provide me a receipt.

Truth:

The taxpayer cannot claim any deduction above \$500 for a donated vehicle unless the recipient charity provides acknowledgement on Form 1098-C which you must attach to your tax return.

Myth:

Social Security benefits are tax-free.

Truth:

In reality, up to 85% of your Social Security income may be taxed. The amount of your Benefit that will be subject to tax is based upon other

Tax Refund Options

You don’t have to receive your tax refund in the form of a paper check. Although the Treasury issues millions of refund checks each year, receiving a paper refund check is generally the slowest method of receiving your refund. This option also comes with the possibility of being lost or stolen.

Direct deposit of your refund into your checking, savings, brokerage or IRA account is available. Your refund may also be split into any amount for deposit into up to three different accounts.

You don’t need a bank account in order to receive a direct deposit. You can deposit your refund directly onto most prepaid debit cards.

A fourth option is to use your tax refund up to \$5,000 to buy U.S. Savings Bonds.

Finally, you may apply your refund to next year’s taxes.

When to Begin Receiving Social Security Benefits? Different Benefits at Different Ages!

If you are considering receiving your social security benefits soon, you have lots of questions. The best place to get specific answers about your benefits is your local social security office. Your benefit is based upon your personal earnings history and the age at which you begin receiving benefits.

• **The “key” ages** are 62-66/67-70.

“Early” benefits can begin any month after age 62. “Full” retirement benefits start at age 66 to 67, depending on your birthdate. “Delayed” benefits can start as late as age 70.

• **“Early” Benefits** can begin at age 62. There are two problems at this age. (1) Your benefits are reduced by 25% of the formula for your earnings history for age 66. Start at any age between 62 and 66 this reduction is prorated. This will be your benefit for life (subject to cost of living increases). (2) If you continue to work after receiving benefits and earn too much in any year, you will return some of the benefit. The earnings limitation stops at age 66.

• **“Full” Retirement Age** occurs if you

were born from 1943 through 1954. At age 66 you will receive the “full” retirement amount with yearly inflation increases. No earnings limits apply. In fact, earnings will now increase your benefits slightly. Your normal retirement age will increase by two months (added to age 66) for each year of your birth from 1955 through 1959. If you were born in 1960 or later then your full retirement age is 67.

• **“Delayed” Benefits** occur for every month you delay starting your benefits after age 66/67. This delay will increase your benefits but not past age 70. The annual increase to your benefits for each year of delay is about 8%. No earning limits apply.

Social Security Review. Social Security Benefits are increasing for 2020. Americans who collect Social Security will receive a 1.6% increase in their monthly payouts in 2020. The extra benefits kick in on Jan. 1. Annual increases in Social Security are determined every year based on changes in a component of the

consumer price index. Social Security recipients got a 2.8% cost-of-living adjustment in 2019, 2.0% in 2018 and 0.3% in 2017. These annual increases are meant to keep up with inflation.

Social Security Recipients Medicare Premiums for 2020. Most people will pay \$144.30 per month for Medicare Part B in 2020, up significantly from \$135.50 per month in 2019.

Social Security benefits are increasing by 1.6% in 2020, which will cover the increase in premiums for most people.

Premiums are increased for higher-income beneficiaries – those with adjusted gross income plus tax-exempt interest income of more than \$86,000 if single or \$172,000 if married filing jointly. These beneficiaries will see the income limits now adjust to general price inflation annually. Overall monthly premiums for higher-income beneficiaries will range from \$189.60 to \$460.50 per person, depending on income.