Mail order *from NEXT PAGE*

they overlook potential income sources, he said.

The National Governors Association estimates that allowing states to collect sales taxes on goods bought via direct mail would raise more than $70 million a year for Michigan.Industry shakeout.

Steve Simons, president of Group SAA Limited, a Farmington Hills-based company specializing in the production and distribution of mail-order catalogs, said those who argue for new legislation may be missing a more subtle point.

"A lot of Michigan retailers are non-mail order and could care less if the industry succeeds or not," he said. Everyone should be concerned, however, because most mail order companies are small businesses, and it is the small business that truly drives the economy.

The level playing field traditional retailers are calling for would be a less populated one, he argued.

"What it will do is shrink the industry by 40 to 50 percent," he said.

While that might please larger mail-order companies that can cope with the new requirements and the traditional retailers, it would be bad news for consumers and entrepreneurs.

As corporate America continues to downsize, the government should encourage, not discourage entrepreneurs. Much of the mail-order industry's growth can be attributed to the ability of entrepreneurs to start and maintain businesses with low overhead.

"This means less competition and higher prices for the consumer," he said.Not a windfall:

Chet Dalzell, spokesman for the national Direct Marketing Association, said the notion that mail order companies collecting taxes would result in substantial revenues for states is just wrong.

Most of the figures he has heard — $70 million in additional tax revenues to the states — are from a 1987 update of a 1984 study by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations.

Those figures are unadjusted and actually include revenue that is already being collected by direct marketers who have a presence in the state.

Dalzell said mail-order companies already collect taxes in states where they have a physical presence, but asking companies — the vast majority of which are small businesses — to keep track of 46 sales taxes and an untold number of local taxing districts is unfair.

Dalzell said that some metropolitan areas have sales taxes in addition to the state tax.

Catalog merchants confident of a win

So begins the legislative tussle.

Just because the Supreme Court has tossed the political football to Congress doesn't mean that lawmakers will choose to run with it.

In one corner, retail associations and some state governments have already begun lobbying legislators to enact laws to amend the interstate commerce laws. In the other corner, direct marketers are already making plans to bombard the Congressmen should a proposal be made.

Chet Dalzell, spokesman for the Direct Marketing Association, said he believes the prospect that Congress will change the law and ask mail order companies to begin collecting and forwarding taxes to states and taxing bodies is remote.

"A bill proposing that was killed on its lack of merit two years ago," Dalzell said.

In 1989, Congress reviewed interstate commerce regulations and decided against any changes at the time, he said. "Any legislation is likely to be defeated until we have a uniform tax code — which isn't very likely."

If all states collected the same sales tax, then mail order companies would be able to collect sales taxes more easily, he said. Mail order companies would still be burdened by the task of transmitting the taxes to the respective taxing bodies, he said.

Steven Simons, president of Group SAA Limited, a Farmington Hills-based company specializing in the production and distribution of mail order catalogues, said those who argue for the tax collection as a way to tap new revenue sources might be surprised.

In order to collect the taxes, those same governments that see a potential windfall would be forced to set up an elaborate system to audit and monitor thousands of mail order companies.

"Most of those companies are probably making revenues of $1 million to $10 million," he said. Any revenues gained by the states would likely be eaten away by the bureaucratic system created to monitor it, he said.

"If they were to pass the law tomorrow, it would be better (to focus) on the larger companies."

Simons suggested that an exemption should be made for smaller companies. The government already distinguishes between small and large companies for other purposes, such as employment regulation and taxes. Such a compromise would at least give the small entrepreneur a better chance for survival.

DATEBOOK

■ **FINANCIAL PLANNING**
"10 Barriers to Personal Wealth" runs 7-9:30 p.m. Monday, June 29 at the Plaza Hotel in Southfield. Fee: $40 at the door. Information: 362-2424. Sponsor: Yes . . . A Positive Network.

■ **STATE TAX FORUM**
State tax forum presented 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Tuesday, June 30, at the Laurel Manor in Livonia. Fee: $110. Information: Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants, 855-2288.

■ **TROY CHAMBER**
Breakfast meeting 8-9:15 a.m. Thursday, July 2, at the Troy Marriott in Troy. Non-member fee: $20. Information: 641-8151.

■ **MEET WORDPERFECT**
"Introduction to WordPerfect" runs 7-9 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays for two weeks beginning July 7 at Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills. Fee: $88. Information: 645-3635.

■ **HEALTH CARE REFORM**
"A Town Meeting on Health Care Reform" 8-10 a.m. Tuesday, July 7, at Walsh College in Troy begins 12-session series on employee benefits. Fee: $48 per session, $480 for all 12 sessions. Information: Melanie de Vries, 567-5047. Sponsors: Dykema Gossett, Walsh College.

■ **RETIRING**
"Overview for the Professional: Retirement, Welfare and Compensation Plans" 10 a.m. to noon Tuesday, July 7, at Walsh College in Troy continues employee benefit series. Fee: $48 per session. Information: Melanie de Vries, 567-5047. Sponsors: Dykema Gossett, Walsh College.

■ **AUTOMOBILE STOCKS**
"If You Own Stock in GM, Ford or Chrysler" presented 1-3 p.m. or 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, July 8, at the Novi Hilton, Eight Mile and Haggerty roads. Free. Information: Phil Bocketti, 1-800-852-6228. Sponsor: PaineWebber.

■ **LIVONIA CHAMBER**
"5 O'Clock Connection" meeting 5-7 p.m. Thursday, July 9, at Ladbroke DRC in Livonia. Non-member fee: $10. Information: 427-2122.

■ **BUSINESS CONSORTIUM**
Oakland County Business Consortium meets 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, *July 11, in the Northland Mall* Auditorium in Southfield. Non-member fee: $5. Information: Annette, 443-0777.

■ **EMPLOYEE BENEFITS**
"Cash or Deferred Arrangements" 8-10 a.m. Wednesday, July 15, at Walsh College in Troy continues employee benefit series. Fee: $48 per session.

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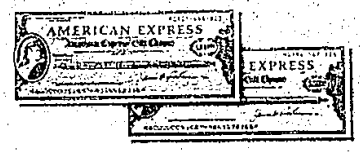

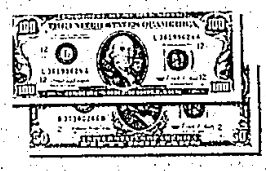

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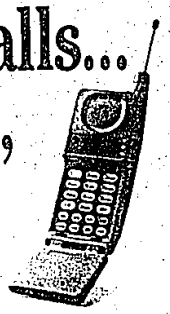

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