

YEAR-END PLANNING: INDIVIDUALS

Dear Client:

With year-end approaching, it is time to start thinking about moves that may help lower your tax bill for this year and next.

The standard year-end approach of deferring income and accelerating deductions to minimize taxes will continue to produce the best results for all but the highest income taxpayers, as will the bunching of deductible expenses into this year or next to avoid restrictions and maximize deductions.

We have compiled a list of actions based on current tax rules that may help you save tax dollars if you act before year-end. Not all of them will apply to you, but you (or a family member) may benefit from many of them. We can narrow down specific actions when we meet to tailor a particular plan for you. In the meantime, please review the following list and contact us at your earliest convenience so that we can advise you on which tax-saving moves might be beneficial:

Tax credits for EVs. If you are looking to buy a new car this year, remember that the Inflation Reduction Act has expired as of September 30, 2025.

Higher-income individuals must be wary of the 3.8% surtax on certain unearned income. The surtax is 3.8% of the lesser of: (1) net investment income (NII), or (2) the excess of MAGI over a threshold amount (\$250,000 for joint filers or surviving spouses, \$125,000 for a married individual filing a separate return, and \$200,000 in any other case).

As year-end nears, the approach taken to minimize or eliminate the 3.8% surtax will depend on the taxpayer's estimated MAGI and NII for the year. Some taxpayers should consider ways to minimize (e.g., through deferral) additional NII for the balance of the year, others should try to reduce MAGI other than NII, and some individuals will need to consider ways to minimize both NII and other types of MAGI. An important exception is that NII does not include distributions from IRAs or most other retirement plans.

The 0.9% additional Medicare tax also may require higher-income earners to take year-end action. It applies to individuals whose employment wages and self-employment income total more than an amount equal to the NIIT thresholds, see above.

Employers must withhold the additional Medicare tax from wages over \$200,000 regardless of filing status or other income. Self-employed persons must take it into account when figuring estimated tax. There could be situations where an employee may need to have more withheld toward the end of the year to cover the tax. This would be the case, for example, if an employee earns less than \$200,000 from multiple employers but more than that amount in total. Such an employee would owe the additional Medicare tax, but nothing would have been withheld by any employer.

Long-term capital gain from sales of assets held for over one year is taxed at 0%, 15% or 20%, depending on the taxpayer's taxable income. If you hold long-term appreciated-in-value assets, consider selling enough of them to generate long-term capital gains that can be sheltered by the 0% rate. The 0% rate generally applies to net long-term capital gain to the extent that, when added to regular taxable income, it is not more than the maximum zero rate amount (i.e., \$96,700 for a married couple; estimated to be \$98,900 in 2026). If, say, \$5,000 of long-term capital gains you took earlier this year qualifies for the zero rate then try not to sell assets yielding a capital loss before year-end, because the first \$5,000 of those losses will offset \$5,000 of capital gain that is already tax-free.

Postpone income until 2026 and accelerate deductions into 2025 if doing so will enable you to claim larger deductions, credits, and other tax breaks that are phased out over varying levels of AGI. These include deductible IRA contributions, child tax credits, higher education tax credits, and deductions for student loan interest. Postponing income also is desirable for taxpayers who anticipate being in a lower tax bracket next year due to changed financial circumstances. Note, however, that in some cases, it may pay to accelerate income into 2025. For example, that may be the case for a person who will have a more favorable filing status this year than next (e.g., head of household versus individual filing status), or who expects to be in a higher tax bracket next year. That's especially a consideration for high-income taxpayers who may be subject to higher rates next year under proposed legislation.

If you believe a Roth IRA is better for you than a traditional IRA, consider converting traditional-IRA money invested in any beaten-down stocks (or mutual funds) into a Roth IRA in 2025 if eligible to do so. Keep in mind that the conversion will increase your income for 2025, possibly reducing tax breaks subject to phaseout at higher AGI levels. This may be desirable, however, for those potentially subject to higher tax rates under pending legislation.

It may be advantageous to try to arrange with your employer to defer, until early 2026, a bonus that may be coming your way. This might cut as well as defer your tax. Again, considerations may be different for the highest income individuals.

Many taxpayers won't want to itemize because of the high basic standard deduction amounts that apply for 2025 (\$31,500 for joint filers, \$15,750 for singles and for marrieds filing separately, \$23,600 for heads of household), and because many itemized deductions have been reduced or abolished (such as the miscellaneous itemized deduction and the deduction for non-disaster related personal casualty losses). You can still itemize medical expenses that exceed 7.5% of your AGI, state and local taxes up to \$40,000 (the Act phases out the deduction for taxpayers with modified adjusted gross income greater than \$500,000 in 2025), your charitable contributions, plus mortgage interest deductions on a restricted amount of debt, but these deductions won't save taxes unless they total more than your standard deduction.

Some taxpayers may be able to work around these deduction restrictions by applying a bunching strategy to pull or push discretionary medical expenses and charitable contributions into the year where they will do some tax good. For example, a taxpayer who will be able to itemize deductions this year but not next will benefit by making two years' worth of charitable contributions this year.

Consider using a credit card to pay deductible expenses before the end of the year. Doing so will increase your 2025 deductions even if you don't pay your credit card bill until after the end of the year.

If you expect to owe state and local income taxes when you file your return next year and you will be itemizing in 2025, consider asking your employer to increase withholding of state and local taxes (or make estimated tax payments of state and local taxes) before year-end to pull the deduction of those taxes into 2025.

New rules for required minimum distributions (RMDs) from an IRA or 401(k) plan (or other employer-sponsored retirement plan). In general, an IRA owner must take their first RMD for the year in which they reach age 73.

If you are age 70½ or older by the end of 2025, and especially if you are unable to itemize your deductions, consider making 2025 charitable donations via qualified charitable distributions from your traditional IRAs. These distributions are made directly to charities from your IRAs, and the amount of the contribution is neither included in your gross income nor deductible on Schedule A, Form 1040. However, you are still entitled to claim the entire standard deduction. (The qualified charitable distribution amount is reduced by any deductible contributions to an IRA made for any year in which you were age 70½ or older, unless it reduced a previous qualified charitable distribution exclusion.)

Take an eligible rollover distribution from a qualified retirement plan before the end of 2025 if you are facing a penalty for underpayment of estimated tax and increasing your wage withholding won't sufficiently address the problem. Income tax will be withheld from the distribution and will be applied toward the taxes owed for 2025. You can then timely roll over the gross amount of the distribution, i.e., the net amount you received plus the amount of withheld tax, to a traditional IRA. No part of the distribution will be includable in income for 2025, but the withheld tax will be applied pro rata over the full 2025 tax year to reduce previous underpayments of estimated tax.

Consider increasing the amount you set aside for next year in your employer's FSA if you set aside too little for this year and anticipate similar medical costs next year.

If you become eligible in December 2025 to make HSA contributions, you can make a full year's worth of deductible HSA contributions for 2025.

Make gifts sheltered by the annual gift tax exclusion before the end of the year if doing so may save gift and estate taxes. The exclusion applies to gifts of up to \$19,000 made in 2025 to each of an unlimited number of individuals. You can't carry over unused exclusions to another year. These transfers may save family income taxes where income-earning property is given to family members in lower income tax brackets who are not subject to the kiddie tax.

If you were in federally declared disaster area, and you suffered uninsured or unreimbursed disaster-related losses, keep in mind you can choose to claim them either on the return for the year the loss occurred (in this instance, the 2025 return normally filed next year), or on the return for the prior year (2024), generating a quicker refund.

If you were in a federally declared disaster area, you may want to settle an insurance or damage claim in 2025 to maximize your casualty loss deduction this year.

These are just some of the year-end steps that can be taken to save taxes. Again, by contacting us, we can tailor a particular plan that will work best for you.

Happy Holidays!

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