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Here's the Tax Beat broadcast for February 4

Subject Line: The Ultimate Celebrity Flex – Your Own Tax

Getting something named after yourself usually means you've accomplished something, good or bad. Charles Ponzi didn't invent fraud, but he was so good at it that his name lives on in infamy. Ernesto Miranda had no idea that confessing to kidnapping and rape would establish a new Constitutional right. Edward Murphy had no idea that his offhand remark about a technician wiring sensors incorrectly would lead to the law that if anything can go wrong, it will.

But your own tax? That's a whole different flex. Getting immortalized in statute sounds like a weird sort of bragging right until you realize it means lawmakers are basically saying, "You're so rich and so iconic that we're going to come after you for more cash." Welcome to the Taylor Swift Tax club – population: extremely wealthy vacation-home owners.

Rhode Island lawmakers have proposed a new levy on homes worth more than a million bucks that sit empty more than half the year. The official title is something boring like the "non-owner-occupied property tax," but everyone's calling it the Taylor Swift Tax because, well, if you own a \$17 million mansion on the Rhode Island shore and only show up for summer sunsets or Fourth of July bangers, you're going to feel it in a big way.

Here's the Ocean State's new, not-so-fun math. For any home assessed over a million dollars that's not your primary residence, the state will hit you with an extra tax of \$2.50 for every \$500 of value above that threshold. For some of these trophy estates, that can mean six-figure bills year after year. That's right, even the mega-rich aren't immune. Crunching the numbers on Taylor's white clapboard mansion suggests she'll pay an extra \$136,000 annually once the law kicks in July, just in time for summer barbecue season. Card-carrying bluebloods with Vanderbilt-era "cottages" in Newport, like the 125,000-square-foot Breakers mansion, could feel even more pain.

The idea behind the new tax isn't just to troll celebrity homeowners, though social-media commentators might disagree. Rhode Island officials are pitching it as a way to raise money for affordable housing initiatives and to discourage absentee ownership that leaves charming coastal towns feeling like ghost movies in the off-season. Penalizing vacancies could lead to more year-round residents, more local spending, and maybe even a few more visits from the last great American dynasties. And owners who don't want to spend their summers enjoying ocean breezes could simply rent their properties. Not only would that avoid the penalty tax, but rental income could help cover maintenance and other expenses.

Of course, not everyone is thrilled about the concept. Real-estate pros and some long-time residents warn that tacking on extra costs could backfire. It could scare off buyers who otherwise pump money into the local economy or prompt owners to leave for friendlier tax climates in neighboring states. (Martha's Vineyard is just 32 nautical miles by ferry – and who knew Taxachusetts could be a friendlier tax climate?) Oh wait – Massachusetts (and Montana) are considering similar taxes, too!

Taylor Swift is currently worth something in the neighborhood of \$1.6 billion. She can afford to laugh about having her own tax. Most of us would sign up for that problem in a heartbeat. But for average non-dynasty families who inherit a modest beach cottage that finally climbs over the million-dollar mark, it feels a little less like a badge of honor and a little more like a punch in the wallet. That's the catch with catchy names: they make everything sound funnier until the tax man shows up with an bill. Good thing you know who to call when that invoice shows up!

Kevin

