General Explanations of the Administration's Fiscal Year 2014 Revenue Proposals

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EXPAND THE DEFINITION OF BUILT-IN LOSS FOR PURPOSES OF PARTNERSHIP LOSS TRANSFERS

Current Law

Under section 743(b), a partnership does not adjust the basis of partnership property following the transfer of a partnership interest unless the partnership has made an election under section 754 to make basis adjustments or the partnership has a substantial built-in loss. If an election is in effect or the partnership has a substantial built-in loss, adjustments are made with respect to the transferee partner to account for the difference between the transferee partner's proportionate share of the adjusted basis of the partnership property and the transferee's basis in its partnership interest. These adjustments are intended to adjust the basis of partnership property to approximate the result of a direct purchase of the property by the transferee partner.

Prior to 2004, section 743(b) applied only if the partnership made an election under section 754. To prevent the duplication of losses, Congress amended section 743 to mandate section 743(b) adjustments if the partnership had a substantial built-in loss in its assets. Section 743(d) defines a substantial built-in loss by reference to the partnership's adjusted basis – that is, there is a substantial built-in loss if the partnership's adjusted basis in its assets exceeds by more than $250,000 the fair market value of such property.

Reasons for Change

Although the 2004 amendments to section 743 prevent the duplication of losses where the partnership has a substantial built-in loss in its assets, it does not prevent the duplication of losses where the transferee partner would be allocated a net loss in excess of $250,000 if the partnership sold all of its assets in a fully taxable transaction for fair market value, but the partnership itself does not have a substantial built-in loss in its assets.

Proposal

The proposal would amend section 743(d) to also measure a substantial built-in loss by reference to whether the transferee would be allocated a net loss in excess of $250,000 upon a hypothetical disposition by the partnership of all of the partnership's assets, immediately after the transfer of the partnership interest, in a full taxable transaction for cash equal to the fair market value of the assets.

The proposal would apply to sales or exchanges after the date of enactment.

EXTEND PARTNERSHIP BASIS LIMITATION RULES TO NONDEDUCTIBLE EXPENDITURES

Current Law

Section 704(d) provides that a partner's distributive share of loss is allowed only to the extent of the partner's adjusted basis in its partnership interest at the end of the partnership year in which such loss occurred. Any excess is allowed as a deduction at the end of the partnership year in which the partner has sufficient basis in its partnership interest to take the deductions. Section 704(d) does not apply to partnership expenditures not deductible in computing partnership taxable income and not properly chargeable to capital account.

Reasons for Change

Even though a partner's distributive share of nondeductible expenditures reduces the partner's basis in its partnership interest, such items are not subject to section 704(d), and the partner may deduct or credit them currently even if the partner's basis in its partnership interest is zero.

Proposal

The proposal would amend section 704(d) to allow a partner's distributive share of expenditures not deductible in computing the partnership's taxable income and not properly chargeable to capital account only to the extent of the partner's adjusted basis in its partnership interest at the end of the partnership year in which such expenditure occurred.

The proposal would apply to a partnership's taxable year beginning on or after the date of enactment.

LIMIT THE IMPORTATION OF LOSSES UNDER RELATED PARTY LOSS LIMITATION RULES

Current Law

If a loss sustained by a transferor is disallowed under section 267(a)(1) or section 707(b)(1) because the transferor and transferee are related under section 267(b) or section 707(b)(1), section 267(d) provides that the transferee may reduce any gain the transferee later recognizes on a disposition of the transferred asset by the amount of the loss disallowed to the transferor. This has the effect of shifting the benefit of the loss from the transferor to the transferee.

Reasons for Change

Because section 267(d) shifts the benefit of the loss from the transferor to the transferee, losses can be imported where gain or loss with respect to the property is not subject to Federal income tax in the hands of the transferor immediately before the transfer but any gain or loss with respect to the property is subject to Federal income tax in the hands of the transferee immediately after the transfer.

Proposal

The proposal would amend section 267(d) to provide that the principles of section 267(d) do not apply to the extent gain or loss with respect to the property is not subject to Federal income tax in the hands of the transferor immediately before the transfer but any gain or loss with respect to the property is subject to Federal income tax in the hands of the transferee immediately after the transfer.

The proposal would apply to transfers made after the date of enactment.

TAX CARRIED (PROFITS) INTERESTS AS ORDINARY INCOME

Current Law

A partnership is not subject to Federal income tax. Instead, an item of income or loss of the partnership retains its character and flows through to the partners, who must include such item on their tax returns. Generally, certain partners receive partnership interests in exchange for contributions of cash and/or property, while certain partners (not necessarily other partners) receive partnership interests, typically interests in future profits ("profits interests" or "carried interests"), in exchange for services. Accordingly, if and to the extent a partnership recognizes long-term capital gain, the partners, including partners who provide services, will reflect their shares of such gain on their tax returns as long-term capital gain. If the partner is an individual, such gain would be taxed at the reduced rates for long-term capital gains. Gain recognized on the sale of a partnership interest, whether it was received in exchange for property, cash, or services, is generally treated as capital gain.

Under current law, income attributable to a profits interest of a general partner is generally subject to self-employment tax, except to the extent the partnership generates types of income that are excluded from self-employment taxes, e.g., capital gains, certain interest, and dividends.

Reasons for Change

Although profits interests are structured as partnership interests, the income allocable to such interests is received in connection with the performance of services. A service provider's share of the income of a partnership attributable to a carried interest should be taxed as ordinary income and subject to self-employment tax because such income is derived from the performance of services. By allowing service partners to receive capital gains treatment on labor income without limit, the current system creates an unfair and inefficient tax preference. The recent explosion of activity among large private equity firms and hedge funds has increased the breadth and cost of this tax preference, with some of the highest-income Americans benefiting from the preferential treatment.

Proposal

The proposal would tax as ordinary income a partner's share of income on an "investment services partnership interest" (ISPI) in an investment partnership, regardless of the character of the income at the partnership level. Accordingly, such income would not be eligible for the reduced rates that apply to long-term capital gains. In addition, the proposal would require the partner to pay self-employment taxes on such income. In order to prevent income derived from labor services from avoiding taxation at ordinary income rates, this proposal assumes that the gain recognized on the sale of an ISPI would generally be taxed as ordinary income, not as capital gain. To ensure more consistent treatment with the sales of other types of businesses, the Administration remains committed to working with Congress to develop mechanisms to assure the proper amount of income recharacterization where the business has goodwill or other assets unrelated to the services of the ISPI holder.

An ISPI is a carried interest in an investment partnership that is held by a person who provides services to the partnership. A partnership is an investment partnership if substantially all of its assets are investment-type assets (certain securities, real estate, interests in partnerships, commodities, cash or cash equivalents, or derivative contracts with respect to those assets), but only if over half of the partnership's contributed capital is from partners in whose hands the interests constitute property not held in connection with a trade or business. To the extent (1) the partner who holds an ISPI contributes "invested capital" (which is generally money or other property) to the partnership, and (2) such partner's invested capital is a qualified capital interest (which generally requires that (a) the partnership allocations to the invested capital be in a same manner as allocations to other capital interests held by partners who do not hold an ISPI and (b) the allocations to these non-ISPI holders are significant), income attributable to the invested capital would not be recharacterized. Similarly, the portion of any gain recognized on the sale of an ISPI that is attributable to the invested capital would be treated as capital gain. However, "invested capital" will not include contributed capital that is attributable to the proceeds of any loan or other advance made or guaranteed by any partner or the partnership.

Also, any person who performs services for an entity and holds a "disqualified interest" in the entity is subject to tax at rates applicable to ordinary income on any income or gain received with respect to the interest. A "disqualified interest" is defined as convertible or contingent debt, an option, or any derivative instrument with respect to the entity (but does not include a partnership interest, stock in certain taxable corporations, or stock in an S corporation). This is an anti-abuse rule designed to prevent the avoidance of the proposal through the use of compensatory arrangements other than partnership interests. Other anti-abuse rules may be necessary.

The proposal is not intended to adversely affect qualification of a real estate investment trust owning a carried interest in a real estate partnership.

The proposal would be effective for taxable years ending after December 31, 2013.

REPEAL TECHNICAL TERMINATIONS OF PARTNERSHIPS

Current Law

Under section 707(b)(1)(B) of the Internal Revenue Code, if within a 12-month period, there is a sale or exchange of 50 percent or more of the total interest in partnership capital and profits, the partnership is treated as having terminated for U.S. federal income tax purposes.

Reasons for Change

A termination of this kind is commonly referred to as a "technical termination" because the termination occurs solely for U.S. federal income tax purposes, even though the entity continues to exist for local law purposes and the business of the partnership continues. Even though the business of the partnership continues in the same legal form, several unanticipated consequences occur as a result of a technical termination, including, among other things, the restart of section 168 depreciation lives, the close of the partnership's taxable year, and the loss of all partnership level elections. Accordingly, this rule currently serves as a trap for the unwary taxpayer or as an affirmative planning tool for the savvy taxpayer.

Proposal

The proposal would repeal section 708(b)(1)(B) effective for transfers on or after December 31, 2013.

TAX GAIN FROM THE SALE OF A PARTNERSHIP INTEREST ON LOOK-THROUGH BASIS

Current Law

In general, the sale or exchange of a partnership interest is treated as the sale or exchange of a capital asset. Capital gains of a nonresident alien individual or foreign corporation generally are subject to federal income tax only if the gains are or are treated as income that is effectively connected with the conduct of a trade or business in the United States (ECI). Section 875(1) provides that a nonresident alien individual or foreign corporation shall be considered as being engaged in a trade or business within the United States if the partnership of which such individual or corporation is a member is so engaged. Revenue Ruling 91-32 holds that gain or loss of a nonresident alien individual or foreign corporation from the sale or exchange of a partnership interest is effectively connected with the conduct of a trade or business in the United States to the extent of the partner's distributive share of unrealized gain or loss of the partnership that is attributable to property used or held for use in the partnership's trade or business within the United States (ECI property). A partnership may elect under section 754 to adjust the basis of its assets upon the transfer of an interest in the partnership to reflect the transferee partner's basis in the partnership interest.

Reasons for Change

Nonresident alien individuals and foreign corporations may take a position contrary to the holding of Revenue Ruling 91-32, arguing that gain from the sale of a partnership interest is not subject to federal income taxation because no Internal Revenue Code (Code) provision explicitly provides that gain from the sale or exchange of a partnership interest by a nonresident alien individual or foreign corporation is treated as ECI. If the partnership has in effect an election under section 754, the partnership's basis in its assets is also increased, thereby preventing that gain from being taxed in the future.

Proposal

The proposal would provide that gain or loss from the sale or exchange of a partnership interest is effectively connected with the conduct of a trade or business in the United States to the extent attributable to the transferor partner's distributive share of the partnership's unrealized gain or loss that is attributable to ECI property. The Secretary would be granted authority to specify the extent to which a distribution from the partnership is treated as a sale or exchange of an interest in the partnership and to coordinate the new provision with the nonrecognition provisions of the Code.

In addition, the transferee of a partnership interest would be required to withhold 10 percent of the amount realized on the sale or exchange of a partnership interest unless the transferor certified that the transferor was not a nonresident alien individual or foreign corporation. If a transferor provided a certificate from the Internal Revenue Service that established that the transferor's federal income tax liability with respect to the transfer was less than 10 percent of the amount realized, the transferee would withhold such lesser amount. If the transferee failed to withhold the correct amount, the partnership would be liable for the amount of underwithholding, and would satisfy the withholding obligation by withholding on future distributions that otherwise would have gone to the transferee partner.

The proposal would be effective for sales or exchanges after December 31, 2013.