Internal Revenue Service

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Date:
March 26, 2020

In Re:

LEGEND:

Taxpayer	=
Parent	=
State A	=
Commission A	=
Commission B	=
Date 1	=
Date 2	=
Date 3	=
Date 4	=
Date 5	=
Month 1	=
Month 2	=
Year 1	=

Year 2 =

Year 3 =

Year 4 =

Year 5 =

Year 6 =

Dear :

This letter responds to a request for a private letter ruling dated September 26, 2019, and submitted on behalf of Taxpayer regarding the application of the depreciation normalization rules under § 168(i)(9) of the Internal Revenue Code and § 1.167(l)-1 of the Income Tax Regulations (together, the "Normalization Rules") to certain State A state regulatory procedures which are described in this letter. The relevant facts as represented in your submission are set forth below.

FACTS

Taxpayer is an investor-owned regulated utility incorporated under the laws of State A. Taxpayer is an accrual basis taxpayer and reports on a calendar year basis.

Taxpayer is wholly owned by Parent. Parent is a State A corporation. Taxpayer is included in a consolidated federal income tax return of which Parent is the common parent.

Taxpayer is a regulated utility engaged principally in the purchase, transmission, distribution, and sale of electric energy and the purchase, distribution, and sale of natural gas in State A. Taxpayer is subject to regulation as to rates and conditions of service by Commission A as well as Commission B. Both these regulators establish Taxpayer's rates based on its costs, including a provision for a return on the capital employed by Taxpayer in its regulated businesses.

Taxpayer has claimed accelerated depreciation on all of its public utility property (both electric and gas) to the full extent those deductions have been available. Taxpayer has normalized the federal income taxes deferred as a result of its claiming these deductions in accordance with the Normalization Rules. As a consequence, Taxpayer has a substantial balance of accumulated deferred federal income taxes (ADFIT) that is attributable to accelerated depreciation reflected on its regulated books of account for each of its divisions. In accordance with State A ratemaking practice, Taxpayer has reduced its rate base by its ADFIT balance.

Commission B has established a system to track accounts for both jurisdictional electric and gas companies. These accounts prescribe the accounting rules which are used by most large investor-owned electric and gas companies and are employed by Taxpayer's electric and gas divisions. The applicable regulations contain several definitions relevant to Taxpayer's inquiry including definitions for cost of removal (COR), salvage value, net salvage value, service value, and depreciation.

In general, based on these definitions, for purposes of regulatory reporting, the net positive value or net cost of disposing of an asset at the end of its life is incorporated into the annual depreciation charge. COR is, therefore, most often (but not always) a component of establishing the applicable depreciation rate. In Taxpayer's case, due to the amount of COR it anticipates, in almost all instances its assets have negative net salvage values so that its book depreciation rate is higher than it would be were salvage value not considered. In effect, the annual depreciation charge creates a reserve for COR over the operating life of the asset. Since book depreciation expense is included in Taxpayer's cost of service used for establishing its rates, customers pay for the COR as book depreciation is factored into their rates. This COR reserve is reflected as an addition to Taxpayer's accumulated depreciation account. When the COR is actually incurred, the amount expended is debited to that same account, thereby reducing the balance.

For tax purposes, COR is deductible only when actually incurred. Taxpayer, therefore, reports its customer collections that fund the COR reserve as taxable income over the operating life of an asset, claiming an offsetting tax deduction only at the end of the life of that asset. Taxpayer has normalized COR since the Year 1 tax year. All references below to COR-related deferred tax accounting relate only to COR associated with assets placed in service after Year 2. Since COR is normalized in setting rates, customers are provided a tax benefit commensurate with their funding of COR. In other words, they are provided the COR tax benefit as they fund the COR reserve – prior to the time Taxpayer actually claims that benefit on its tax return.

The tax effect of the COR funding as described creates a deferred tax asset ("DTA"). This represents the future benefit to be derived from the eventual COR tax deduction. The COR-related DTA is included in Taxpayer's overall plant-related ADFIT account that reduces Taxpayer's ADFIT balance.

COR can (and does) impact ADFIT balances in an additional way. The COR included in depreciation expense (that is, the accrual) is an estimate prepared for an entire class of assets contained in a Commission B account. It is likely that any COR estimate will be too high or too low with respect to any individual asset with the ultimate answer remaining unknown until all vintages of each asset class are retired and removed. Any running variance from the estimate is recorded on Taxpayer's balance sheet. Where the accrual exceeds the actual COR, it creates a net credit to the accumulated depreciation account. Where the actual COR exceeds the accrual, it creates a net debit to that account. This treatment means that Taxpayer will recover

under-accruals from customers and refund over-accruals to customers through future rate adjustments. These future rate adjustments will give rise to future increases or decreases in taxable income. Under applicable accounting principles, Taxpayer must record the deferred tax consequences of these future events. An over-accrual produces a DTA (the tax benefit of a future deduction due to the refund of the excess collection) while an under-accrual produces a deferred tax liability "DTL" (the tax cost of future taxable income due to the collection of the shortfall).

For the electric distribution division, the COR book/regulatory accrual has always been included in the development of the book depreciation rate. Thus, instead of waiting for the Taxpayer to incur the tax benefit of COR, its' Customers are provided the COR tax benefit as they fund the COR reserve – prior to the time Taxpayer actually claims that benefit on its tax return. This produces a DTA as described. In addition, as of Date 1, Taxpayer has, in total, incurred more COR than it has recovered from customers and, thus, is under-accrued for COR. This has produced a DTL, also as described. Both the DTA and DTL are included within Taxpayer's overall plant-related ADFIT Account.

Prior to Month 1 Year 3, the gas distribution division accrued and collected COR as a component of the book depreciation rate. However, pursuant to order of Commission A, that collection practice was modified in Year 3. Beginning in Month 1 Year 3, the gas-only COR regulatory accrual was removed from the book depreciation rate. Rather, Taxpayer was allowed to record and recover annually (through a fixed dollar depreciation charge incremental to the normal depreciation computed via application of the depreciation rate) an amount representing an estimate of the annual COR that would be incurred in that year. At the time of this modification, the cumulative COR accrued exceeded COR actually incurred (that is, Taxpayer was over-accrued). At that time, Taxpayer had recorded a net DTA (to reflect the tax benefit of the future reduction in rates associated with refunding the excess to customers).

Since converting to this methodology in Year 3, COR actually incurred has significantly exceeded COR accrued and recovered, resulting in a DTL (the tax cost of recovering the under-accrual in the future). As of Date 1, the two components (pre-Month 1 Year 3 and post-Month 2 Year 3) combined represented a net DTL.

Effective Date 2, pursuant to an Order issued by Commission A, gas COR regulatory recovery has reverted back to a component of the book depreciation rate. The fixed dollar accrual which began in Year 3 has been eliminated.

Since Year 4, Taxpayer's tax fixed asset system has separately identified the portion of Taxpayer's book depreciation expense that relates to COR since that date. As a consequence, the system distinguishes between COR book/tax differences and depreciation method/life differences even though they are both derived from Taxpayer's book depreciation. Though the system has the capability of tracking the reversals of these differences separately, in order to set it up to do this, a significant amount of work

and data manipulation would be required. It is not currently configured in a manner that would allow this.

In years prior to Year 5, Taxpayer paid income tax at a 35% rate on the recovery of the COR portion of book depreciation (and provided its customers a tax benefit at that tax rate). However, as a result of the tax rate reduction enacted as part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act ("TCJA"), Taxpayer will only receive a 21% benefit when the COR deduction is claimed or when any over-accrual is refunded and will pay only a 21% tax on the recovery of any COR under-accrual. In other words, in the case of COR, the tax rate reduction enacted as part of the TCJA has produced both a deferred tax shortfall as well as an excess tax reserve. Because Taxpayer will not recover the 14% "excess" tax it paid on its recovery of the COR component of book depreciation from the government when it claims its COR deduction, it must recover it from its customers. Conversely, because Taxpayer will not pay the 14% "excess" deferred tax it accrued on its obligation to refund over-accrued COR, it must restore the amount to its customers (that is, it also has COR-related excess deferred taxes).

Taxpayer's Changes in Accounting Method for Mixed Service Costs and Repairs

Prior to Taxpayer's Year 6 tax year, in capitalizing its indirect overhead costs – including its mixed service costs – Taxpayer followed the same methodology for both book and tax purposes. Effective for its Year 6 tax year, Taxpayer filed with the Internal Revenue Service an Application for Change in Accounting Method (Form 3115) in which it requested permission to depart from its book method for tax purposes. The result of the change was to recharacterize a substantial quantity of mixed service costs that Taxpayer had previously capitalized into depreciable assets as deductible costs (including additions to cost of goods sold). This resulted in Taxpayer claiming a negative adjustment under § 481(a) (that is, a deduction) to remove from the tax basis of its existing assets all such recharacterized costs to the extent Taxpayer had not previously depreciated them ("Section 481 Adjustment").

Also, prior to Taxpayer's Year 6 tax year, in identifying deductible repairs, Taxpayer followed the same methodology for both book and tax purposes. Effective for its Year 6 tax year, Taxpayer filed an Application for Change in Accounting Method (Form 3115) in which it requested permission to depart from its book method for tax purposes. In general, under its new tax method, Taxpayer elected to use larger units of property than used for book purposes. The result of the change was to characterize many projects that were capitalized for book purposes as deductible repairs for tax purposes. This resulted in Taxpayer claiming a negative § 481 Adjustment to remove from the tax basis of its existing assets all such recharacterized costs to the extent Taxpayer had not previously depreciated them.

Adjustments (additions) were made to Taxpayer's ADFIT accounts, which already reflected the deferred tax consequences of having claimed accelerated

depreciation on both types of costs after they were capitalized for tax purposes for the additional deferred taxes produced by the § 481 Adjustments.

Taxpayer's Recent Commission A Proceedings

On Date 3, Taxpayer filed with Commission A to adjust both its electric and its gas rates. The parties to the proceeding reached an agreement and, on or about Date 4, Taxpayer submitted a stipulation to Commission A for its approval. Commission A approved the stipulation on Date 5.

The stipulation provides that:

1) Taxpayer will seek a private letter ruling to determine if excess deferred taxes associated with excess tax over book depreciation that is subsequently reversed by accounting method changes relating to repair deductions and the capitalization of mixed service costs are protected by the normalization rules and subject to reversal under the ARAM; and that

2) Taxpayer will seek a private letter ruling from the IRS to determine whether post-Year 1 cost of removal is protected by the normalization rules and, if so, whether it is to be treated as a separate temporary difference or part of the overall depreciation temporary difference for purposes of ARAM amortization.

RULINGS REQUESTED

Taxpayer requests the following guidance:

1) Under the circumstances described above, is Taxpayer's electric distribution COR-related net DTL "protected" by the Normalization Rules?

2) If Taxpayer's electric distribution COR-related deferred tax is "protected," should that shortfall be treated as a discrete "protected" item or as part of the "protected" method/life difference?

3) Under the circumstances described above, is Taxpayer's gas distribution COR-related net DTA accumulated through the depreciation rate prior to Month 1 of Year 3 "protected" by the Normalization Rules?

4) If Taxpayer's gas distribution COR-related deferred tax accumulated through the depreciation rate prior to Month 1 of Year 3 is "protected," should that shortfall be treated as a discrete "protected" item or as part of the "protected" method/life difference?

5) Under the circumstances described above, is Taxpayer's gas distribution COR-related net DTL accumulated through the fixed estimated cash recovery after Month 1 of Year 3 "protected" by the Normalization Rules?

6) If Taxpayer's gas distribution COR-related net DTL accumulated through the fixed estimated cash recovery after Month 1 of Year 3 is "protected," should that shortfall be treated as a discrete "protected" item or as part of the "protected" method/life difference?

7) If Taxpayer's COR-related deferred tax shortfall is "protected," do the Normalization Rules permit Taxpayer to collect a shortfall any more rapidly than using the ARAM?

8) Do Taxpayer's depreciation-related ADFIT balances created pursuant to the Normalization Rules that are attributable to costs that were capitalized into the basis of depreciable assets prior to Taxpayer changing its method of accounting for those costs remain subject to the Normalization Rules after the change in method of accounting pursuant to which such costs were reclassified as current deductions?

LAW AND ANALYSIS

Section 168(f)(2) provides that the depreciation deduction determined under § 168 shall not apply to any public utility property (within the meaning of § 168(i)(10)) if the taxpayer does not use a normalization method of accounting.

In order to use a normalization method of accounting, § 168(i)(9)(A)(i) requires the taxpayer, in computing its tax expense for establishing its cost of service for ratemaking purposes and reflecting operating results in its regulated books of account, to use a method of depreciation with respect to public utility property that is the same as, and a depreciation period for such property that is not shorter than, the method and period used to compute its depreciation expense for such purposes. Under § 168(i)(9)(A)(ii), if the amount allowable as a deduction under § 168 differs from the amount that would be allowable as a deduction under § 167 using the method, period, first and last year convention, and salvage value used to compute regulated tax expense under § 168(i)(9)(A)(i), the taxpayer must make adjustments to a reserve to reflect the deferral of taxes resulting from such difference.

Former § 167(l) generally provided that public utilities were entitled to use accelerated methods for depreciation if they used a "normalization method of accounting." A normalization method of accounting was defined in former § 167(l)(3)(G) in a manner consistent with that found in § 168(i)(9)(A). Section 1.167(l)-1(a)(1) provides that the normalization requirements for public utility property pertain only to the deferral of federal income tax liability resulting from the use of an accelerated method of depreciation for computing the allowance for depreciation under § 167 and the use of straight-line depreciation for computing tax expense and depreciation expense for purposes of establishing cost of services and for reflecting operating results in regulated

books of account. These regulations do not pertain to other book-tax timing differences with respect to state income taxes, F.I.C.A. taxes, construction costs, or any other taxes and items.

Section 481(a) requires those adjustments necessary to prevent amounts from being duplicated or omitted to be taken into account when a taxpayer's taxable income is computed under a method of accounting different from the method used to compute taxable income for the preceding taxable year. *See also* § 2.05(1) of Rev. Proc. 97-27, 97-27, 1997-1 C.B. 680 (the operative method change revenue procedure at the time Taxpayer filed its Form 3115, *Application for Change in Accounting Method*).

An adjustment under § 481(a) can include amounts attributable to taxable years that are closed by the period of limitation on assessment under § 6501(a). *Suzy's Zoo v. Commissioner*, 114 T.C. 1, 13 (2000), *aff'd*, 273 F.3d 875, 884 (9th Cir. 2001); *Superior Coach of Florida, Inc. v. Commissioner*, 80 T.C. 895, 912 (1983), *Weiss v. Commissioner*, 395 F.2d 500 (10th Cir. 1968), *Spang Industries, Inc. v. United States*, 6 Cl. Ct. 38, 46 (1984), *rev'd on other grounds* 791 F.2d 906 (Fed. Cir. 1986). *See also Mulholland v. United States*, 28 Fed. Cl. 320, 334 (1993) (concluding that a court has the authority to review the taxpayer's threshold selection of a method of accounting *de novo*, and must determine, *ab initio*, whether the taxpayer's reported income is clearly reflected).

Sections 481(c) and 1.481-4 provide that the adjustment required by § 481(a) may be taken into accounting in determining taxable income in the manner, and subject to the conditions, agreed to by the Service and a taxpayer. Section 1.446-1(e)(3)(i) authorizes the Service to prescribe administrative procedures setting forth the limitations, terms, and conditions deemed necessary to permit a taxpayer to obtain consent to change a method of accounting in accordance with § 446(e). *See also* § 5.02 of Rev. Proc. 97-27.

When there is a change in method of accounting to which § 481(a) is applied, § 2.05(1) of Rev. Proc. 97-27 provides that income for the taxable year preceding the year of change must be determined under the method of accounting that was then employed, and income for the year of change and the following taxable years must be determined under the new method of accounting as if the new method had always been used.

Because of their similarity, we address requests 1, 3, and 5 together. For all of the COR-related amounts at issue in these requests, the amounts are not protected by the Normalization Rules. Generally, § 168(i)(9)(A) does not refer to COR. Moreover, there is no reference to an acceleration of taxes but only to a deferral. While COR may be a component of the calculation of the amount treated as book depreciation, it is a deduction under § 162 and has nothing to do with actual accelerated tax depreciation. While depreciation method and life differences are created and reversed solely through depreciation, such is not the case with COR. While the COR timing differences may

often originate as a component of book depreciation, it reverses through the incurred COR expenditure.

Taxpayer's ruling request 8 pertains to the depreciation-related ADIT existing prior to the year of change (Year 6) for public utility property in service as of the end of the taxable year immediately preceding the year of change. Beginning with the year of change, the Year 6 Consent Agreement granted Taxpayer permission to change its (1) method of accounting for mixed service costs to recharacterize a substantial quantity of mixed service costs that Taxpayer had previously capitalized into depreciable assets as deductible costs (including additions to cost of goods sold) and (2) to depart from its book method for tax purposes electing to use for tax purposes larger units of property than used for book purposes which resulted in characterizing many projects that were capitalized for book purposes as deductible repairs for tax purposes.

When there is a change in method of accounting to which § 481(a) is applied, income for the taxable year preceding the year of change must be determined under the method of accounting that was then employed by Taxpayer, and income for the year of change and the following taxable years must be determined under Taxpayer's new method of accounting as if the new method had always been used. *See* § 481(a); § 1.481-1(a)(1); and § 2.05(1) of Rev. Proc. 97-27. In other words: (1) Taxpayer's new method of accounting is implemented beginning in the year of change; (2) Taxpayer's old method of accounting used in the taxable years preceding the year of change is not disturbed; and (3) Taxpayer takes into account a § 481(a) adjustment in computing taxable income to offset any consequent omissions or duplications.

Accordingly, for public utility property in service as of the end of the taxable year immediately preceding the year of change (Year 6), the depreciation-related ADIT existing prior to the year of change for the changes in methods of accounting subject to the Year 6 Consent Agreement does not remain subject to the normalization method of accounting within the meaning of § 168(i)(9) after implementation of the new tax methods of accounting in the year of change and subsequent taxable years.

Based on the foregoing, we conclude that:

1) Under the circumstances described above, Taxpayer's electric distribution COR-related net DTL is not "protected" by the Normalization Rules.

3) Under the circumstances described above, Taxpayer's gas distribution COR-related net DTA accumulated through the depreciation rate prior to Month 1 of Year 3 is not "protected" by the Normalization Rules.

5) Under the circumstances described above, Taxpayer's gas distribution COR-related net DTL accumulated through the fixed estimated cash recovery after Month 1 of Year 3 is not "protected" by the Normalization Rules.

Because these amounts in requests 1, 3, and 5 are not protected by the Normalization Rules, requests 2, 4, 6, and 7 are moot.

8) Taxpayer's depreciation related ADFIT balances created pursuant to the Normalization Rules that are attributable to costs that were capitalized into the basis of depreciable assets prior to Taxpayer changing its method of accounting for those costs do not remain subject to the Normalization Rules after the change in method of accounting pursuant to which such costs were reclassified as current deductions.

Except as specifically set forth above, no opinion is expressed or implied concerning the federal income tax consequences of the above described facts under any other provision of the Code or regulations.

This ruling is directed only to the taxpayer requesting it. Section 6110(k)(3) of the Code provides that it may not be used or cited as precedent.

This ruling is based upon information and representations submitted by Taxpayer and accompanied by penalty of perjury statements executed by an appropriate party. While this office has not verified any of the material submitted in support of the request for rulings, it is subject to verification on examination.

In accordance with the power of attorney on file with this office, a copy of this letter is being sent to your authorized representatives.

Sincerely,

Patrick S. Kirwan
Chief, Branch 6
Office of Associate Chief Counsel
(Passthroughs & Special Industries)

cc: