

Stealing What's Ours

Rich Heidel, BCTA President

Believe it or not, this is the last issue of the *Tax Times* you will receive before the November 6th mid-term elections. The following are my opinions - not necessarily those of the Brown County Taxpayers Association.

As a self-delusional tactic to salve their anger and disappointment in the 2016 presidential election result, the mainstream media ("MSM") are up in arms about the integrity of the American electoral process, specifically its subjugation to Russian hacking. Never mind that no evidence of President Trump is in any way implicated despite a year and a half of investigating, or that the REAL hacking went on with Secretary Hillary Clinton's e-mails, or that President Obama himself correctly stated that our electoral process is too decentralized to be vulnerable to any foreign influence. (That particular statement was made BEFORE Trump's unexpected victory!) With such egregious, flagrant, and obvious attempts at trying to alter the 2016 election result, one wonders what the DoJ, FEC, Congress, or President Trump himself are doing to set the record straight, but that's a subject for another cover letter. The question I'd like to ponder here is why does the American public take offense at alleged interference in our electoral process by Russians, or anyone else, when American voters themselves turn out in such slim numbers for elections other than the presidential elections every four years? After all, the second-most important manner in which to protect our elections is to participate - to vote! The most important role in participating - overshadowing voting itself - is to be informed on the issues and candidates' positions with respect to the issues. To feign outrage at manipulating elections while sitting at home instead of voting, or not educating oneself about the candidates' positions on the

issues, or both, is indefensible.

So, how do you get informed? Ironically, radio talk shows, regardless of their disclaimers about not being objective news shows, are far more informative and objective than MSM. It's actually entertaining to listen to the MSM after having had the advantage of taking in a few talk shows. Another way to be informed (and entertained) is by attendance at meetings of deliberative bodies such as the school board, county board, village board, city council, or state legislature. Our form of government showcases these arenas expressly for public consumption and participation. Our elected officials - at all levels - will typically perform only as high as we make our expectations known. This also includes engaging these elected officials vis-à-vis phone calls, letters, and e-mails with opinions, comments, questions, or grievances. A third strategy at being informed is active membership in the BCTA itself. The BCTA diligently presents and dissects political issues - often governmental spending and its priorities - at its monthly lunch meeting. You're invited and encouraged to come, listen, enjoy a lunch, ask questions, and kibitz with other BCTA members. With individual membership at \$15/year, there's no better deal in town!

Only after one avails himself of the above options can one be genuinely and legitimately outraged at election meddling! And once informed, you'll find you're outraged by the shenanigans of the MSM, the Democratic Party, and the seeming indifference of some of our elected politicians - NOT the Russians! Plato once said, "One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors." Instead of putting on their "big boy" pants and living with the results, these bad actors are trying to steal our 2016 elections.

Rich H.

JULY MEETING NOTES

State Representative David Steffen spoke about relocating the Green Bay Correctional Institution (GBCI). He represents the Fourth Assembly District, which includes the Village of Allouez. The Village Administration, along with 1,000 citizens and over 100 businesses have petitioned for the removal and relocation of the GBCI.

The GBCI houses 1,086 prisoners and has 396 full-time employees. Designed for 750 inmates, the current population of 1,086 inmates is 145 percent of its original design capacity.

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) have identified \$200 million of deferred maintenance necessary for the 120 year old facility. The GBCI ranks at the top of all 37 correctional facilities operated by the state for capital costs, assaults on prison guards, number of inmates, and value of the residual property.

Representative Steffen supports a debt-free solution that would have a new correctional facility constructed by a private business and leased to the State of Wisconsin. After 20 years of lease payments, ownership would transfer to the state. This plan avoids bonding and it would place the new facility on the tax rolls. It would be operated and managed by the DOC. Efficiency improvements would permit reducing the guard force by 30 percent to 40 percent. He estimates total savings of \$120 million for Wisconsin taxpayers.

Bob Srenaski, an economist, presented his research questioning the immediate need for a \$14 million addition to the Brown County Jail. He is a member of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Board. He explained that the 20 to 24 year-old male segment of the population is becoming a smaller and smaller percentage of the total population of Brown County, which infers lower crime rates. Actually, crime rates are down, arrest numbers are down, but the jail population is increasing. Why? Over 69 percent of jail inmates are awaiting their first court dates. The Brown County District Attorney's Office is woefully understaffed as is the Public Defender's Office. Each year, more cases are opened than are closed, with the backlog adding to the jail population. We end up spending \$50 per day boarding some prisoners who cannot post bail of \$1,000 or \$2,000. Mr. Srenaski suggests that evaluating flight risk when setting bail could reduce the jail population, a measure which has been successful in other states. He believes that the Brown County Board should take responsibility and create a Criminal Justice Department for coordinating between stakeholders to establish common communications and speed up the criminal justice system in Brown County.

John Muir, host of the John Muir Show on WTAQ Radio in Green Bay, spoke about his approach to presenting factual information to his listeners. He stated that there are some very clear choices that citizens must make in the near future. The John Muir Show is a morning talk show with a conservative focus on political and governmental issues.

Dave Nelson - Secretary

AUGUST MEETING NOTES

Mark Steuer, Green Bay City Council President and candidate for mayor, shared his thoughts on Green Bay city government. He worked for the City of Green Bay for 25 years as a cartographer (mapmaker) in the Planning Department. This gave him an opportunity to learn about zoning, land use, planning, comprehensive land use, and transportation. On the City Council, he represents District 10 on the west side of Green Bay, which is primarily a residential district. Issues he has handled in his district include: safety of children at school, rats, fall waste pickup, roads, sidewalks, railroad crossings, the wheel tax, special needs of homelessness, and claims. Claims are put in as a communication to the appropriate committee. The committee reviews the claim, studies it, and forwards the claim to the full

Council if it agrees with the claim.

Mr. Steuer is always interested in citizens' ideas for improving efficiency in any department. He identified the merger of the Green Bay Fire Department and the Allouez Fire Department into the Green Bay Metro Fire Department as an example of a major efficiency improvement.

He believes that we need a strong central city and we need strong neighborhoods as well. As part of his campaign for mayor, he plans to ride his bicycle over all of the City streets, giving him a firsthand observation of their condition.

Tom Sladek presented the findings of his research

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into the often-cited claim that 30 percent of the Brown County 0.5 percent sales tax is paid by out-of-county visitors. For almost 10 years, the 30 percent estimate has been cited again and again with no one able to provide any solid evidence to support it.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism has estimated that annual Brown County direct visitor spending is \$638 million. The 0.5 percent sales tax would generate \$3.19 million from the \$638 million of visitor spending. \$3.19 million is 13 percent of the \$24.5 million annual sales tax revenue estimated by the Brown County

Administration. Since gasoline and non-prepared food are not taxable purchases by visitors, the actual percent of sales tax revenue due to visitor spending must be less than 13 percent.

From another approach, 30 percent of \$24.5 million estimated annual sales tax revenue is \$7.35 million. To generate \$7.35 million with a 0.5 percent sales tax, annual visitor spending must be \$1.47 BILLION.

A March, 2017 AECOM report, funded by Brown County, stated "we estimate that visitors to Brown County generate approximately 11 percent of the sales tax revenues."

Dave Nelson - Secretary

Things That Make Us Wonder

The primary elections at least are finally over, and voters can get down to the business of actually selecting who we want to be running our state and representing us in Washington for the next few years.

A problem may be, however, is that many people perhaps based their voting decisions on what they learn by watching TV commercials, which for the most part in this election, seem to have consisted of negative statements, used out of context, with no proof of validity, or even a legible statement of who is sponsoring the ad.

The coming November election so far is starting out as the worst ever for misleading advertising. At least in Wisconsin.

It is up to you to determine if the candidate you are voting for truly has the welfare of the majority of people in mind. Not a few special interests paying for their ads and political influence.

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For many years, it has been a requirement that employers verify a new applicants citizenship status by examining their social security card, driver's license, passport, or whatever else to prove beyond reasonable doubt the applicant was eligible for benefits. All forms of identification supposedly have safeguards built in to prevent fraud and protect our interests.

We realize the system is complex and requires a lot of upkeep but if the IRS and Social Security Administration were doing half the job they are supposed to do it would be easier for all of us.

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Have you been watching any good soap operas lately? There is one that has been continuously running simultaneously on all the major networks for the past several months and doesn't show any signs of ending soon. The plot is well written, with new wrinkles added daily to keep it ongoing.

It doesn't have an official name or sponsor except any combination of the words election, Russian, meddling, probe or collusion seems acceptable.

Like all good soap operas there is a constant parade of characters coming and going including a heroine named Hillary who claims she is really the President of the United States. While so far no real evidence of collusion or vote meddling has been proven, but the program is still playing and if nothing else, shows how events can exploited out of proportion for political purposes.

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The voting systems of several states, including Wisconsin, have been under fire (possibly because Trump won) as being outdated and subject to hacking.

A lot of different systems have been used to count votes around the country in recent years, and the one used in Wisconsin seems simple and foolproof. Lists of eligible voters are updated and verified at polling places and a paper trail is available in case anyone wants a recount.

At one time votes were all counted by hand after the polls closed. Many of the media outlets

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had a fit because results were not available soon enough to suit them, and mistakes in reporting were more common.

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The United States and Russia have probably never been real "buddy-buddy", but we still don't want to aggravate each other while protecting our own interests.. We believe there is plenty of room for improvement and exchange of ideas.

While the outrage over their hacking into our election system was probably justified, we possibly did the same with their recent election. Perhaps our obsession with putting everything on the internet for everyone to hack and read was a problem we created in the first place

We note that more and more pictures of ordinary Russian and even Chinese citizens going about their daily affair's has them looking more like us in their dress and standard of living. We probably have a lot to learn from each other.

While this in no should be interpreted as meaning we are not still at each other's throats, it could indicate better relationships through more open communication and exchange of ideas than scolding them for the results of our election.

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The recent tariff wars seem to have settled down a little. Unfor-

tunately with international trade there are usually always winners and losers.

The U.S. has no one to blame but itself for the fact that MANY if not MOST of the consumer products or components therein formerly produced here and sold in our big box stores are now produced overseas.

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The city and county of Milwaukee has been always had about double or triple the population of Madison and Dane County.

We were quite surprised to read in "Focus", published by the Wisconsin Policy Forum, that total property values in Dane County now actually exceed that of Milwaukee. In recent years, Dane County has been growing at a rate 3 times that of Milwaukee.

This disclosure leaves a lot of questions. Assuming a good percentage of Dane County real estate belongs to state government and UW system which are property tax exempt, how does their property value fit into the equation? Are their enough high paying state, UW, and private sector jobs living in expensive real estate to make the difference?

It's often been said that Madison and Wisconsin are two different places and this is probably proof.

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A recent article in TIME magazine commented on the fact that daily newspaper readership

has dropped dramatically all over the country. While there are probably local reasons on a case by case basis, nationally with radio, TV, and the internet. people find out what is going on before a paper is able to go to press.

While there may be more to the problem than that, the fact remains total newspaper sales are about what they were in 1940, and papers are still cutting back on their reporting staffs and local news reporting. Competition for advertising and political bias could also be factors.

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It seems whoever gets nominated to fill vacancies on the U.S. Supreme Court is more important than the President or anything else that happens in Washington; at least to the Roe v. Wade crowd. We realize this was a controversial decision and always will be but the Court will have many more, likely even more important and controversial decisions to make in the years to come. Accordingly, we should expect all of the Justices to do their homework, follow existing guidelines including the Constitution, and do what is best for the country on a non-partisan basis.

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A recent USA Today article claims Congress is urging the Pentagon to be more open with reporting and handling incidents of sexual misconduct in the military, estimated to be 15-20 thousand

Articles and views appearing in the "TAX TIMES" do not necessarily represent the official position of the Brown County Taxpayers Association. We want to encourage discussion and input on current issues of taxpayer interest and invite your comments or articles suitable for future "TAX TIMEES." Please send them to the BCTA, P.O. Box 684, Green Bay, WI 54305-0684 or email BCTaxTimes@gmail.com

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per year.

Perhaps the real question should be: what did they really think was going to happen a few years back when they started to merge men and women in combat units and liberalize recruiting standards so as not to offend anybody?

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Is there a nationwide campaign to legalize the use of marijuana? It often seems that way. It is already legal for "medical" use in 30 states. Are the reasons it has been outlawed so far still valid? Is it a legitimate pain killer? These are questions which may be answered from proposed referendums in the Brown County fall election.

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Gov. Walker and his administration have been criticized for their support of the Foxconn project in Racine County. We acknowledge it is a risk and we sincerely hope they have a market for their product when they are off and running. That said, however, assuming things work out as planned, it would be the same critics shooting off their mouths if Foxconn had located in a different state.

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The recent Supreme Court ruling reinforcing the states authority to collect sales taxes on out of state sales might bring in a few

dollars for Wisconsin, but many of the big retailers were already complying.

Some optimists even claimed we would be able to lower our state income taxes as a result. We are sure the state will find a use for any extra money that comes their way.

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Our prisons are crowded and under staffed causing all sorts of problems. One solution used around the country and being considered for Wisconsin is building private prisons. It is estimated 9%, of U.S. prisoners are held in private prisons, mostly built in recent years.

While the concept may sound good, the results may be misleading. *The Week* magazine in a recent article mentioned some items to consider.

Basically, private prisons are built to make a profit for the owner, whose ultimate goal may be more, not fewer inmates incarcerated on a per diem basis. Even though state officials may be looking over their shoulder they may use construction short cuts which can cause problems later on. They get by with smaller staffs at lower pay to cut costs which can also cause security and rehabilitation problems.

Easier said than done, but the best solution somehow would be to find a way to have fewer prisoners to punish.

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It's football season again, and everything else becomes unimportant, at least in Green Bay.

The Packers must be looking for a good season, as they sent out invoices for home playoff ticket's the same week they started practice. We all hope their right.

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As usual, lots of things to wonder about.

"Things That Make Us Wonder," consists of taxpayer related thoughts that occur to us from daily news events. We use reliable, published information and statistics. Some items are unimportant and probably not worth commenting about while others could easily be expanded to full length feature articles worthy of future study and action to protect our interests as taxpayers. We try to cover a wide variety of subjects in limited space and perhaps put a different spin on items from what you read in the papers or see on TV. We acknowledge that our perspective on some items in this column may be contrary to some of our readers. However, one of our purposes is to encourage debate, as we realize there are two sides to every question. Comments or suggestions are welcome for inclusion in future "TAX TIMES."

Jim Frink - BCTA

Monthly Meetings @ The Village Grille

Monthly meetings are held at **The Village Grille**, corner of Hoffman and East River Drive, Allouez. The location has no stairs or steps, convenient parking, and a room to better accommodate speakers and conversation. There will be three selections from which to choose lunch - each one will be priced at \$10 (including tip.) Lunch is at 12:00 noon with monthly speakers presenting.

The TAX TIMES

Brown County Taxpayers Association
P. O. Box 684
Green Bay, WI 54305-0684

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Meeting Location

The Village Grille, Allouez

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

Thursday - Sept 20, 2018 BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at The Village Grille, Allouez
Speaker - Jeff Mayers of WisPolitics

Thursday - Oct 18, 2018 BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at The Village Grille, Allouez

Tuesday Nov 6th, 2018 Fall Election - Go Vote

BCTA monthly meetings are held the Third Thursday of each month, 12:00 Noon, at , at The Village Grille, Allouez.

Meetings are open to the public. BCTA Members, their guests and other interested parties are cordially invited to attend and participate in our open discussions.

COST: \$10.00, Payable at meeting. Includes lunch, tax & tip.
Call Tom Sladek – 499-7701 for information or to leave message.

Sept - Oct 2018



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New Members are
Always Welcome.
Visit our website
www.BCTaxpayers.Org
for Details.**