
❖ The TAX TIMES ❖

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August 1995

Mayor Jadin explains cost of Green Bay Fire Department services as compared to other cities.

The July 1994 issue of the "TAX TIMES" included an editorial entitled "Fire Protection at Any Cost?" The basis of this article was a comparison published by the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance in their newsletter which indicated that Green Bay had the most expensive fire department in the state of cities with over 30,000 population.

The BCTA questioned the reasons for this cost, and also an explanation of why other cities actually enjoyed lower fire insurance premium rates than other comparable municipalities in the state.

We recently brought this to the attention of new Green Bay Mayor Paul Jadin, and he provided the following response: - - -

"We would like to thank you for allowing us to clarify and update some of the information concerning fire department cost from your July, 1994 newsletter.

First and foremost the validity of the numbers used by the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance has to be questioned. We have two major issues with their numbers. First of all, we have attached Exhibit I, a copy of the approved "1992 Budget" for the fire department for \$13,355,760, and as exhibit II a copy of the Wisconsin Taxpayer Alliance report which shows an amount of \$14,018,256, a difference of \$662,496 or 5%. Our second issue with their numbers is the fact that different cities include different cost in the fire department. For instance: some cities (Green Bay) include hydrant rental, some do not; some cities (Green Bay) include all pension and insurance cost, some do not; some cities (Green Bay) include all capital cost, some do not;

some cities (Green Bay) provide ambulance service, some do not.

The current report includes cost for the City of Green Bay totalling nearly 4 million dollars (30% of budget) that may not be included in other cities' budgets. In short, comparisons of this type cannot be made without a significant input of time to carefully review each budget and determine what is included within that budget, and then developing some common cost comparison model.

There are other factors that also impact cost, such as:

#1 Area of coverage and population density - In a 1992 study done by Rochester, MN using 15 Midwest cities with a population range of 50,000 to 100,000, Green Bay was ranked the 6th least densely populated. It takes more units per capita to cover a city that is large in area to provide reasonable response times. A 1993 study by LaCrosse of 22 cities in Wisconsin indicated that Green Bay ranked 11th in the number of firefighters per square mile.

#2 Type of service and response frequency - A city providing additional service (e.g. Ambulance service) is going to need more personnel to provide that service.

ice. If you look at out-put, such as calls for service, each call in Appleton cost \$4,202, while each call in Green Bay cost \$1,168 (source: Rochester report).

#3 Revenue - The WTA study does not consider revenue, yet in 1994 the Green Bay Fire Department generated over \$650,000 in revenue.

Finally we need to report that effective December 1, 1995 the City of Green Bay fire insurance rating will improve to a Class 2. This is the result of a lot of hard work over the past five years to correct previous defi-

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ciencies, and was accomplished without additional personnel.

The Green Bay Fire Department appreciates your interest in our services and your legitimate right to demand reasonable cost for those services. We are satisfied that we have been responsive."

Signed **Paul F. Jadin, Mayor**
John L. Troeger, Fire Chief

We want to thank Mayor Jadin and Fire Chief Troeger for their response to our questions. It is most encouraging to note that the cities insurance rating will improve. In addition to providing a cost savings to property owners, it is an indication of a job well done. Space did not allow for publication of the exhibits I & II referred to, but basically they were the study which compares the states fire departments and a condensed version of the 1992 city budget indicating the fire department anticipated costs for that year.

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**BROWN COUNTY
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Some Things Never Change.

start new stories or to continue stories

The August 1995 issue of "Kiplinger's Personal Finance" magazine includes a comparison of state and local tax burdens for "retirees" in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Their model was a retired couple with an annual income of \$50,000 from various sources, living in the capital city of each state. They further assumed this couple owned a 2,000 sq ft home at the median market value in each city. They supposedly used the latest figures available and factored in special rates and considerations which would apply to this hypothetical couple.

We appreciate that the capital city of each state does not necessarily reflect the state as a whole, and that certain states such as Alaska, Nevada, etc., have special circumstances favorable to its residents. Some are able to charge higher sales taxes due to the tourist trade while other economic factors make each state unique. However, in any such comparison only one state is going to have the reputation of being the highest taxed overall and this time you guessed it: - **good old Wisconsin**. We were a whopping 22% over second place Iowa. The table at the bottom of this page gives their numbers for the top and bottom five states.

We note that this article seems to ignore certain factors such as excise taxes, federal government aids, average personal income or ability to pay, and other economic indicators which are often included in such studies. However, Wisconsin usually does not fare well in these comparisons either.

Also note they would be comparing Madison, which is in a different world than Green Bay, Appleton, or even Milwaukee. However, they are also comparing Madison with cities like Boston, Atlanta, Washington D.C., and other capital cities which do not have reputations as being cheap places to live.

We have been subjected to a number of such studies, and who prepares them and what they are trying to prove is undoubtedly a factor in the results. Nonetheless, it seems we are always in the top ten or so, and the hard fact that most of us seem to like it here probably causes us to overlook these constant high tax ratings.

However, a couple of items stand out. #1, if our taxes are amongst the highest as the article indicates, our spending must also be amongst the highest. Where is it all going? Are we actually being offered and receiving higher levels of services intended to improve our "quality of life" than the rest of the country, or are just doing it at a greater cost? Is it possible that rather than fine tuning our taxes and fees as seems to be the case during recent we should be taking a closer look at what other states are doing with their budgets and how our money is

being spent.

And #2, although Wisconsin has never touted itself as being a retirement paradise, irregardless of the cold weather, anyone reading the article would probably have second thoughts about moving here. How many retirees already living here get the same message?

Where Wisconsin will rank in future studies after all the property tax relief legislation, property tax shifting, "spending cuts", and spending limits have been in place is anyone's guess. Quite frankly, at this point it still looks like smoke and mirrors. You cannot cut taxes without reducing spending. It makes no difference where, how or by whom the money is spent, it all comes from you and me.

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The BCTA has a supply of "How Wisconsin Compares" 1994 edition, prepared by the *Public Expenditure Survey*, which compares Wisconsin with the other states on a number of factors including personal income, corporate and individual income taxes and local property taxes as well as state expenditures. If you would like a copy, call Jim Frink at 336-6410, drop a note to the BCTA at Box #684, Green Bay, 54305, or attend one of our meetings where a supply will be available.

Jim Frink

The President's Message

By Tom Sladek

County Executive Election August 22nd.

Concerned taxpayers need to get to the polls and vote in the special election for County Executive this month. Voter turnout is likely to be thin, creating the opportunity for small factions with narrow interests (and designs on your tax dollars) to greatly influence the outcome. If you're having trouble deciding between the candidates, read closely the press coverage of their issue statements...or call them up and ask them about issues important to you. **(Nancy Nusbaum 336-2850, Jerry Van Sistine 494-7055).** The BCTA is non-partisan and does not endorse candidates. We do, however, want everyone involved in the selection of a new county executive. Form your opinion of who will best protect taxpayer interests...and please vote!

BCTA Officer/Director Elections

Next month at our annual meeting, elections will be held to fill the BCTA officer positions, along with one third of the seats on our board of directors. If you have interest in serving in one of these positions or know of someone who would make a good officer/director, please let us know ASAP!. A nominating committee has been formed, chaired by director Rod Goldhahn (468-1975). Give Rod a call if you have a name for consideration. Floor nominations at the annual meeting are also permissible. The time I've spent as a director and officer of this organization has been rewarding, educational and a heck of a lot of fun. If you're sitting on the sidelines and think you'd enjoy playing the game, do it now. It's a great experience.

Arena/Convention Center Project

Along with several other BCTA officer/Directors, I'll be meeting this month with the Green Bay Facilities Development Corporation, which is the group advocating a new arena and expanded convention center. We've obviously been watching this issue closely. At this point, the only formal BCTA position on the matter is our clear opposition to the use of property or sales taxes to fund the development. I'll want to hear more from the project sponsors about the need (priority), cost to taxpayers, overall financing plan, and risks to taxpayers associated with this project as we develop further positions on the issue.

Consider Running for Public Office

I suspect many of our members from time to time think they could do a better job of protecting taxpayer interests than do many current office holders. If you've ever had those thoughts, here's an opportunity to learn more about running for office. The Chamber of Commerce will be holding a Political Training Institute on Thursday evenings in September/October. It's an opportunity for potential candidates or campaign workers to learn about the election process and campaign techniques. There is a fee, and enrollment deadline is August 15th. Call Diane Herner at the Chamber, 437-8704, if you have interest.

July Meeting Notes

Don Daehling of the Public Expenditure Survey of Wisconsin discussed the effects on school tax levies of the two-tier and three-tier alternatives for the state equalization aid formula. He expects Governor Thompson to sign the budget bill during the first week of August.

State Representative Frank Lasee's letter in response to the BCTA resolution supporting continuing residency requirements for municipal employees as a local option and opposing any state legislation that would remove this option from local government control was circulated. Representative Lasee wrote that the 68 percent November 1994 Brown County vote in favor of residency requirements was a clear indication of the wishes of his constituents, which he will support with his vote in the assembly.

State Representative Mark Green discussed a number of current topics, including AB 149, the municipal employee residency bill, property rights legislation, and potential legislation to authorize an exposition district within Brown County. Representative Green warned that we should expect massive federal transportation aid reductions, which will require additional state and local taxes if we wish to continue current levels of highway construction and maintenance.

David Nelson - Secretary

"If we fixed a hangnail the way our government fixes the economy, we'd slam a car door on it"

Cullen Hightower

"Politics is an excellent career -

**BROWN COUNTY
TAXPAYERS
ASSOCIATION**

"If you can't stand the heat, get out of the

BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

BCTA Meeting Schedule

Thursday - August 17, 1995

scheduled
facilities.)

DAYS INN, Downtown - 12:00 Noon *
(Brown County Sheriff Mike Donart is

to speak on the need for additional jail

Tuesday - August 22, 1995

Election Day - VOTE your choice for
Brown County Executive.

*** Cost \$6.00 per meeting, payable at door. Call 469-7373 for reservations. (Leave Message)**
*All members of the Brown County Taxpayers Association and other interested parties
are cordially invited to attend and participate in our monthly meetings..*

The TAX TIMES

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