

---

---

# ❖ The TAX TIMES ❖

---

Volume 11, Issue No. 7

May, 1996

---

## New Brown County Board Takes Office.

Although there were only a few changes in the membership of the Brown County Board of Supervisors resulting from the March elections, the election of a new County Board Chairman has resulted in considerable changes in the structure of the standing committees appointed to make recommendations to the rest of the board as a whole.

Even though the previous board received constant criticism for its actions or in some cases, lack of action, for the most part it was considered fiscally conservative. Nonetheless, it was discouraging that overall county expenditures, the property tax levy and net tax rate have been steadily trending upward. While the total budget increased by over 24% from 1991 to 1996, the tax levy, or the amount of revenue raised from property taxes rose by over 65%.

During this period, the property tax rate has also been trending upwards. The next table shows the property tax rate per thousand dollars of assessed valuation each year, as well as Brown County's total indebtedness at the end of the year.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Tax Rate per m/</u>	<u>Year end County Debt.</u>
1991	\$4.7739	\$36,714,098
1992	\$4.8491	\$38,262,761
1993	\$5.0210	\$44,996,100
1994	\$4.9587	\$45,417,462
1995	\$5.0278	\$40,820,553
1996	\$5.1272	?

Source: Brown County Annual Adopted Budget/Human Resources.

In other words, the county portion of your property taxes on a \$100,000 home would have increased from \$477.39 in 1991 to \$512.72 in 1996. A difference of \$35.33, assuming you were not reassessed during that time. This does not include municipal or school district taxes. The amount of year end debt is significant in that it represents borrowing to be paid at a later date plus interest, and which can definitely have an impact on future county tax rates.

We note that the incumbents and candidates for the county board largely ran on a platform of keeping taxes in line and providing responsive government to the taxpayers. Hopefully this will be the case, as there will be several well publicized and for the most part expensive issues demanding their attention

**Next BCTA meeting. Thursday, May 16,  
DAYS INN - Downtown**

"A public man must never forget that he loses his usefulness when he as an individual, rather than his policy, becomes the issue." . . . .Richard M. Nixon

"When a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself as public property."  
. . . .Thomas

---

---

**The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION**

---

---

## Another Perspective on The Campaign Fund Checkoff.

The April "TAX TIMES" had an article encouraging taxpayers to check off a \$1.00 contribution to the public campaign fund on their Wisconsin tax forms. The tax form explains that the checkoff will not increase your taxes. (Your checkoff actually moves \$1.00 from the state's general fund to the public campaign fund).

We routinely hear laments that public campaign fund checkoffs are decreasing, which will adversely affect the quality of state government. The reality is that more and more Wisconsin taxpayers are seeing through this feel good foolishness. Taxpayers understand that about half the tax funds going into the public campaign fund will go to support candidates they oppose. They know it doesn't make any sense to participate in a scheme that subsidizes campaigns of politicians they don't want elected to office.

I believe that the purported virtues of the public campaign fund checkoff are far outweighed by the moral arguments against it. First, I oppose having any portion of my state taxes being involuntarily transferred to a fund that gives half of my contributions to politicians I oppose. Second, I don't believe that the scheme of using unwitting taxpayers to shovel state tax money from the general fund into the public campaign fund is ethical.

The education we really need on this subject is that the main benefactors of public campaign funding are incumbents who can couple the low-effort public funding (and associated rules) with the benefits of incumbency to choke off any but the most well-funded challengers.

For fairness, I propose another checkoff to permit taxpayers to return \$1.00 from the public campaign fund to the general fund in hope that we might see a slight reduction in our state tax burden.

**Dave Nelson**

## Here We Go Again.

The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance reports that at 23.7 cents per gallon, Wisconsin has the 10th highest state gas tax in the nation. Last fall another 2 cent per gallon tax was narrowly rejected. Recently it was announced that a number of long anticipated highway projects, including some in this area were going to be delayed due to the lack of funding. Guess what the solution will be. We are already taxed 18 to 25% higher than our neighboring states which raises the question, "does Wisconsin have the 10th best highway system in the country?"

The Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation is a massive bureaucracy with a budget of about **\$1.5 Billion a year**. \$678 million is scheduled to come from motor fuel taxes, and the balance from registration fees, licenses, permits and a myriad of federal sources. Roughly a third of the budget goes towards "local assistance", all of which is undoubtedly well spent and accounted for.

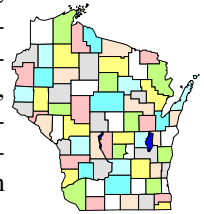
The DOT employs large staffs of engineers and planners at its Madison headquarters and branches throughout the state, including Green Bay. We are not qualified to question their function or necessity but do wonder if it makes sense to continually keep planning grandiose projects we will never be able to afford? We can understand that maintenance is more economical than replacement even though at times it appears to be somewhat over done.

For example, the DOT is currently making its presence known along Hwy. 41 in Green Bay. Even though the orange barrels have been up frequently in the past and the road didn't seem that bad we are sure the \$2.9 million expenditure, plus the inconvenience and cost to you and me while repairs are being made is well justified. What bothers me is that when these repairs are completed, the relatively short merge lanes for entering traffic, the fancy compound curves at some of the exits and the temptation for rude drivers to cut in front of you at their pleasure will still remain.

Suggesting more money be spent while being critical of the present budget

is not our intention, any more than to dispute the priorities given to proposed projects. Nonetheless, it is discouraging to see large amounts of taxpayers money spent when we just seem to be spinning our wheels. One recommendation would be for our elected representatives to question in depth the annual budget of the Department of Transportation. If they are satisfied and can relate this back to their constituents, fine.

One very real danger is that politics play too much of a role when it comes to highway expenditures. Whose land is bought, who gets the job and where the road goes in whose district are all factors that should be left to the administration at the DOT, and not subject to abuse by politicians. Their job is to take responsibility for DOT actions and show consideration for the taxpayers. Any DOT project, be it maintenance or a new highway should be approached with the ultimate cost in mind. Quite frankly, some of the recent projects in this area seem to have been designed with aesthetic appearances predominating over safety, land usage, the environment, required maintenance and construction cost.



The real question is, "Why can't the DOT manage to live within a budget?" We all realize that maintenance, inflation, land acquisition and environmental concerns, and construction costs contain variables that cannot be programmed. Could some of these expenses be better controlled from within, however? How does private industry keep its costs in line? Basically their directors see to it that the managers they hire and the operations they carry out are done profitably and competitively. If not, the stockholders see to it that changes are made.

In this case, the taxpayers and highway users are the stockholders, and our elected representatives are the board of directors. Need we say more?

**Jim Frink**

"Common sense is the knack of seeing things as they are, and doing things as they ought to be done."

## Why Did the Green Bay School District Have a \$5 Million Budget Surplus?

The Green Bay School District recently announced that they ended the 1994-95 school year with a \$5 million budget surplus. Of that amount, \$4.4 million was due to "savings" in the 1994-95 school budget. Their intent is to spend these funds on various capital projects. The BCTA has questioned where this surplus came from and why was the budget so far off?

Assistant Superintendent, Dan VanDeWater, provided us with a wealth of information concerning the budget process. Their primary reason for the surplus was the result of the district's negotiations with the teachers union (WEAC). The district had originally budgeted the maximum salary increase allowed by law prior to the contract settlement.

The key areas of the savings in 1994-95 are as follows.

\$ 463,612	Increase in Local revenues, primarily Interest Income.
832,262	Increase in State Revenues, primarily At-Risk Aid.
956,878	Savings from salaries (lower than estimated)
1,092,004	Savings in employee benefits.
523,924	Savings in "Purchased Services", primarily utilities.

While it is comforting to see the district's efforts in reducing expenses, it's troubling to see a budget that is so far off. Especially when they have already shown up on our tax bills.

The proposed use of these "excess" funds is to reduce the need for borrowing by paying for additions at McAuliffe Elementary School, renovations at Preble High School, etc. While we applaud the wise use of these funds, we question if the budget process will be used to create "excess" funds that can be used for capital projects and bypass the new requirements of referendum.

A simple review of the budget may lead us to that exact conclusion. For example, 1994-95 spending increased 3.6% over the previous year, but this years budget (1995-96) calls for a 7.3% increase over 1994-95 spending. Future issues of the "TAX TIMES" will cover the 1996-97 Green Bay School District budget as it develop.

We thank the Green Bay School District for their information and assistance.

**Ray Krusic**

## April Meeting Notes.

Green Bay mayor Paul Jadin presented a new version of the arena/convention center plan. He explained that the plan has been refashioned to eliminate the need for an exposition district with taxing authority and would get the private sector more involved. The beneficiaries would pay with an increased room tax, and users would pay a ticket fee. The biggest variable now is the project cost. The goal is to hold the total project cost to \$35 million, and planners are looking at the arena design, the old arena, and the exposition center. The mayor stated that, with conservative revenue estimates, he wants debt service coverage of 1.3 to 1.35 to ensure that the project is viable. He expects that the project's business plan will be available two months after the financing plan is announced.

Mike Riley of Taxpayers Network, Inc. reported that Representatives Toby Roth and James Sensenbrenner both voted for House Joint Resolution 159, which called for a Constitutional amendment to require two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress to approve any federal tax increases. Mike outlined the massive unfunded pension liabilities facing many municipalities. He reported that he is encouraged by the possibilities of legislation making medical savings accounts (MSA's) available to all citizens. Ray Krusic reported on a meeting he had with Dan VanDeWater, Green Bay School District assistant superintendent regarding the source and disposition of a \$5 million surplus from the 1995 school district budget.

State Senator Rob Cowles, a member of the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee, reported on the agonies of trimming the state budget to available funds. He noted the Governor's budget needed to be trimmed by \$100 Million. He explained that \$172 million of state spending has been cut to fund the property tax relief commitment, but another \$150-200 million of cuts will be necessary.

**Dave Nelson - Secretary**

### CORRECTION.

In the April "TAX TIMES," paragraph 2 of an article entitled "Will Welfare Reform Save Money?" it was reported that due to changes in the W-2 plan made from the original proposal, it would cost \$120 more than the Governor originally proposed.

This was an error, and should have read \$120 million more than the Governor proposed. We apologize for any confusion caused by this \$119,999,850 misprint.

"You can't legislate intelligence and common sense into people."  
 . . . .Will Rogers

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."  
 . . . .Chinese Proverb

"Practical politics consists in ignoring facts."  
 . . . .Henry Adams

## **BCTA Meeting & Events Schedule**

Thursday - May 16, 1996 DAYS INN - Downtown  
12:00 Noon - Monthly Business Meeting

Monday - June 3, 1996 DEADLINE - Material for June  
"TAX TIMES"

Thursday - June 20, 1996 DAYS INN - Downtown  
12:00 Noon - Monthly Business Meeting

Thursday - July 18, 1996 DAYS INN - Downtown  
12:00 Noon - Monthly Business Meeting

Cost - \$6.25 per meeting - Payable at door.  
Call 469-7373 for reservations. (Leave Message)

All members of the BCTA, their guests, and other interested parties are invited to attend and participate in these open business meetings.



### **Still Think Spring!**

#### CLASSIFIED

Wanted: Articles for the "TAX TIMES"  
Whats on your mind when it comes to  
taxes? Next deadline Mon. June 3.  
Call Jim Frink at 336-6410 for details.

"Vote for the man who promises  
least— he'll be the least  
dissappointing."

. . . . Bernard Baruch

"Bad officials are elected by good

## **The TAX TIMES**

BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION  
P. O. Box 684  
GREEN BAY, WI 54305-0684

**BULK RATE**  
U. S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Green Bay, WI  
Permit No. 255

### **Inside This Issue**

**New Brown County Board Takes Office.**  
**New Perspective on Campaign Fund Checkoff.**  
**Comments on Wisconsin Gas Tax.**  
**Report on Green Bay School Board**  
**\$5 million surplus.**  
**And More.**