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# ◆ The TAX TIMES ◆

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## TAXPAYERS BEWARE !

There is a phenomenon in government that we all need to be aware of, the increasing legal battles between different governmental units.

The biggest area of taxpayers paying for both sides of the argument is the Criminal Justice System. The Judges are funded by the state, The District Attorneys offices with the assistants are also funded by the state (clerical help and other support is in the Brown Country budget), and the Public Defenders office is also funded by the state. **WE ARE THE STATE.** Currently about 80% of the cases in the Brown County Court system are for people unable to pay for their own defense, therefore you and I get to pay both sides of the bill.

Recently there is discussion on the clean up of the Fox River. A group called the Fox River Coalition was formed in 1992 to remediate the PCB problem in the river. This group of industry, government, sewerage districts and the DNR has studied the problem and has a \$500,000 federal grant to pilot the cleanup process. Sampling of the problem is defining the locations and plans are formed for the most cost effective way to tackle the different locations. All of a sudden the Federal Fish & Wildlife Service wants to do a damage assessment and assume control of the cleanup. The state DNR as a member of Coalition believe they know best what needs to be done and have been working within the Coalition framework toward cleanup. Now the issue is "Who" should be in charge. The potential for a long court battle looms on the horizon.

The DNR is also working with seven paper mills to aid in the cleanup. With a federal damage assessment, these companies now fear the possibility of being asked to restore the resources lost by the PCB damage. These figures are at best a guess and at worse more than the companies are worth. Estimates of the cleanup run from *ONE HUNDRED MILLION* to *ONE BILLION DOLLARS* and that does not include any restoration. Again the problem shifts to one of who is in charge and progress to cleanup the river is delayed. The legal battle on who is in charge would be a hard fought contest between state and federal lawyers. Again, we pay for both sides. Some of the estimates of legal cost equal the cost of cleanup.

Lets get on with fixing the problem and stop the hassle over who is in charge. Lets keep the cooperative effort alive.

*Frank S. Bennett Jr., Pres. BCTA*

## Sheriff to Address June 19, BCTA Meeting.

Brown County Sheriff Thomas Hinz has accepted an invitation to speak at the June 19, monthly meeting of the BCTA.

We assume his presentation will cover law enforcement problems presently facing the Sheriff's Department, and the need for a new jail.

Details on the last page of this "TAX TIMES."

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## Your State Government in Action.

There was a recent report that despite objections from law enforcement agencies, the legislature recently approved requiring that only one license plate be issued for automobiles. The primary reason given was that it could save something like a million dollars a year.

If they are truly interested in saving money, it would seem that perhaps producing a two color license plate rather than our four-color art gallery with barns, birds, sailboats, etc., could easily save over a million dollars. Wisconsin must have the widest assortment of license plates in the world and it would be interesting to know if they all pay their way inasmuch as some must be issued in rather limited quantities.

Remember the fuss when the annual registration fee was raised from \$15 to \$18, supposedly to cover the cost of using reflective paint? We also received a brand new set of plates every year at that time.

We understand the increases in costs since then and issuing new plates every few years seems to work well. However, it would seem there are plenty of other cuts which could be made in the DOT budget which are less trivial and should be considered prior to imposing higher gas taxes and registration fees as is now being proposed. My observation, past increases have not necessarily lived up to the promise of a better managed highway system in Wisconsin. JF

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**The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION**  
*Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government*

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## Cost of Proposed Brown County Jail Keeps Rising and Rising. *It's Our Money.*

In the May "TAX TIMES", we attempted to illustrate the amount of money that \$24 million, the proposed cost to construct the first phase of a new Brown County jail facility. Since that time, the publicized estimated cost has risen to \$28 million, despite the fact that no site has been approved or have any plans been drawn. This is probably about the same amount it would cost to build a new high school.

As with other taxpayer funded projects, it seems that once a degree of acceptance has been imposed upon the public, the cost becomes irrelevant. That shouldn't be. Unfortunately much of the planning of such public projects is assigned to consultants and architects whose livelihood depends on fees from their proposals and percentages of construction costs.

From the very beginning of discussions on the need for a new jail, there has been debate on the necessity of building a fortress type showcase facility, a less elaborate dormitory type structure, or some type of combination. Not all inmates require secure lock-up.

Whereas all potential sites and considerations by the selection committee have some merits, it still seems that the bottom line should be

- A**-Sufficient and adequate facilities for the counties needs for the foreseeable future.
- B**-Security to protect the public from persons considered dangerous, while still providing the mandates imposed by the courts.
- C**-Design and construction which can be operated with a minimum of cost while still providing necessary services and security.
- D**-Convenient location, not necessarily right downtown where versatility and expansion would be limited, but still convenient for normal operations.
- E**-A cost estimate taxpayers can live with.

Possibly the most compelling argument for a new jail has been the million or so dollars a year the county has been spending each year to store prisoners elsewhere. This situation will likely continue to get worse, but has a long way to go before it would cost taxpayers as much as the construction, staffing, and maintenance of a new \$28 million facility. We agree that some remedies are in order as sending prisoners elsewhere is not prudent use of taxpayers money nor does it accomplish the purpose for which the jail was originally intended.

Other alternatives have been proposed, such as remodeling the present jail for those waiting trial or requiring secure detention, and constructing less expensive facilities for non-violent/Huber inmates. Several area jails have been visited by the site selection committee, and numerous innovations and options have been suggested, many of which would meet or exceed state standards for jail construction, provide options for expansion when needed, be cost effective to operate with a minimum of personnel. In other words, we could have adequate facilities but at a far less cost. For example, **construction is underway in Milwaukee County for a secure dormitory facility complete with all support services for 600 prisoners. The cost? \$16.3 million, or about half the cost per prisoner that is being proposed for Brown County.**

The big question is what facilities are required for the prisoners involved? The Brown County Criminal Justice Coordinating Board conducted a Jail Census on March 24, April 10, and April 24, 1997. The results of the April 24 survey are shown on the chart. Of the 368 inmates at that time, 50 were confined in other counties, and 26 were on home monitor. The actual capacity of the present Brown County Jail is only 256, with 158 of those being in secure lockup. Inmates over that number requires dangerous crowding or detention elsewhere.

Of the 54% of April 24, inmates who were already serving their sentences, about 75% had Huber Law privileges, which means they could hold outside jobs and presumably were not considered to be dangerous. It is understood that more of those convicted could probably qualify for Huber privileges, but have not at their own option. Also, some of those being held for pre-trial could be released on bail if they chose, which would reduce the inmate population accordingly.

We realize that the jail population fluctuates constantly, and that properly processing, monitoring inmates while maintaining adequate security is a labor intensive, time consuming job

which must be done properly to exacting standards. We commend the dedicated officers and personnel who manage these facilities.

Nonetheless, it would seem that more cost effective alternatives could be considered to solve their problems. Couldn't the county board set a budget limit of \$15-18 million and produce an acceptable proposal? What do you think?

Jim Frink - BCTA

## TAXPAYER GROUP URGES SUPPORT FOR AB262.

TO: *Brown County Taxpayers Association.*

"The Germantown Citizens Action Coalition supports Assembly Bill 262 and has notified several legislators of that support. The bill was introduced by Red. David Travis (D-Madison) and would allow municipalities to decrease their county tax levies by not paying for certain services provided by the county. We have enclosed a copy of our letter to them along with our encouragement to your group to study this bill and notify legislators of your thoughts on the issue."

*Lawrence N. Prodoehl, Pres. GCAC*

"Dear Legislator,

The Germantown Citizens Action Coalition is a taxpayers group who monitors local taxing and spending. Our members have reviewed and discussed AB 232 regarding double taxation for over-lapping services between county and local governments. The proposed bill would allow local governments to opt out of county property tax levies for several services if the city or local government already provides the same service. The bill does acknowledge that there are some services that should be paid for by everyone in a county, such as county jails and local courts.

We agree that residents of cities and villages sometimes pay twice for city-county overlaps. We also agree that today's advanced record keeping capability should be utilized to get back to a more equitable, fair method of spreading the costs for services.

Those individuals who flee into the unincorporated townships often do so because of the financial inducement of lower taxes. Those lower taxes are a result of a lower service level, plus a property tax levy for county departments such as the sheriff's office which is paid equally by all county property, even within incorporated communities. For instance, municipal residents pay for their own local police department, therefore, they do not use the sheriff's department at the same level. This lower tax cost is probably a major

factor of urban sprawl in metropolitan areas such as Milwaukee. Having county residents pay more of the true cost of servicing their own property, without a subsidy from the tax base of city/village governments seems the just and right direction.

We would favor shortening the list of services included. Simplifying the bill should help in its eventual enforcement and should also help in gathering support for its passage. One area not to be excluded from the bill should be the Sheriff's department patrol and investigative services. We support the bill with a shortened list of function, services, and programs."

*Lawrence Prodoehl, Pres. GCAC*

**NOTE:** Although the extent of duplication of services and the cost to taxpayers in Brown County may or may not be as great as in other counties of the state, it is obviously a reason for concern. Most services offered by municipalities and counties appear to be well defined. If one government district does not pay for a service, another one must. We note ongoing discussion of some shared services such as police and emergency dispatch and certainly encourage this if efficiencies can be realized. The *BCTA* will monitor AB 262 and hopefully make recommendations which can be considered on a local level.

**"There is no art which one government sooner learns from another than that of draining money from the pockets of the**

## TAXPAYERS NETWORK, Inc. Now on The Internet !

You can now reach *Taxpayers Network, Inc.*, by logging on the Internet and going to [www.tni-assoc.org](http://www.tni-assoc.org). In addition to information on the organization and items of current taxpayer concern, shortcuts are also provided to various websites of consumer interest.

We also suggest you check the *DAILY OUTRAGE* at [www.dailyoutrage.com](http://www.dailyoutrage.com). Each day offers an interesting story of questionable government practices or the waste of taxpayer dollars.

The Email address for Taxpayers Net-

## MAY MEETING NOTES:

Mike Riley of Taxpayers Network, Inc., distributed copies of Oregon's State Senate Concurrent Resolution #2 which calls upon Congress to enact legislation amending the Social Security Act to authorize issuance of waivers to states allowing design and implementation of alternative retirement plans.

Mike also announced Taxpayers Networks new internet web page which can be found at [www.tni-assoc.org](http://www.tni-assoc.org)

Through this website you can calculate your social security benefits and compare them to various private pension plans as well as comparisons of taxes paid by citizens of all 50 states.

Brown County Supervisor Pat Collins reported on the Public Safety Committee's May 12th visit to the Winnebago Correctional Facility at Oshkosh. He stated that this state facility has a 140-bed dormitory building that could be replicated for a Huber prisoner facility for around \$1 million. He noted that Milwaukee County is building a 600-bed Huber facility for less than \$10,000 per bed.

The directors expressed concern that a detailed financial plan for the proposed arena and convention center has not been made public as yet, despite the fact that increased room taxes to pay for these projects has begun.

The State and Federal committee reported that Governor Thompson wants to hold on to the newly estimated \$230 million state budget surplus. It appears that the education budget has understated expenses and overstated revenues. The building construction spree by state school districts in anticipation of state support for most of the debt serviced costs appears to be threatening the State's ability to support K-12 education at present levels.

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 19, and will feature Brown County Sheriff Tom Hinz.

**David Nelson - Secretary**

## BCTA Meeting & Events Schedule

Thursday - June 19, 1997, DAYS INN - Downtown \*  
12:00 Noon - Monthly Business Meeting  
Speaker - Brown County Sheriff Tom Hinz

Thursday - July 17, 1997, DAYS INN - Downtown \*  
12:00 Noon - Monthly Business Meeting  
(Program to be announced.)

June 15, 1997 - Second quarter installment due,  
estimated state and federal income taxes.

July 31, 1997 - Second half installment due,  
1996 property taxes.

Monday - August 4, 1997 - Deadline for material,  
August "TAX TIMES"

**\* 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  
persons are invited to attend and participate in these open meetings.***

### Mark your Calendars !



**It is finally summer, (at least by the calendar). There will not be a "TAX TIMES" for July. However, our regular monthly meetings will be held as announced and we urge your attendance and participation.**

"Next to being shot at and missed, nothing is quite so satisfying as an income tax refund."

..... F. J. Raymond

"Of all debts, men are least willing to pay taxes. What a satire is this on government!"

..... Ralph Waldo Emerson

## The TAX TIMES

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