
◆ The TAX TIMES ◆

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RESULTS FROM BCTA MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Included with the August "TAX TIMES" was a questionnaire covering current items of local taxpayer concern. We are gratified that approximately 20% of our membership have returned their completed survey forms, and the results and comments were very interesting. Following are some of the observations and conclusions we were able to make regarding the concerns of our membership and issues for the BCTA to focus on during the coming months.

The first question asked you to prioritize the top 5 items that more information should be gathered so that more information could be made available. The issues receiving the most top 5 votes were in order: Jail Cost and Location, Arena/Convention Center, Cost of Green Bay School Projects (still a major concern insofar as not all of our membership lives within the Green Bay School District), Teachers Contracts, and Shared Services for City and County. There was also considerable interest in the Cost of Fire Protection, Cost of Public Apathy, Providing Potable Water, and the Cost of Urban Sprawl.

"In matters of style, swim with the current. In matters of Principle, stand like a rock."

. . . . Thomas Jefferson

Question #1 - Please prioritize the following as areas for us to gather and publish more information by listing the highest priority #1. List your top 5.

The next survey question asked to "Please Prioritize" from a list of 15 items the top 5 that the BCTA should work on to lower taxpayer costs. These items are all assumed to be necessary government services that we all expect to be provided, but perhaps could be managed in a more cost efficient manner. Even though the items were the same as in question #1, the results of the survey were somewhat different.

The largest priority was to lower the cost of Green Bay School Projects, fol-

lowed by Jail Costs and Location. The next concern was Teachers Contracts, Shared Services for City and County, and the Arena/Convention Center.

Question #2 - Please prioritize the following list as the ones we should work on to lower taxpayer costs by listing the highest priority #1. List your top 5.

After we asked just what items that more information should be made available upon, and which items that our membership felt where taxpayer costs could possibly be lowered, we asked you to list your priorities as to how tax dollars should be spent. We also included some national issues of importance. We used the number of first 5 place votes received to determine the priorities of the 15 items listed. The largest priority for the spending of tax dollars was for Police Protection, followed by Public Educa-

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SURVEY RESULTS - (Cont. from Page

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government

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tion, Infrastructure, National Defense, Fire Protection., Jails and Prisons, Water, Court System, Sewers, and Libraries.

We feel that it was significant that while Public Education, Police Protection and Jails and Prisons placed high on the list of items on which tax dollars should be spent, they were also high on the lists of items that respondents to the survey listed as requiring more study, and which focus should be given towards lowering taxpayer costs.

It was also interesting that National Defense was a top priority for tax dollars inasmuch as this is usually the first item to suffer budget cuts when Washington is looking for extra money to spend on other projects which suit the politicians fancy.

We acknowledge that this survey couldn't possibly cover all the issues, and various interpretations can be made from the results. However, the **BCTA** will make every effort to focus attention on the issues which are of the most concern of our membership and community in representing the taxpaying public.

Thank you to those who took the time to complete and return the survey forms. One thing that was definitely accomplished was to illustrate the many spending issues competing for your tax dollars, and the importance of each. **JF**

RANDOM THOUGHTS

- Did you ever think about the Department of Natural Resources and their plans to purchase land to prevent development? The property is generally along rivers, streams and lakes. Property that is generally sought after for development as vacation homes. In many cases this land is paid for with our tax money as a grant to existing associations up to 80%. The Loon Lake Association in Shawano County received 80% of the funds to purchase over 500 feet of lake frontage under the condition that the land **not** be developed. I find it interesting that the people in the association have a vested interest to **NOT** develop the property in the first place.
- What are the facts and the true projections for drinking water in Brown County? Does the aquafirm contain enough water if we just start to pull it out at different points or do we really use it faster than it can be replaced? Why does the Press-Gazette not report the water usage for the city of Green Bay when it reports the surrounding communities? Is Green Bay using as much water from Lake Michigan as they possible can? Does anybody really care at this point?
- Wisconsin is taking a huge step to reduce welfare costs. I saw on the news that Fond Du Lac County acted as a test center for the system for the past two years. They reported a reduction in their welfare recipients from over 1100 to 40 during the test period. This program reapplied across the state will indeed save many tax dollars.
- The Green Bay City Council refused to rezone property on University Avenue to locate a jail. This will delay the site selection process for several months and will cost the Brown County tax payer. The estimate for this action is that it will cost about \$1 per month of delay for each person in Brown County. The persons who voted no to the rezoning are the same ones who claim they watch out for the taxpayer. I wonder?
- The Federal Budget contains new legislation to provide medical coverage for financially challenged youth. An increased tax on cigarettes will be used to pay for this new program. I wonder where the money will come from when the number of smokers is reduced to the point where there are insufficient funds for this form of welfare.

Frank S. Bennett, Jr. *President*

More Results from Membership Survey.

In addition to the section of our survey asking you to prioritize areas as to importance and how tax dollars should be spent, we asked some other questions regarding taxation and spending policy. The first question was, "When looking at ways to balance the budget, the method I like best would be:" A - Increase taxes on income (5%), B - Across the board spending limits (37%), C - Cut programs to reduce spending (58%), and D - Increase taxes on business (No Votes). It was interesting to note that while business is often called upon to support government mandated programs, apparently our respondents felt otherwise.

The second question was, "When evaluating the public services I receive today in Brown County, I would give them an:"

A - Top notch across the Board (8%), B - Good service at a reasonable cost (25%), C - Average service done in a government manner (39%), D - Needs Improvement in most areas (18%), and Services are too costly (10%). On this question, we did not specify local or county government or the various school districts.

What we wanted to know was just how the respondents feel about what they are getting for their property tax and other tax dollars. We acknowledge that this is a very large area to cover, and will try to be more specific on future surveys we may take, as well as seek more specific input as to areas which could be improved, both from a cost to the taxpayer standpoint and improvement in services offered.

The final question read, "To provide equity in the tax process, I believe a change to the following system would be best for the

county. A - A flat tax on income (47%), B - A national sales tax to eliminate the income tax (25%), C - Indexing capital gains to inflation (3%), D - Elimination of tax loopholes (25%), and E - NO CHANGE, I LIKE THE SYSTEM (0%).

We acknowledge their may have been some confusion on this question, insofar as we normally focus on local issues, and most of the proposals for a new taxing system are on a national basis. We assume that most of

the respondents took this question as referring to the national budget, insofar as the property tax is so strongly entrenched and it would likely be far more difficult to ever change the local or state systems.

There has been a lot of publicity lately on either a flat tax on income or a national sales tax. The VAT or value added tax is not a dead issue either. Considering all of the debate recently expended on the new tax law, it is difficult to imagine any system which would be satisfactory to any majority of taxpayers. The worst fear is that new taxes will be continually added, (as at present), without compensating adjustments to spending to allow sufficient revenue to remain in the private sector to maintain a viable economy. A far deeper subject than we are qualified to address. Again, we thank those who took the time to return the questionnaires, and will use these results to guide our activities in the months to come.

JF
JF

BCTA ANNUAL MEETING

Time to pencil in the Annual Meeting. This year we will have our meeting on Monday Morning, the day after the Packer bye. For those who do not follow football (anybody you know?) that's October 20. Location is the same as our regular meetings, **Days Inn - Downtown.**

All of the legislators that represent a portion of Brown County are invited, and the topic of discussion will be the State Budget.

Complete details will be in the October "TAX TIMES."

From our Readers:

“TAX TIMES” C/O Brown County Taxpayers Association:

Thank you for the opportunity to document the possible several million dollars in tax savings and the request for Grass Roots efforts to prevent County Officials from promoting structure and energy blunders.

My observations as a citizen and a deep concern about Architecture, Land use, Environment and Energy has revealed a serious problem in Brown County and Green Bay with the proposed construction of the Arena, Convention Center, Jail and Libraries.

It is my observation that County Officials are being presented designs and structural systems that are unimaginative, obsolete and outdated. The structures are costly, inadequate and the energy issue has been largely ignored. This could easily amount to several hundred million dollars over the life of the buildings.

On April 25, 1996, we presented to the MECCA committee a proposal for a 15,000 seat arena which we felt could be built for \$25 million, while the committee is considering a 10,000 seat structure which will likely cost \$45 million or more. Our pro-

posal, provides for an attractive, energy efficient structure which could be built in far less time. The Arena being proposed is a duplicate of the “boiler plate” design of the 1950’s from the Charleston Coliseum, South Carolina. Our carefully conceived and documented proposal was completely ignored, and the public received no information regarding our proposal.

*Tom Dobesh, Citizen, Partner
Tom Dobesh /Build Joint Venture
Partners & Construction*

Editors Note: Although the BCTA is not necessarily promoting the construction of a new arena for Brown County, our primary interests are that this expense not be placed on the taxpayers of the county. Further, we are not in a position to promote any private enterprise under any circumstances. However, it would seem that if viable alternatives were available for any public project the scope of the proposed arena, convention center, jail, new schools or whatever, they should be given due consideration by the proper authorities. Especially when there is taxpayer money involved. Private industry will normally consider all approaches to a project before moving ahead to make sure they are getting the most effective solution for the money being spent.

Proposed New Brown County Arena using Concrete Domed Construction

Mark your Calendar

1997 BCTA Annual Meeting

Monday - October 20, 1997 - 7:27 A.M.

Days Inn - Downtown

Details in the October “TAX TIMES”

October						
1997						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

August Meeting Notes.

Meeting held Thursday, Aug. 21, 1997. Mike Riley of Taxpayers Network, Inc., presented a Tax Foundation report showing that Wisconsin ranks third in the U.S. in state and local taxes, with 13.30 percent of income going to state and local governments. Only Hawaii and New York are higher, at 13.35 and 15.33 percent respectively. For total taxes as a percent of income, Wisconsin remains solidly in third place with 36.51% of income going for state, local, and federal taxes. Connecticut and New York have higher total tax rates, 38.79 and 38.93 percent respectively. (NOTE: These and other states have higher *per capita* incomes than Wisconsin, which would tend to place their citizens in higher federal income tax brackets.)

Ron DeLain, Brown County Board Chairman, presented a report summarizing the findings of the Brown County Vision 20/20 committee. This committee was authorized by the Brown County Board in July, 1996. It was directed to prepare recommendations for a Brown County government long-range plan for submission to the county board.

The committee submitted recommendations for five categories of strategic issues. Key items for each category are listed.

Management and Governance: Change state laws to make the currently elected department heads appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the County Executive. Change state laws to make the state provide 100 percent funding of the Circuit Courts and the District Attorney's office. Enact a Code of Conduct for public officials.

Systems and Technology: Assign clear responsibility for the County's records management functions. Adopt a strategic technology plan to ensure that investment in technology supports overall county strategies.

Consolidated Services: Establish a single fully-integrated Brown County communications and information system for all public safety agencies. Evaluate con-

solidation of existing police forces, information services departments, and public works agencies within Brown County.

Customer Service: Establish programs to measure and improve customer satisfaction for all departments.

Human Resources Development: Assign a single organizational unit responsible for training. Develop a countywide training plan. Establish individual training plans for each employee. Provide performance-based pay for administrative employees.

The directors expressed concern about having presently elected county officials appointed by the County Executive. They questioned how technology will be evaluated for benefits achieved. Concerns were expressed about establishing a county training department instead of taking advantage of the wide variety of public and private training services that are available within the county. The very limited number of citizen/taxpayer members of the Vision 20/20 Committee was another source of concern. It was noted that the committee appeared to be dominated by representatives of government and educational organizations.

The next meeting of the Brown County Taxpayers Association will be scheduled for Thursday, September 18, 12:00 noon at the **DAYS INN - Downtown**. The BCTA annual meeting will be held Monday, October 20, at the **DAYS INN**.

David Nelson - Secretary

"It ain't braggin' if you can do it."
... Dizzy Dean

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

"The taxpayer - - that's someone who works for the federal government and doesn't have to take a civil service examination."
... Ronald Reagan

Did You Ever Wonder -

About the recent "Poll" which purports the majority of Wisconsin residents support or otherwise have no objection to the state lottery or casino gambling. We have no objections to the wishes of the people, but wonder with state lottery sales reportedly dropping, just what percentage of the population, and with what frequency actually participate in these activities.

Why many municipalities seem to do such a lousy job of controlling weeds and grass growing in cracks on roads and sidewalks while the average homeowner manages to keep these problems under control on his own property. Something about looking a lot nicer and having your expensive concrete last a lot longer.

Do the people who plan and authorize and contractors doing the work on all of the road projects in the area give due consideration to the inconvenience caused by detours while they complete their construction. We certainly appreciate new roads and necessary repairs and upgrading. However, some of these jobs seem to take forever to complete, and it wastes time, energy, and often creates dangerous situations with detours. Put the customer first.

Why administrators of the public institutions, during negotiations with public employees, give the appearance of objecting to expensive health care and benefit packages when most often they will receive the same benefits themselves when negotiations are complete?

Next BCTA Meeting September 18.

The next meeting of the Brown County Taxpayers Association will be Thursday, Sept. 18, 1997 at the **DAYS INN-DOWNTOWN**, at 12:00 noon. All members of the BCTA and interested parties are invited to attend.

Complete details on the back cover of this "**TAX TIMES**."

BCTA Meeting & Events Schedule

**Thursday - September 18, 1997, DAYS INN - Downtown
12:00 Noon - Monthly Business Meeting**

**Monday - October 20, 1997, BCTA Annual Meeting
7:27 A. M., Breakfast Meeting.
DAYS INN - Downtown.
Area Legislators will discuss what is going on
with the State Budget. (Full details in October
Tax Times.)**

**Monday - September 15, 1997. 3d Qtr, 1997 Federal and
State income tax estimates due.**

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

Call 469-7373 for information or reservations.

The BCTA fiscal year begins October 1, and a new slate of officers and directors will be named at our Annual Meeting on Oct. 20.

We are presently seeking nominations for Directors of the organization. If you would be interested in serving, please contact any of the officers listed below.

Frank Bennett, Jr.
Rod Goldhahn
Rob Miller
Dave Nelson
Jim Frink

We are seeking persons interested in public affairs, and able to assist on our committees which are schools, county and municipal, state and local, and membership.

"A free society is one where it is safe to be unpopular."

The TAX TIMES

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