
◆ The TAX TIMES ◆

Volume 14, Issue 12

Tax News and Views in Plain English

October, 1999

LAST CHANCE

The legislature is about to pass the next State Budget which be effective for two years. This is the last chance we have to provide input for our representatives as to our individual preferences. Feel free to call Scott Jensen at 608-266-3387 or e-mail him at Rep.Jensen @legis.state.wi.us. You may also contact his counterpart in the Senate at 608-266-9170 or e-mail to Sen.Chvala@legis.state.wi.us.

If you are interested in providing input, please share our view on two issues. The use of tax dollars to support campaigns and the use of tax dollars to support the lottery are no-nos. Both of these issues are new in this budget and if passed will only lead to larger amounts in the future. These two issues strike fear into any taxpayer who thinks there is a chance to control spending in government. Both of these issues are a total waste of taxpayer dollars and are only a ploy to make life easier for legislators at the expense of the taxpayer. Please contact both of the above mentioned gentlemen and let them know of your feelings.

As long as you are calling or e-mailing, let them know your position on what to do with the surplus from the current year. *It would make sense to me that the excess taxes be returned to the people who paid them and the rates adjusted so that excess taxes are not collected in the future.* This may be a simple option for our representatives so we will need to make sure they understand what we want them to do with this extra money.

As you know, our annual meeting is coming up on the 18th of this month. It is a breakfast meeting and will be held at the Days Inn-Downtown as in previous years. Start time is 7:30 and we have Todd Berry as our scheduled speaker. Todd is the President of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WTA), a privately funded nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving government through public policy research and citizen education. Todd has experience in both private business and government and has been President of the WTA for six years. His education includes a master's degree from Harvard University and the University of Chicago. He comes highly recommended and his topic will be, "Wisconsin Taxes, How High and Why."

BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

Frank S. Bennett Jr.
President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government

THINGS THAT MAKE US WONDER.

Proposals to return the supposed state and national revenue surpluses to taxpayers seem to become more incredible and unbelievable each day. An example is the governor's suggestion of a sales tax moratorium over the Christmas season. Fortunately it didn't get too far. We realize this idea was part of a "tax package", but as nice as the idea may have sounded to the voting public, it simply served as an example of the lack of compassion government has for the burden taxes are to the citizens and a complete ignorance and disregard of the problems imposed to business with obeying the tax laws.

The Wisconsin Sales Tax Law is a hybrid conglomeration of regulations that effect nearly all retail establishments in the state. Reporting forms leave little room for error or guesswork. The proposal called for eliminating tax on items costing under \$500 purchased between Thanksgiving and New Years. In other words, retailers would be compelled to classify sales by amount and just part of a reporting month. Not necessarily easy to do on short notice. Even though the state might lose a few dollars, the county sales tax would probably still apply and be collected where it has been imposed. Would business be exempt on their taxable purchases of such items as office supplies, even though individuals buy the same items for Christmas gifts? How would you notify all of the out of state mail order retailers who tax sales to Wisconsin residents? Insofar as big ticket items such as automobiles and anything over \$500 would not qualify under the proposal, a family would have to spend \$2,000 on smaller items to receive \$100 of relief. Even though this scheme was probably not serious, it certainly reinforces the theory that once a tax is in place, it is permanent no matter what, and that government will spend every penny that it gets its hands on. If they believe they have too much money, simply lower the collection rates that produce it, and quit dreaming up new taxes and fees. (Example-raising automobile registration fees from \$40 to \$45).

It has been recently publicized

that for only \$250, the Wis. Motor Vehicle Dept. will sell a list of all the licensed drivers in the state, including their age and address. Whether this is done by statute or some hack in the MVD trying to make some points doesn't matter. It is not necessary to elaborate how such information could be used to ulterior motives. What ever happened to the "Right of Privacy" we hear so much about?

We note that a number of school districts are preparing capital projects referendums for approval by the voters, and applaud the fact that most of them are being scheduled for the same days as regular fall and spring general elections. Although we appreciate the frustrations of school districts in funding their budgets, history has proven the voters to be quite sympathetic if their needs are well documented and presented and fiscal responsibility is indicated.

For years we have been told that a joint dispatch center in Brown County would set a good example of shared municipal services and in addition save the taxpayers a bundle of money. Now a committee studying the situation says it will cost \$3 million to set a system up and another \$3.1 million a year to operate it. What are these services costing us now?

How much is it eventually going to cost the taxpayers by accusing the two police officers of wrongful use of their police car computers? We certainly agree that no employee should be playing games while on duty but administrative leave is expensive and unproductive. No matter where you work, it is up to supervisors to know what your employees are doing and see to it that rules are followed.

The UWGB students and faculty have gotten together and placed a 5,000 seat multi-purpose building on their want list. On campus, suitable for basketball, and probably paid for 100% by state taxpayers. Justification being that difficult for students to go all the way across town for a basketball game.

Now promoters of the new arena in Ashwaubenon are concerned about competition. Remember all the location and financing options which were discussed during the past five years or so?

Jim Frink

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

Lottery Problems.

The main challenge facing the Wisconsin lottery in recent years has been sales. They grew steadily from 1989 through 1995, topping out at \$519 million. Since then, the trend has been generally downward, reaching \$419 million in 1998, or 18% off of the peak.

As lottery revenues fell, so did the property tax credits they supported. From an average high of \$167 in 1992-93, they dropped to \$52 in 1998-99 and are expected to drop to \$40 this year. This despite a constitutional amendment passed this spring limiting credits to Wisconsin home owners.

It has been proposed that general fund taxes (income and sales) be used to cover lottery expenses which are currently paid by lottery income. It is important that you let your legislators know what you think of these proposals.

"There is no dignity quite as impressive, and no independence quite so important, as living within your means." . . . Calvin Coolidge

"The wheel that squeaks the loudest is the one that gets the grease." . . . Josh Billing

"Did you ever get the feeling that the only reason we have elections

“WISCONSIN TAXES How High and Why”

That will be the subject of our outstanding speaker, Todd A. Berry, at the 14th annual meeting of the Brown County Taxpayers Association scheduled for Monday, Oct. 18. Mr. Berry is President of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance of Madison, a privately funded and widely respected nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving government through public policy research and citizen education. He has served on the Dane County board, was Wis. Assistant Secretary of Revenue, executive director of the Tax Reform Commission and a tax policy analyst for the Dept. of Revenue.

He is an honors graduate from the UW-Madison, and holds a masters degree in planning from Harvard and in business administration from the University of Chicago.

Anyone concerned with the high level of taxes in Wisconsin is invited to attend, and we urge you to mark your calendars for Monday, Oct. 18.

“I have learned to use the word ‘impossible’ with the greatest caution.” . . . **Werner Von Braun**

“The golden rule: Those that have the gold make the rules.” . . . **Managing Your Money**

“The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries.”

National Research Award to Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance.

The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance has been honored for distinguished research by the Governmental Research Association (GRA), a national organization of nonpartisan academic, nonprofit and other researchers who study state and local government issues. Todd A. Berry, President of WTA will be the speaker at the BCTA annual meeting scheduled for October 18. (See above related article.)

Federal “Army” Swells to 17 Million. From the National Taxpayers Union.

How can the federal government get even **bigger** as the official federal payroll gets smaller? A recent study by the Brookings Institute provides a few clues. According to study author Paul Light, in 1996 the federal government employed 1.9 million civilian workers, 1/5 military personnel, and 850,000 postal workers—the lowest total in two decades. However, this tally ignores a “shadow” federal government:

- 5.6 million workers are employed under federal contracts.
- Federal grants added 2.4 million jobs under government’s umbrella.
- Federal regulatory burdens forced other governments to hire 4.7 million workers.

All told, Light believes the actual federal workforce alone is nearly 17 million. The author did not calculate similar figures for state and local government, but the National Taxpayers Union has determined that the official payroll at those levels exceeded 14 million in 1996. After accounting for “shadow” state and federal workers and adjusting for overlap with some of lights figures, government at all levels would account for 30-40 million members of the labor pool—or nearly one

PUBLIC LAND IN WISCONSIN.

Wisconsin covers 34.8 million acres of land and 7.4 million acres of water. Of the land, at least 6.6 million acres, or 19.1% are publicly owned. This includes 5.5 million acres used for public conservation and recreation, of which counties manage 21.4 million acres, the federal government 1.8 million and the state 1.4 million.

The speaker scheduled for the November 18, BCTA meeting is Jeff Pagels, Regional Government Outreach Director for the DNR, and he will discuss the DNR’s land acquisition programs. Ron Kazmierczak, DNR Regional Director and Bill Landvatter from the Green Bay Park Department will also be attendance. Details on the back cover of this “TAX TIMES.”

September Meeting Notes.

DNR Regional Trails Coordinator Gary Hanson discussed the Department of Natural Resources’ position on the Green Bay to Greenleaf recreational trail. He explained that they are attempting to acquire the Fox Valley and Western Railroad corridor from Green Bay to Greenleaf. Acquisition of this railroad corridor is being done under the provisions of the 1984 Rail Bank Act, which was passed to enable maintaining railroad corridors for rail purposes.

He went on to explain that this project entails minimal risk for Brown County taxpayers as the U.S. Government is taking the risk. Only once has the Rail Bank Act been successfully challenged. The U.S. Government could be liable if a challenge is successful, not Brown County taxpayers. Development of the trail misestimated to cost \$500,000. A \$400,000 federal grant is available. The money from the federal Department of Transportation will be out there, no matter what. If we don’t get it for this trail, it will go somewhere else.

Mr. Hanson stated that the corridor development plan doesn’t include removal of the railroad bridge near Portier Street in Green Bay: There is no plan to remove the bridge; it will be left in place. It could be put to some use. It may become an asset. It is certainly not a liability. Removal of the bridge is outside the trail project.

Responding to questions, Mr. Hanson explained that he is not aware of any long term cost projections for the DNR’s trails acquisition program and that Brown County can enter into the state trail pass program. Trail passes cost \$3 per day or \$10 for one year.

The next BCTA meeting will be the annual meeting to be held Monday, October 18. It will be a breakfast meeting at 7:30 A.M. at the DAYS INN, and will feature Todd A. Berry, President of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alli-

“Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.”

. . . **George Nathan**

“The current tax code is a daily mugging.” . . . **Ronald Reagan**

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule

Monday - October 18, 1999 - DAYS INN - DOWNTOWN
7:30 A. M. - Whitney Room, North. BCTA Annual Meeting
Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance President Todd A. Berry
WISCONSIN TAXES - *How High and Why.*

Details in attached flyer. Reservations appreciated.
All members of the BCTA, their guests and other interested parties are invited to attend this special meeting. Mr. Berry is an outstanding and qualified speaker.

Thursday - November 18, 1999 - DAYS INN - DOWNTOWN
12:00 Noon - Whitney Room, South - BCTA Monthly Meeting. DNR Regional Outreach Director Jeff Pagels will discuss the DNR's Land Acquisition Programs.

All members of the BCTA, their guests and other interested persons are cordially invited to attend and participate in these open meetings. Phone 499-0768 or 336-6410 for information or to leave message.

Regular monthly meetings are held the third Thursday of each month at the DAYS INN - Downtown.

Price, \$6.50 per meeting. Includes meal.



OCTOBER, 1999

"An association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which has never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or a vestry." . . . Thomas Jefferson

SUPPORT THE BCTA
New Members are always welcome.

Call 336-6410 or 499-0768
Write us at P. O. Box 684,
or visit our Website WWW.BCTAxPAYERS.ORG

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

Last Chance to Comment on State Budget.
Things That Make Us Wonder.
Lottery Problems.
Wisconsin Taxes, How High and Why.
Federal Army Swells to 17 Million.
Public Land in Wisconsin