
◆ The TAX TIMES ◆

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Newsletter of The Brown County Taxpayers Association

November, 20001

COUNTY BUDGET - FORMULA FOR MORE TAXES.

The proposed Brown County budget is a formula for increasing taxes in the future. The continued spending at better than twice the rate of inflation will result in a tax increase soon. Last year, a one-time transfer of \$2 million from the jail savings account to the general fund offset the spending increase. This year, a one-time transfer of \$1.5 million from the general fund is being used for a pay increase. In addition, another one time payment of \$1.1 million from a legal settlement is being used to increase spending by 6.6%. We have been blessed with one-time transfers and only hope for more of the same in future years or we will be in for one huge tax increase.

As I reviewed the budget proposal this year, I found some good things, some bad things, and a few things that were mission. The startup of the Joint Communications Center will save money for taxpayers. It is unfortunate that Ashwaubenon is not included as they are spending a bundle to upgrade their equipment. The ability to separate the cost of the Communication Center also allows for a reasonable way to budget this change. The joint use of landfill space between three counties is also a step in the right direction. This proposal is expected to save \$75 thousand a year, yet represents a major step in cooperation that is necessary for future joint projects.

My concern in the budget is the pay raise that is being proposed for administrative employees. The cost is projected to be \$1.2 million. In this package, 12 people will get raises of \$10,000 a year or more and another 48 will see increases of more that \$5,000. The largest increase of \$18,000 is recommended for the golf course superintendent. Add to this an expected 3% raise and the pay for this one individual goes up 46.3%. This is **NOT** how I want my tax dollars spent. In an effort to be fair, I called other counties in the comparisons and asked what they paid their golf course superintendents. Dane, Manitowoc, Rock, Sheboygan and Winnebago Counties do not have County owned golf courses. Fond du Lac County has one county owned course and pays their manager a \$17,000 salary plus income from concessions. Kenosha County has two county owned courses, a 45-hole and an 18-hole course. The salary for the persons in charge of these courses ranges from \$36,287 to \$53,686. Waukesha County has three county owned courses and the person in charge receives between \$63,880 and \$78,000 and is also in charge of an ice arena. For Brown County, a salary of \$62,000 to the golf course superintendent would be totally unfair to every taxpayer in Brown County.

Another concern with the pay raises is how the cost of living was considered. Dane County for example has a cost of living index of 110.7 while Brown County is at 87.3. When the cost of living index for each of the counties in the comparison in averaged, it is 4.3% higher than Brown County. Without a consideration for this difference, Brown County would be paying a premium to its county employees.,

Two things I expected to see in the budget were not there. The cost to renovate the downtown jail for Huber prisoners and some way to start dealing with the unfunded liability for the Wisconsin Retirement System need to be addressed. I talked to the sheriff about the jail and he indicated minimum changes would be needed and that a request for purchase was in process. for the \$11.1 million in unfunded liability, there was nothing. We currently pay the state 8% interest for this liability.

Overall, this budget is balanced with one-time incomes and sets us up for a large tax increase in the future. It should **NOT** be passed in its current form.

Frank S. Bennett Jr.
President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

TEACHERS UNION PLAYS POWER POLITICS. Wisconsin Labor Law Handicaps Taxpayers Ability to Negotiate Fairly!

A recent article in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (9-27-01) reports that 372 of Wisconsin's 426 school districts still need to negotiate deals. All the contracts in the state expired June 30.

According to the Journal Sentinel story, Mike McNett, manager of collective bargaining for the Wisconsin Educational Association Council (WEAC), the state's largest teachers union, blames the state's Qualified Economic Offer (QEO) law for labor unrest. The QEO law and a law imposing revenue caps on school board spending has been a thorn in the side of the union since these laws were enacted. McNett claims that the QEO law has damaged teacher bargaining power.

Taxpayers know that teacher unions are just holding out for more! The unions have it within their power, and they have shown they will use that power, to hold the children as hostages.

The Waukesha Taxpayers League prepared a study early this year that clearly indicates that the teacher unions have used deceitful and slick tricks that make a mockery of the QEO law. This study analyzed actual salary increases of individual teachers and found that in each of the past two years the average salary increase for full time teachers exceeded 5%. This is in spite of QEO law which limits salary and benefit increases to 3.8%! Deceit is utilized often when presenting spending referenda to voters. Current targets of the union's largess focuses on school auditoriums and lavish gymnasiums that have little or no beneficial impact on academic or vocational learning and achievement.

Taxpayers must be aware that Wisconsin Labor Law enhances the union's ability to dictate with the power provided by the state legislators. Our state legislators have dealt a full measure of power to the teachers union (and all municipal unions) which seriously transgress constitutional rights. The fear of the unions, as a political force, is evident when considering the campaign treasuries amassed by the unions. Legislators cringe in fear at these vast amounts that can be used against them when re-election realities confront their campaigns. Taxpayer organizations cannot and will not generate the dollars raised by the unions, because our organizations are free and we will rely on the freedom and liberty as Americans to protect us. Taxpayers will NEVER RELY ON COERCION!

Federation of Wisconsin Taxpayers Organizations (FWTO)

"Everything is changing. People are taking the comedians seriously and the politicians as a Joke."

. . . Will Rogers (1930)

"A politician will do anything to keep his job, even become a patriot."

. . . William Randolph Hearst

Rep. Lasee's Notes

The legislature is being irresponsible.

That's nothing new. Last year, we sold off \$160 million a year in tobacco settlement money, then spent \$450 million of the sell-off to balance the budget. First we killed the goose that was laying a \$160 million-a-year golden egg, then we used one-time revenues for ongoing expenses. Now the legislature is going after money created by making government workers' retirement benefits more generous.

This week the Assembly brought two new spending bills to the floor: AB 553 and AB 557. We've got some money, and we've just got to spend it.

Granted, one of those new spending items provides money for apprenticeship training and workforce development. One could argue that that's exactly the sort of spending we should be doing during an economic downturn.

But inside the Capitol, we know that we are going to be seriously short of cash as early as November or December. I think we could be anywhere from \$300 million to \$700 million short. Some people are saying it will be as much as a \$1 billion shortfall.

We in the Capitol also know that the State Constitution requires us to balance the state budget. Wisconsin cannot be like Washington and spend on a deficit. The numbers have to come out even. That's the law.

So we're going to have a big, big problem to solve later this year. We could start now, but instead, it's business as usual. We're spending every single dime we can get our hands on, and forget about tomorrow. We'll worry about tomorrow when it gets here.

Some of the money we spent this week is coming from the Wisconsin Retirement Fund. Statewide, WRS has an unfunded liability of more than \$2 billion - that's money that the state, local governments, and school districts owe the system. We're paying 8% interest on this hidden debt.

We got the unfunded liability because, in the 1980s, the legislature decided to make WRS an even richer plan. It was already a Cadillac plan - far better than what most honest taxpayers have. But we made it better, and then didn't fund it. All governments in the state, including schools, are paying that off now.

In 1999, the Legislature earmarked \$200 million to give state and local governments a break, a "holiday," from paying off the liability. Every government in the state gets a share. That frees up the money those governments (including state agencies) were going to spend on liability payments.

The responsible thing to do would be to make the liability payments anyway, and therefore pay it off faster, or to save that money, in case of hard times ahead.

Some local governments or school districts might be doing that. Most aren't. The state certainly isn't. The state's share is \$15 million, and instead of saving it to weather the coming billion-dollar-storm, we're spending it. We're digging ourselves further into a deep fiscal hole. The legislature is acting irresponsibly again.

Representative Frank G. Lasee

15th Annual Meeting Report. Metropolitan Sewer Director Explains Organization.

The 15th Annual Meeting of the Brown County Taxpayers Association was conducted on Thursday, Oct. 18, 2001 at the Glory Years. With his opening remarks, BCTA President Frank Bennett reviewed the various activities and accomplishments of the organization during the past year. Of note were the annual membership poll establishing taxpayer concerns and priorities, and the stand taken by the organization and publicized on important issues. Also noted was the presentation of a plaque by the Libertarian Party of Wisconsin honoring the BCTA for its work on the part of taxpayers by opposing the use of a special county sales tax for the Lambeau Field project.

Featured speaker, Paul Thormodsgard, Executive Director of the Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District (GBMSD), presented an overview of the GBMSD's organization and operations. He began by explaining that the GBMSD was originally organized in 1931 as a result of legislation passed in the late 1920's. Its initial focus was on the East River. Its original service area was the City of Green Bay, the Town of Preble, and part of the Town of Allouez. Now, 16 municipalities and Oneida Nation are members of the GBMSD. De Pere operates its own system. The capacity share of each member reflects its percentage of the total GBMSD wasteload.

The GBMSD's first treatment plant, constructed for \$1.8 million, came on line in 1935 with a capacity of 10 million gallons per day. A \$72 million expansion was completed in 1975, increasing capacity to 52 million gallons per day with a much more efficient process, using activated sludge in its secondary treatment. All pollutants are monitored in the input, sludge, and water disposal.

The GBMSD is organized under Chapter 200 of the Wisconsin Statutes. It has taxing authority under Chapter 67 of the Statutes, but this taxing authority has not been used. Instead, GBMSD members are billed for measured wasteload contributions. Efficiency improvements have permitted a 13 percent reduction in rates charged to users since 1998. A 25 percent staff reduction was a major part of the cost reduction. Rates have not been lower since 1991. The GBMSD reduces

rates in summer to allow for lawn watering, but some members to not pass these reductions along to their citizens.

The BCTA directors expressed interest in the GBMSD organization as a potential model for a regional water authority.

State Representative Frank Lasee expressed outrage that the legislature authorized a 22 month holiday for payments by Wisconsin governmental units toward their unfunded liabilities to the Wisconsin state retirement fund. Meanwhile, the total \$1.3 billion obligation to the government employees retirement fund is compounding at 8 percent annually. All levels of government are involved in this growing obligation, from the state government down to local school districts.

New BCTA directors elected for three-year terms are Carol Kelso and John Pogorelc. Jim Frink, Dave Nelson, and Richard Parins were re-elected to three-year terms as BCTA directors.

The next BCTA meeting will be Thursday, November 15, 2001, and will be used to organize committees and make plans for the coming year. All directors and interested members are urged to attend. Details on last page of this "TAX TIMES."

Dave Nelson - Secretary

Paul Thormodsgard, Director of the Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District explains relationship with the communities it serves.

National Debt Clock Still Running.

Despite talk of government surpluses, the National Debt balance keeps rising. We last reported the balance on Sept. 4, when it stood at \$5,739,113,235,554. As of October 30, it had grown to \$5,742,503,846,078. This is an increase of 3.3 Billion dollars, or about \$5.00 per month for each of us. We don't know if they've factored in the cost of the tax refund for all of us, or the costs encountered and accrued by the government since Sept. 11, but does anyone really care?

"The only way you can do that (decrease taxes, balance the budget, and increase military spending), is with mirrors, and that's what it would take."
... John B. Anderson

"Our government rests in public opinion. Whoever changes public opinion can change the government practically just as much."
... Abraham Lincoln

"The business of government is to keep government out of business — that is, unless business needs government aid."
... Will Rogers

"There's only one kind of tax that would please everybody — one that nobody but the other guy has to pay."

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.BCTaxpayers.Org

Things That Make Us Wonder.

The US Postal Service has announced price increases for next year. If they follow their usual pattern, it will take about 2-3 months after the event until the correct denomination stamps are available. They will probably have tons of stamps though with letters that signify the amount of postage but will be meaningless as time passes. How is it that they can come out with a series of stamps commemorating the Sept. 11, attack only 3 weeks after it happened? They can move if they want to.

We congratulate Mayor Jadins' actions to make downtown parking more user friendly and agree with many people that this has been a big problem. The city, private developers, and many retail establishments have expended millions of dollars in an effort to make the downtown viable while the parking utility has treated patrons as a source of revenue to be tapped and oftentimes antagonized. Do parking meter revenues from Broadway compensate for the money spent by the city to develop the area or do they discourage businesses from investing? Take a ride through and decide for yourself.

It is nice to see the state or Wisconsin at least spending some of the money awarded from the tobacco companies for anti-smoking ads, as was originally intended by the federal courts. One of the TV ads attempts to discourage smokers because it "benefits big tobacco." While this is probably true, it would probably be more effective if it pointed out the amount of tax one pays for a pack of cigarettes compared to what the tobacco companies and retailers receive. One problem with this ad is that it attacks the people who have been forced to pay for it. Also, in Wisconsin, Phillip-Morris who is usually characterized as the biggest villain, employs thousands of people in other industries whose profits, right or wrong, are effected by the settlement. Probably a poor example, but it reminds me of China where criminals are executed and surviving relatives are asked to pay for

the bullets.

According to the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, a number of the states counties which have based their spending on county sales tax receipts are experiencing budget problems due to the declining economy. This could be a problem for the state also. For every \$1.00 a county loses at the .5% rate, the state loses \$10.00 at their 5.0% cut. Maybe people are just getting smarter about paying taxes.

Perhaps you noticed that the public schools were closed Oct. 25 and 26, so that teachers could attend the annual WEAC union meeting, or what they like to call the "teachers convention." The itinerary made available on their website does include a number of seminars and meetings on subjects pertaining to better education. However, there is also a lot of crying about the state imposed levy limits and the QEO, or qualified economic offers that school boards use to keep costs in line. The fact that income and property taxes in Wisconsin are among the highest in the nation, and that the new state budget will only make matters worse makes no difference. The fact that Wisconsin citizens spend an average of 29.5% of their personal income more than the national average for higher education and 19.9% more of their personal income for elementary and secondary education is apparently not enough. According to the U.S. Dept. of Education, Wisconsin spent \$7,765 per pupil in public schools in 1999, which was 21.2% over the national average of \$6,407. We ranked 8th nationally in spending, while our pupil/teacher ratio and teacher salaries were close to the national average. Just what do these people want except everything?

While the nation and insurance companies ponder over the cost of repairing the damage and compensating the survivors of the Sept. 11, tragedy, it appears that much of it will be at taxpayer expense. Meanwhile trial lawyers will likely be waiting their turn for some of the action.

Early drafts of the Green Bay School District and Brown County budgets for the coming year indicate that property tax rates could remain fairly stable, which should be good news for taxpayers and reflect fiscal responsibility on the part of our elected officials. In the case of the county, however, there are several areas which could be of concern in the future. It calls for 67 additional employees when many businesses are cutting back their payrolls. Salaried employees would share a \$1.2 million plus pay increase averaging over \$4,000 per employee. The cost of benefits is rising dramatically. Reserve funds are being spent leaving higher expenses for the future. More on the county budget on page 1 of this *TAX TIMES*.

On October 16, it took a packed house of concerned citizens and until 2:00 AM before the Madison (as in capital of Wisconsin) school board grudgingly gave permission for their schools to allow the Pledge of Allegiance or National Anthem. Perhaps their entire school curriculum should be looked at. In these troubled times, there is no need for further comment except where do these people come from? Did they actually get elected to office on a platform of ignoring patriotism?

We read that the Brown County Board of Supervisors is debating whether to have detailed plans prepared for their new mental health center. So far, the estimated cost has risen from \$30 million a couple years ago to \$39.7 million, and we doubt this is all due to inflation. The question that comes to mind is, if detailed plans haven't been prepared, where does the \$39.7M estimate come from? Is this another inflated SWAG that can be inflated as supporters dream up new enhancements, or can someone still cut this project down to an affordable size?

The county estimates it can save \$800,000 in interest on their new arena by taking advantage of lower interest rates which are now available. This certainly is good fiscal policy, but will the extra room tax paying for this

“sunset” when the project is completed? Same for the sales taxes financing Lambeau Field.

Estimates are that it would cost at least a billion dollars to dredge ~~taminants from both the Fox River and the bay of Green Bay.~~ This dollar amount even made the DNR cringe. While some environmentalists will say this is necessary whatever the cost, maybe they can figure out how and where the spoils will be dumped without causing without causing more pollution and a host of other problems. Also where people will work if the paper mills decide to go elsewhere.

While state lawmakers keep dreaming up new special license plates, the MVD claims that the 70 or so plates already available are enough. Some of them are of limited demand, and the cost of producing and processing them is prohibitive. Maybe if the state went back to one design and started over we could all save some money.

The media continues to attempt minimizing the impact of the .5% Lambeau Field sales tax during its first year of imposition while bragging about how much it takes in. Unfortunately, since most retailers simply list sales taxes as a single amount at the end of your receipt, and unless you carry a calculator, you probably don't realize what it is costing you. Nonetheless it is there.

The \$16 million or so they anticipate extracting during the first year equates to over \$70 for every Brown County resident. If you're not paying your share, someone else is doing it for you. Does showing pictures of the Luxury boxes these tax revenues are paying for make the poor feel any better?

Governor McCallum has announced a hiring freeze for state employees due to a projected shortfall in ~~the state budget due to the economy.~~ Meanwhile Brown County is proposing adding more employees to its payroll. While private employers are stagnates due to the economy, and taxes will become more of a burden for many, is adding to the public payroll a true stimulus?

In addition, it is likely that with the uncertain world situation, mandatory expenditures for additional security measures at all levels of government will be required. Perhaps we should re-examine our priorities.

Just wondering.

JF

Articles and views appearing in the “TAX TIMES” do not necessarily represent the official position of the Brown County Taxpayers Association. We want to 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 Frink at 336-6410. E-Mail Frink@ExecPC.Com.

November BCTA Meeting to Discuss Plans.

The BCTA was originally organized in October, (1985) and for that reason we refer to October as the start of our new year, with new directors, and plan of action for the next 12 months.

This year we would like to re-organize and strengthen our committee structure in order to make the entire organization more effective. Basically these committees consist of municipal, schools, county, state and national, and membership and publicity. It is obvious there are far more issues of taxpayer concern than can be handled by the group as a whole, so the various committees are asked to study and report on issues as they arise.

We will discuss this along with other plans for the coming year at our November 15, meeting. All directors and interested members who would like to become more active are urged to attend.

Government in Action

House of Representatives Votes Against English Language Fails to Overturn Clinton's Executive Order 13166

On Thursday, October 11, the House of Representatives rejected Rep. Ernest Istook's (R-OK) amendment to delay enforcement of Executive Order 13166, which declared government-funded operations must be provided in languages other than English. In a vote of 156 to 262 (Roll Call Vote #380), 63 Republicans joined 198 Democrats and one Independent to kill an amendment that would have protected English as the language of the U.S.

Former President Clinton's Executive Order 13166 requires state and local government agencies and other recipients of federal funds, such as doctors who treat Medicare or Medicaid patients, to provide translation services on demand in any person's language of choice. Every recipient of federal funds must be prepared to pay for translation services, oral and written, in all 6,800 languages spoken around the world.

Friends and relatives are not permitted to help translate. Professionals must be hired, and the service must be provided for free for anyone who asks. Hospitals and universities are already facing harassment by federal agencies. The University of Utah medical center spent over \$400,000 last year for translation services and publishes health brochures in 24 languages. Yet, it remains under investigation by the Dept. of Health and Human Services.

On April 24, the Supreme Court ruled in Alexander v. Sandoval that our civil rights laws do not require the government to use languages other than English. Clinton's Executive Order was based on the false argument that providing services only in English discriminates on the basis on "national origin." Despite the Supreme Court's rejection of that argument in the Sandoval case, so far the Bush administration has stated that the President has no plans to repeal this executive order.

Contributed by Mike Riley, Taxpayers Network, Inc.

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule.

Thursday - November 15, 2001. **BCTA Monthly Meeting.**
Glory Years, 347 S. Washington St.
12:00 Noon, Vince's Office.
Planning session. Discussion and plans for coming year. All directors and interested members are invited to attend and participate.

It's your organization.

Thursday - December 21, 2001. **BCTA Monthly Meeting.**
Glory Years, 347 S. Washington St.
12:00 Noon, Vince's Office.
We plan on having a speaker to be announced.

Regular BCTA meetings are held the third Thursday of each month at the Glory Years in the Washington St., Inn. 347 S. Washington St., Green Bay

All members of the Brown County Taxpayers Association, their guests and other interested parties are cordially invited to attend and participate in our open meetings. Phone 36-6410 or 499-0768 for information or to leave message. COST - \$6.50 per meeting, includes lunch, tax & tip.

November, 2001



**Let Us
Give
Thanks.**

"Sure it's just a billion dollars, but a few billion here and a billion there and pretty soon it begins to add up."
. . . Senator Everett Dirksen

"Government does not solve problems, it subsidizes them."
. . . Ronald Reagan

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Inside This Issue

**The County Budget - Formula For More Taxes.
Teachers Union Plays Power Politics.
Representative Lasee's Notes.
Report From BCTA Annual Meeting.
Things That Make Us Wonder.
November Meeting To Discuss Planning.
English As The U. S. Language.
AND MORE.**