
◆ The TAX TIMES ◆

Volume 17, Issue 7

Newsletter of the Brown County Taxpayers Association

July-August, 2002

COUNTY BUDGET 2003

I have been reading a few letters in the people's forum about our current County Board. The letters have not been complementary and many of the writers are concerned about the direction of County government. I believe we get what we vote for at the national, state and local levels. Like many elections, the person casting the vote is entrusted with the responsibility to understand the issues, the candidate's views on the issues, and the candidates standing. Armed with this information, each voter does the best job an individual can do at the ballot.

Much discussion is taking place at the County level about making English the official language of the County. This issue is taking too much time of the County Board. The most pressing issue is the County Budget. We haven't heard a word about the cost of the County for next year. Two years ago, the budget was balanced by moving two million dollars from the jail capital reserve to the general fund and used to cover the increase in spending. Last year, a one time legal settlement, using money from the general fund and the first year payment from the Oneida Tribe allowed the budget to remain in balance. With the increased spending over the last several years at twice the rate of inflation, the budget is under tremendous pressure.

This year the budget will include about seven hundred thousand dollars for the new library in DePere (\$200k for debt and \$500k for operations), the annual increase for medical coverage at astronomical rates (up about 15%?), the second year of increases for the pay raise (several hundred thousand dollars more), and the cost for a new mental health center (three million in debt payments). With a budget that has been balanced with one-time payments, I wonder how the County will balance the budget for the upcoming year? What financial rabbit will the county pull out of its hat for next year? It would be easy to predict a shortfall of more than seven million dollars, have everyone throw up their hands and say it is time for a county sales tax. If that happens it will be easy to see how the individual decisions made over the last few years have gotten the County Budget in such disarray. We might have been able to predict this would happen. We as a County did vote on a sales tax increase as recently as September 2000 and the result is clear. NO sales tax increase for Brown County government.

Now is the time for the County Board to start asking the necessary questions and making the important decisions to control spending and keep the budget in control. Do we need a Mental Health Center at this time or can it be delayed? When a new Mental Health Center is built, does it need to be the design put together by the Mental Health Community? Do we need to implement the pay raise passed by the last board? Can something be done to limit the cost increases for medical coverage? Maybe insurance coverage should look more like the private sector with deductibles and co-pays? Can we get the schools and the County Library system to work together so taxpayers can be served at the lowest cost? Can we get discussion on a County Budget prior to a one-day meeting in November where decisions are final?

I believe we have a County Board like we haven't seen in a long time. A County Board that represents the taxpayer and is ready to do the right thing when it comes to tough decisions. The time to start that process is NOW.

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government

Hold Your Representatives "Feet To The Fire."

It's about time that when our elected officials go back on the work he was elected to, or against their pledge to control taxes and spending, we as taxpayers should record their votes and actions to keep a file for reference when they seek re-election. This also goes for campaign pledges, promises of open government and whatever else they said when elected.

Mark Leistickow

Federal spending out of control.

The Congressional Budget Office released its Monthly Budget Review on June 14, and it revealed a staggering increase in federal government spending in the current fiscal year 2002 budget.

Federal outlays through the first eight months of fiscal year 2002 were up by 10.1%, compared with the same period in FY2001. Given the attacks of September 11, and the subsequent war on terrorism, one might expect defense spending to rise, and it has grown by 15.4%. However, Social Security spending is up 5.6%, Medicare 10.2%, Medicaid 13.7%, unemployment insurance 72.6%, and other remaining programs and activities by 18.1%. Non-defense discretionary spending was up by 9%.

Interestingly, net interest on public debt actually fell by 18.6%. Factor out this decline in net interest, and federal spending on actual programs is racing ahead at a rate of 14%.

Such massive spending increases endanger U.S. taxpayers and economic recovery.

Raymond J. Keating

Chief Economist, Small Business Survival Committee
(Submitted by Mike Riley)

"The constitution is not neutral. It was designed to take the government off the backs of people."

. . . **William O. Douglas**

*I shall on all subjects have a policy to recommend, but none to enforce against the will of the people.:

. . . **Ulysses S. Grant**

"You don't make the poor rich by making the rich poorer."

. . . **Winston Churchill**

The State Budget All Over Again.

This fiscal biennium, which has caused so many headaches, began on July 1, 2001 – one year ago on Monday. Thus, we were nearly two months late when, on August 29, 2001, Governor Scott McCallum signed our current budget into law.

The Senate passed that budget, 25-8. The Assembly passed it 73-22. (I was one of the 22).

At the time, we had no idea that terrorists were less than two weeks away from attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but we did know that Wisconsin and the U.S. were in a mild recession.

Despite the recession, our budget predicted that state revenues would grow by 5.9% in the first year, and by 4.4% in the second year.

When the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau first predicted those numbers in late 2000 – about nine months before the budget finally passed – they looked about right. By the time the budget was passed, it was obvious that they were much too high.

We passed the budget anyway. Governor McCallum used his veto power to remove about \$60 million in spending. I applauded that, but we all knew it wasn't nearly enough.

Fast forward now, nearly a year, and see how history is repeating itself.

We've got a \$1.117 billion budget deficit that we must fix. Just as we knew early on that our revenue estimates were too high, we've known at least since October that the deficit was going to be big. Back then, estimates put it anywhere from \$300 million to \$1.3 billion.

We could have dealt with the problem then – we could have found a way to spend a billion less over the course of 18 months, to alleviate the problem. We didn't. We put the problem off, and put it off, and put it off.

We're still doing that, and it's still making the problem worse.

When the Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimated the cost savings from across-the-board cuts to state agencies

(several months ago), they calculated them over a 12-month period. Those cuts are intended to begin on July 1, 2002 – the first day of the second year of this biennium.

Guess what? July 1, has already passed.. There's no way we can get the bill passed by then. We're going to be late. Again.

Just as we knew last year that our budget would be in deficit, we know now that our "solution" to the deficit will only make our future problems more difficult. There's another deficit on the horizon, and this one could top \$2 billion, according to some (unofficial) estimates.

We could make the really hard choices now, with an eye toward easing that future deficit. Instead, we're using \$800 million of tobacco settlement money – a one-time fund that we'll never have back again. We're putting off payments to the trust funds that fund state employee benefits. We're looking for solutions that will get us through the next election cycle.

We're making our future decisions harder, to make current decisions easier, just like we did a year ago. Thinking legislators, and thinking legislative leaders, know all of this already.

History is repeating itself in the Wisconsin State Legislature. The question now is: when will it stop?

Rep. Frank G. Lasee

"When there is a lack of honor in government, the morals of the whole people are poisoned."

. . . **Herbert Hoover**

"There are plenty of recommendations on how to get out of trouble cheaply and fast. Most of them come down to this. Deny your responsibility." . . . **Lyndon B. Johnson**

"Politics is not an exact science."

. . . **Otto von Bismarck**

**VISIT OUR
WEBSITE
www.BCTaxpayers.Org**

Ed Thompson to speak at July BCTA meeting.

Wisconsin gubernatorial candidate Ed Thompson will be the speaker at the July 18, BCTA meeting. His views on taxpayer issues and the state budget should be of interest to everyone. This meeting will be in the Nicolet Room of the Glory Years, allowing for a greater attendance. Details on the back page of this *TAX TIMES*.

June Meeting Notes.

Monthly BCTA meeting held June 20, 2002 at the *Glory Years*, Green Bay.

Len Teresinski, President of the Village of Hobart and Chair of the Brown County Central Water Authority (BCCWA), presented an update of the water negotiations between the City of Green Bay and the BCCWA participating communities. He stated that he is working with Mayor Jadin to do what is best for all concerned. There is no question that we need a quality water supply for all of the communities. Also, authority members must meet the 2006 EPA radium standards imposed by the state and federal authorities.

For a new water supply, the nine BCCWA communities would need to invest about \$135 million, plus \$4 million to \$5 million annually for capital improvements. Connection fees would be needed for new users. The City of Green Bay would need to invest \$30 million to \$50 million to upgrade its facilities. Working together, the BCCWA members and the City of Green Bay can significantly reduce their future water supply costs.

The BCCWA has until October 1, 2003 to agree with the City of Green Bay's aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) plan. The first 50 million gallon ASR test will be completed in April, 2003 and the second 50 million gallon ASR test will be completed in July, 2003. Following the ASR tests, the DNR needs about four weeks to make a ruling.

In response to questions, Mr. Teresinski explained that the Oneida Tribe of Indians is not participating in the search for solutions to area water supply problem.

Brown County Supervisor Patrick Evans reported that the Brown County Board tabled the \$31 million Mental Health Facility construction issue for sixty days for further study. The issue of pay raises for county administrative employees was sent back to the Executive Committee.

Don Stewart, candidate for Brown County Sheriff, expressed concerns about present costs of operations for the new Brown County Jail. He noted that it costs at least \$71 per day to house a prisoner, but we only charge other counties \$52 per day. Replacing two of the three daily hot meal with nutritious unheated meals could save \$700,000 annually. Converting the eight basketball courts to dormitory space could provide enough space to close the downtown Huber facility, saving another \$500,000 per year.

The next BCTA meeting will be Thursday, July 18, at the "Glory Years", and the speaker will be Ed Thompson, candidate for Wisconsin Governor. All BCTA members and interested parties are invited to attend. Details on the back page of this *TAX TIMES*.

Dave Nelson – Secretary

No TAX TIMES in August.

We do not plan on publishing the "TAX TIMES", for the month of August. There will still be a monthly meeting on Aug. 15, and our annual meeting scheduled for Sept. 19. Mark your calendars. Details on the back page.

Notify BCTA of Address Changes.

The Tax Times is mailed at bulk rates, and accordingly the Postal Service does not notify us of address corrections or mail which cannot be delivered.

Please drop us a note of any changes. Thank you.

Red Skelton's Pledge of Allegiance.

With the recent controversy over our "Pledge of Allegiance", we print his interpretation of the wording as given several years ago to a group of school children by Red Skelton. Most of us probably agree.

I	- Me; an individual; a committee of one.
Pledge	- Dedicate all of my worldly goods to give without self-pity.
Allegiance	- My love and my devotion.
To The Flag	- Our standard; Old Glory;; a symbol of freedom; wherever she waves there is respect, because your loyalty has given her a dignity that shouts,
Of The United	- That means that we have all come together.
States of America,	- Individual communities that have united into fifty great states. Fifty individual communities with pride and dignity and purpose. All divided with imaginary boundaries, yet united to a common purpose, and this is love for country.
And to the Republic, For which	- Republic; a state in which sovereign power is invested in representatives chosen by the people to govern. And government is the people; and it's from the people to the leaders, not from the leaders to the people.
One Nation	- One Nation – meaning. So blessed by God.
Under God,	- Added in 1954. Wouldn't it be a pity if someone said that is a prayer, and that would be eliminated
Indivisible,	- Incapable of being divided.
With Liberty	- Which is freedom; the right of power to live one's own life, without threats, fear, or some form
And Justice	- The principle, or qualities, of dealing fairly with others.
For All	- For All, which means it's as much your country as it is mine.

THINGS THAT MAKE US WONDER.

The newly announced Federal Courthouse to be built in downtown Green Bay is drawing praise from all sources. There is no doubt that this will bring prestige and other development to the downtown area. While attention has been focused on selecting a judge to head the new district, there apparently will be other federal offices and a significant number of employees also housed here. A lot of credit must go to Congressman Mark Green and others who were involved in making this possible.

One question is the selection of the location. Many of us who remember the corner of Washington and Walnut was once the center of the city and the busiest corner in town. A lot has changed since then, and Green Bay has stuck a lot of taxpayer dollars in efforts to revitalize the downtown area. The bottom line of all of this has been to bring in business and property tax dollars in return. More convenient parking will be necessary for users of this building and this could be a taxpayer expense. Present downtown parking available now, it is still inconvenient for users of many of the government offices due to the meters and street parking restrictions. It seems that the bulk of the downtown is already tax exempt in the form of city and county ownership. One problem is that if the new building is privately owned and leased to the government as suggested, you and I end up paying the property tax to the city. We could lose either way.

The Packers have announced the receipt of \$920,000 or so in other revenues to apply against the stadium project and "save taxpayers money." \$500,000 of this amount is added to the price of tickets so is not a voluntary contribution but paid by fans attending games. The balance was mostly from license plate sales and income tax check offs. How many license plates does the state have left and who pays for them?

While on the subject, recall when the Packers were seeking support for the county sales tax, they set aside several thousand of the new seats for

Brown County residents on a lottery type basis for individual games rather than make them available to those on the waiting list. We understand there were something like 12,000 applicants which means these people could go to several games per year. Considering that previous season ticket holders were assessed \$2,000 per seat, (the green and gold packages), my question is, will the Packers be able to get the \$2,000 license fee from these single game sales. A deal is a deal. If they received \$2,000 each from 5,000 more season ticket holders, it could mean \$10 million more for the project to "save the taxpayers money". That's also a lot of license plates.

During the past year, Wisconsin's bond rating has been lowered at least twice, and is considered a more speculative investment. The result of this is that the state must pay a higher price to borrow money because our spending habits have made us more of a credit risk. This situation has been complicated by the fact the state does not have an adequate "rainy day fund", or reserve to cover emergencies. It wasn't always so. It seems that not too many years ago it was against the states principles to borrow money. Throughout the years, however, what went out simply outpaced what came in. Anytime a small reserve or surplus was found, a way of quickly spending it on some new project was immediately found also. Many new programs have been initiated in recent years committing future revenues dependent on a steadily growing, inflationary economy. It is epidemic, as many of our cities, counties, schools and other unites of government have operated the same way. Such is the nature of politics and trying to do everything for everybody. Perhaps the best thing that could happen would be for potential borrowers to Wisconsin to just say "NO".

It seems that in recent years we have seen one after another of our precious American institutions and freedoms either removed or altered beyond meaning or use. The latest is the decision of a San Francisco, (of all

places), Federal Appeals Court which determined as unconstitutional and outlaws the pledge of allegiance because it includes the phrase "under god." Particularly disturbing is that such a far reaching, patriotic, emotional and potential divisive issue could be imposed on all of us so easily from an unsuspected source. It makes us wonder who is running the show in this country.

The decision will likely be repealed, but only after a great deal of expense and controversy that will have the effect of dividing rather than uniting our people. In the meantime, Brown County continues to consider making English the official county language, with a lot of misunderstanding and distortion of facts being entered in the discussion. At least there has been some opportunity for public debate on this subject.

The Packers have agreed to pay \$400,000 of a \$5.5 million Lombardi Ave. rebuilding project from Lambeau Field renovation funds. Didn't the state give \$9.1 million for infrastructure including streets, bridges, parking, etc. related to the project, and wouldn't this be part of it?

A recent article entitled "Auditors disputing cost of Miller Park" caught my eye. While officials try to sort out the actual cost complicated by various overruns, lawsuits, and the Brewers performance this year, Robert Trunzo, who is chairman of the stadium district board criticized the Legislative Audit Bureau report as being "riddled with errors" over the \$393.2 million he claims the stadium cost and the \$1 billion or so the state claims it will cost when all the bonds and interest are finally paid. Mr. Trunzo was then quoted as saying that "adding a lifetime cost of a project was not common practice on any other state or municipal project."

Unfortunately this seems to be the rule rather than the exception. The cost of a new school, municipal building, or whatever is always given to the gullible taxpaying public at the cash price with no mention of the interest which can easily double the cost. We have seen many examples of this cost being inflated to allow for extra perks and enhance-

ments not originally specified. It never makes the news when the final payment of bonds sold 20-30 years previous are made. We forget about that, and lose track of previous bonding projects which are being paid for. It would be nice if new projects couldn't be undertaken until old ones were paid off. Like you and I do.

The new 568 prisoner Brown County jail has been operating at partial capacity, and now officials are concerned. While providing room for the future makes sense with any project, couldn't we just cut our losses by operating this facility with a smaller staff and overhead until greater need arises? Seeking prisoners from other counties seems to be poor economics. This thing cost over \$100,000 per inmate to build plus staffing, and nobody gets get rich renting rooms for \$100 per day.

The wildfires in Colorado and Arizona are a national disaster, and we are fortunate that Wisconsin is usually spared from such catastrophe. Now it turns out that at least two of the largest fires were intentionally set by disgruntled government employees, as if we don't have enough problems with outside terrorists. While not necessarily a taxpayer issue, the federal government will suffer a loss for all the timber and wildlife resources they have been protecting and is now going to waste. The emergency cost of fighting these fires will cost us and we can be sure the federal government will give away large amounts of our money in efforts to restore the damage when things cool down. The future cost of lumber and fire insurance could also effect our pocketbooks.

The stock market has been a disaster the past few months, and in addition to discouraging individual investors, has been placing huge strains on large institutional investment accounts ~~intended to fund retirement benefits.~~ There are probably a number of factors responsible which an economist would have to explain, but the scandals at Enron and Worldcom seemed to have an immediate negative effect. Is it that our big mega-corporations feel they can operate like

the government with little regard for balancing spending with revenues, while paying top executives ridiculous salaries to make things look good rather than fulfill their obligation to their employees and shareholders. Don't count on much relief from any government meddling, no matter how well intended. Anyone who has ever been involved with a small corporation will tell you the first thing the IRS looks for in an audit is how much of the profit the principals take, but this rule apparently doesn't apply to the big fish.

The U. S. Supreme Court has ruled it legal to give random drug tests to high school and college athletes. If drugs indeed do effect ones ability to function normally and make responsible, rational decisions, perhaps some of our elected officials should be tested also. Some of them spend money like they are buying drugs.

It is now the first of July, and time for a new Wisconsin state budget for the year 2002-2003. Does that mean we can forget about trying to balance the budget from last July 1?

President Bush's approval rating remains high, and we support him 100%. However, he seems to have caught the spending bug big time. Considering the same factors that have affect state income such as lower tax receipts based on the economy are also effecting Washington, it would seem that our government could set a better example for us.

There are always a lot of things that make us wonder. JF

"The best things in life are free, but sooner or later the government will find a way to tax them."
... Unknown

Demographics Point to Future State Problems.

The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance has examined trends in the states population, and projects the following changes in the growth and composition in the years to come.

While the total population is expected to rise 18.5% by 2030, the number of citizens over 65 will double during that time. However, school age population in the 5-17 age group will probably shrink during that time. In the meantime, the percentage of people in the 18-64 working class group will show little change.

The significance of this is that while school officials will see less growth, while health care facilities for senior will be more in demand. Consumer demand and the labor force will have to make adjustments accordingly.
From FOCUS, June 19, 2002, Wis. Taxpayers Alliance.

BCTA Website Being Updated.

Webmaster Ron Erickson has been busy updating and making enhancements to the BCTA Website. If there are any suggestions that you feel could be an improvement, pass them on to Ron or Jim Frink. We have received comments from all over the country, but our primary goal is communication with our members and our elected officials.

"There are two distinct classes of men. . . Those who pay taxes, and those who receive and live upon taxes." . . . Thomas Paine

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.

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The TAX TIMES - July-August, 2002

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule (Mark Your Calendars)

Thursday - July 18, 2002, BCTA Monthly Meeting.

GLORY YEARS, 347 S. Washington St., 12:00 Noon.
Speaker, Ed Thompson, Candidate for Wis. Governor.
This meeting will be held in the "Nicolet" Room.

Thursday - August 2002, BCTA Monthly Meeting.

GLORY YEARS, 347 S. Washington St., 12:00 Noon.
There will not be an August *TAX TIMES*, but there will be
an August meeting. Plan on attending.

Tuesday - September 10, 2002, PRIMARY ELECTIONS.

County, state and congressional races will have primaries.
Show your support.

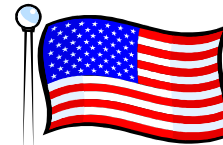
Thursday - September 19, 2002 BCTA Annual Meeting.

Details to be announced in the September *TAX TIMES*.

Tuesday - November 5, 2002. GENERAL ELECTIONS.

County officials, Governor, Legislature and Congress.

Regular monthly meetings of the BCTA are held on the third Thursday
Of each month at the Glory Years, 347 S. Washington St., Green Bay
Cost - \$6.50 per meeting - includes lunch, tax & tip.
Phone 336-6410 or 399-0768 for information or to leave message.



**JULY-
AUGUST
2002**

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

"The nation ought to have a tax sys-
tem which looks like someone de-
signed it on purpose."
. . . William E. Simon

SUPPORT THE BCTA

**New Members are Always
Welcome.**

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