
◆ The TAX TIMES ◆

Volume 20, Issue 2

Newsletter of the Brown County Taxpayers Association

November, 2004

No Laughing Matter.

"I don't mean to laugh, but that will be a tough job. Americans love to hate government. There is a general belief that government is too expensive and fat. And there is little you can do to change that image." – UW-Milwaukee Prof. Mordecai Lee

Do you know what the good professor was laughing about? The former Democratic lawmaker from Milwaukee was laughing at a proposed union media blitz to make government workers more likable.

If you don't believe me, go and read for yourself. I'll wait:

<http://www.bizjournals.com/milwaukee/stories/2004/10/25/newscolumn1.html>

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 48 Pres. Rich Abelson moaned, "Public employees are under constant attack. Everybody thinks they are getting boatloads of money, but the truth is in some cases they are paid much less than comparable jobs in the private sector."

So, AFSCME, is going to market us into liking their members. After this year's election onslaught, I hope they wait a long while before delivering their political propaganda. And remember, our tax dollars pay the union dues that AFSCME will use to buy these ads.

What ever happened to cooperation? Or did it, like Santa Claus, never really exist? Speaking of Santa, I'll tell you what taxpayers want for Christmas. It's easy. We don't need a fat tax cut, although that would be nice. All we want is what good Prof. Lee suggested: A union collaboration at making government more efficient.

Green Bay Mayor Schmitt has done an excellent job so far. His 2005 budget only saved \$500,000, but it is a great good-faith opening bid. But here's where it gets sticky. The ointment is out-of-date workplace rules which prohibit a common sense approach to efficiency in the workplace, and the fly is the fear of change.

As we all grow in job experience, most employees find their efficiency grows. Our economy screams to do more with less. And these are workers who would do more with less if they could. They are buzzing with productivity. They just need the chance. It's the right thing, and certainly what any of them would do if they were running their own business.

Like it or not, only the strong survive. The fly will soon meet the swatter. Current workplace structure seems to keep the flies in. Let's work to open the window and let those pesky critters out.

In truth, friends, they have little choice. With the impending tax freeze and the steady march of TABOR, AFSCME and other union resisters will have to cooperate to avoid layoffs. It is a shame it has come to this. I know their members are now wishing union leaders had not played hardball with government negotiators through the cash-flush 90's.

And I know the rank and file hope AFSCME takes Prof. Lee's advice. It would make their jobs easier and more rewarding. And best of all, they would still HAVE jobs.

Keep the faith! Have a Happy Thanksgiving.

Richard Parins, President

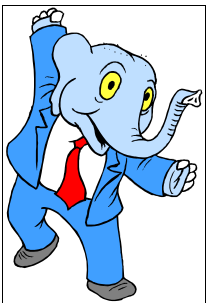
The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government

The Election is Over.

Amen!

We have just witnessed what was likely the most negative, expensive, and deliberately misleading advertising blitz in history. (*From both sides*). Regardless of whether your candidate won or lost, the messages conveyed were generally more critical of the opposition than positive for the candidate. Barring lawsuits to determine a winner, there should be some degree of cooperation but we are fearful of the next time around when the losers fight for revenge.

This shameful affair was sponsored and approved by the very individuals whom we entrust to make important decisions effecting our lives, spend our money, make and enforce our laws and educate our children. They seem to have forgotten that there is a certain amount of



dignity and trust connected with holding public office. Participants included those wanting to be president of the United States down to the local level. Agree or not, the national (and local) media did their share to keep things

going and make key races interesting by subtly rooting for their favorites and drumming up business. The countless polls, especially after a debate or notable event only added to the confusion.

If there was any common denominator other than bashing their opponents in their advertising, it could be that no one ran on a platform of raising taxes of any kind once in office, other than vaguely suggesting to tax the "rich" more. Previous tax cuts were often criticized for various reasons, while claiming that taxes were too high brought audiences to their feet.

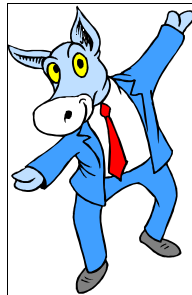
While promising to control taxes, however, most of the candidates seemed to agree on more spending for job creation, education, health care at every level and national defense. Another contradiction was a popular suggestion that tax breaks should be given to

"No one ran on a platform of raising taxes of any kind once in office."

employers providing new jobs to boost the economy. This often from the same people criticizing previous tax cuts enacted for the same purpose. Rather than clearly explain how they intended to achieve these goals we would have to wait until after the election and trust them in the meantime.

It appeared that many of the candidates were as mathematically challenged as they believed their audiences to be. One popular theme was to criticize their opponents voting record, especially if there was any hint of reducing funding for such popular items as education, health care, veterans benefits, the environment, or public safety. While raising taxes would not be an option, little was said about how they would balance the budget. Little was ever said regarding the fact that government spending requests were simply in excess of projected revenues. In most cases, especially on the state and local level, services have been maintained at the same or even higher levels than previous due to the necessity of operating more efficiently.

Another effective tactic was to spread fear and uncertainty among certain groups of prospective voters by suggesting that the economy would get worse, Social Security or Medicare benefits would be cut, or that the Military draft would be reinstated. Hopefully true national emergencies would supersede any circumstances. Healthcare and prescription drug costs was the poster child of all candidates. Having all of us buy prescription drugs from Canada sounds nice but may be impractical as would giving us all the same health-care plan as members of Congress receive be impossible for the country to afford.



Despite the McCain-Feingold act, special interests appeared to be more active than ever in trying to influence voters. Loopholes enabling large contributions were easily exploited. A large number of the advertising we were subjected to came from sources

other than the candidates or their parties. These ads also seemed to be the most venomous in their approach and content, and the most difficult to defend against. Many of these special interests appeared more concerned with their own agendas than the welfare of the majority they were claiming to represent.

Particularly disturbing were some of the personal attack claims questioning the qualifications of opponents and what could happen if they gained office. Mostly they were baseless speculation with no reference to facts or an opportunity to be proven.

In all fairness to all of the candidates for office, they are for the most part outstanding citizens and have a genuine desire to serve the public. Perhaps their value to special interest groups and a partisan majority in the legislature or congress is beyond their own personal comprehension. Once they become a candidate, their committees will map a plan to do whatever it takes to get them elected. Outside consultants and media specialists are retained to do whatever necessary to develop the plan and approach to get their person elected. In their eyes, it is not the people who matter, it is the ones who pay the bills.

In any event, we congratulate the winners of the November, 2004 election success in their office. **JF**

National Debt Update.

As of Election Night, Nov. 2, the U. S. National Debt stood at a total of **\$7,428,667,390,801.00**. This was an increase of \$57.7 Billion over last month at this time. The average family now owes as their share **\$118,308.**, or an increase of **\$1,239**. About the same as if you charged a nice new TV set to your account. You can check it any time at www.toptips.com/debtclock.HTML

"He who slings mud loses Ground."
... Proverb

"No matter who you vote for, the government always wins."
... London Grafitti

TABOR Support Crosses Normal Boundaries.

By Rep. Frank G. Lasee

I could almost hear it: the sound of teeth grinding together. How else would opponents of tax reform react to this latest report? I wonder what their first thoughts were. Perhaps: "are people really this stupid?"

The "they" I refer to are those who oppose the Taxpayer Bill of Rights – those who have invested themselves, their time and resources, their organizations and reputations to defeating it for the last two years, and who intend to keep trying to defeat it in the future.

Recently, they received a blow. The people don't agree with them. Harris Interactive, a New York based research firm, just released the results of their latest poll, which show that two thirds of Wisconsin residents want the Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

Overall, 67% of Wisconsinites support TABOR, 24% oppose it. The rest were undecided. The numbers got more interesting as they were broken into sub-groups.

Wisconsin's liberal bastions support TABOR: 63% in the Milwaukee area (55% in the City of Milwaukee), 58% in the Madison area. A majority of Democrats – 56% - support it, as do 69% of independents, and 76% of Republicans. Even among liberals, more support TABOR than oppose it: 46% to 34%. Now that's what I call bipartisan support.

Other poll results give us some clues as to why such widespread majorities support constitutional spending limits: because people think government spends too much (59%); they want the budget balanced with spending cuts instead of tax increases (78%); property taxes are far too high (64%).

But these are conservative positions: conservatives want smaller government, lower taxes, more dependence on the individual rather than on government. How is it that even liberals are supporting TABOR?

Perhaps because TABOR is another step in Wisconsin's progressive tradition. That progressive tradition got its start with Robert "Fightin' Bob" LaFollette, who broke with the established Republican Party over what he felt were too-close ties to banking and other special interests.

Today, Progressivism has been hijacked by liberalism – instead of standing solely with the little guy against big special interests, it's used as a club to bash only Republicans.

But Wisconsinites aren't fooled. We can see that special interests still have too much influence in our government, and not only on one side of the partisan aisle.

TABOR offers what progressives want: by limiting the power of government, we also limit the power of special interests. By requiring a referendum of the people before government can raise taxes, borrow large amounts of money, or spend more than the limits allow, we take power away from those few people at the top, and give it back to all of us, who are supposed to have it anyway.

TABOR opponents, take note. If the primary elections didn't clue you in, this survey should. Wisconsin is ready for the Taxpayer Bill of Rights. Don't stand in the way.

Rep. Frank G. Lasee

Numerous Taxpayer Referendums on Ballot Nov. 2.

Besides the Presidential race which took the attention of the whole country, there were a number of referendums of interest to taxpayers around the country.

A referendum in **Arizona** would require recipients of state and local benefit programs to submit proof of immigration status. A **California** referendum would require that sales of surplus state property be deposited in a "rainy day fund" rather than spent on new programs. **Florida** voters were asked to repeal a high-speed rail plan, which would save them at least \$25 billion.

Maine voted to limit property taxes to 1% of assessed value and roll back valuations to the 1996-97 level. A 2/3 voter approval would be required for an override. The State of **Washington** had an initiative to allow non-tribal gambling establishments to provide property tax relief. The City of **Houston** voted to require a 60% majority for approval of all local revenue increases in excess of inflation or population growth. **Colorado** had a referendum to modernize the state's public employment system to provide additional management flexibility regarding hiring and firing of personnel.

Some referendums would increase state spending. **Nevada** voted to require per-pupil school expenses to meet or exceed the national average, **Washington** voted for a 1% sales tax increase to fund education, and **California** voted on a 1% increase on incomes in excess of \$1 million.

We didn't see the results of any of these referendums yet, but it is important to know what can happen when concerned taxpayer groups get aroused. (From NTU)

Let's look ahead. Anti-tax groups target state-house spenders.

Washington, D.C.-based groups such as Americans for Tax Reform (ATR), Club for Growth and FreedomWorks/Citizens for a Sound Economy zeroed in on several primaries, targeting Republican legislators in Kansas, Nebraska, Oregon and Wisconsin who reneged on their pledge not to raise taxes.

Among the Republicans kicked out of office in state primaries, in large part because of their votes to boost taxes, were: Mary Panzer, the Wisconsin Senate majority leader. Panzer (R) lost her party nomination for re-election to state GOP Rep. Glenn Grothman, who signed a pledge not to raise taxes.. Panzer had been accused of blocking a vote on a Taxpayers Bill of Rights measure that would limit tax hikes.

"Of the four wars in my lifetime, none came about because the U.S. was too strong." . . . Ronald Reagan

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www.BCTaxpayers.Org

Things That Make Us Wonder.

One difference we noted between the candidates for national office and those on the local or state level. Those on the national level could promise improved health care, energy, jobs, national defense, education and whatever else everyone wanted with little concern for the cost.

Don't worry because someone else will pay for it (presumably the rich), now or in the future. Local candidates should realize that new spending must be matched by reductions in spending on other items, or their constituents will end up paying greater state and property taxes. We don't recall any candidate running on a platform of tax increases.

The Northeast Wis. Technical College (NWTC) has contracted with a Florida company to manage their "information and technology" services through 2009 at an announced cost of \$11.2 million. This would eliminate 16 of the 58 employees now in the department but they could apply for other NWTC positions or with the new contractor. If this will resort to cost savings and greater efficiency for the taxpayers supporting the NWTC we can agree with their action. It seems that often outside consulting firms only add another layer of cost and confusion to contend with.

We congratulate Mayor Schmitt for his vision and plans for developing downtown Green Bay, and look forward to seeing things happen. We assume that financing and finding suitable tenants are also in the works.

We sincerely hope the parking meter mentality that has controlled the downtown and Broadway areas will also be addressed. In the Oct. 14, *Press-Gazette*, Mayor Schmitt was quoted as favoring elimination of metered parking and offer two-hour street parking. We realize that there are potential abuses with any street parking, such as business employees occupying spaces intended for customers. Considering that providing employee parking space could be a major problem for business owners, encouraging business owners to rent space in the

underutilized ramps should be a win-win situation for the city, business employees and downtown patrons.

Unemployment rates and loss of jobs to other areas have been big factors in this year's election campaign. Much of the rhetoric has consisted of often vague statistics, politically motivated and configured to enhance the candidates message. We do acknowledge that this is a serious problem with many contributing factors to be evaluated. Yes, corporations do outsource production, move their plants and lay off workers if their bottom line can be helped. In Wisconsin, unrealistic regulations, cumbersome permits, and high taxes at all levels have been blamed for much of our job loss. Whether it is worse here than other states would have to be examined. It has been estimated there are about 8-13 million illegal aliens living in the United States. This is far greater than the number of unemployed. There seems to be no way of telling how many of these people are holding legitimate jobs, or receiving unemployment and other benefits.

Most of the state's public schools were closed October 28 and 29, to allow their teachers to attend the annual "teachers convention", or WEAC union meeting in Madison. The schedule included attending an address by Presidential Candidate John Kerry, and workshops on problems with TABOR and what they call "tax gimmicks", understanding the Qualified Economic Offer and collective bargaining negotiations with local school boards. WEAC claims 97,000 members.

Late in the summer when presidential candidates began to make frequent visits to the Green Bay area ~~there was a call to charge the various~~ political parties for the expense of extra security required during their visits. The amount is considerable. If the money is available to fly candidates all over the country, and rent venues plus the other extras necessary for an appearance, they should be able to pay for necessary security. We heard that Ashwaubenon has been partially reim-

bursed, but nothing on the city or county. During the last few weeks of the campaign there had been almost daily appearances of Presidential candidates and their celebrity representatives. City and county police overtime has been a rather uncontrollable expense to taxpayers for many years. We realize our community has been honored by the attention we receive. However, considering it is imposed upon us, by the candidates and their interests, not the other way around we should be reimbursed for any extra expense involved in providing the extra security. At least the amount over and above what is budgeted for such services.

It doesn't seem like too many years ago that Wisconsin law required taverns to remain closed until 8:00 P.M. on election days. The rationale supposedly being that office seekers would gather potential voters in the establishments and after filling them with beer would lead them over to vote for him. Apparently many people still can't make up their minds by election day. This election day even the national candidates were still holding rallies in Wisconsin, and there were still radio and TV commercials on the air. You could probably buy a lot of beers with the amount of advertising money that was spent during this campaign to gain votes.

Pending final approval, it appears that the Green Bay School Board, City of Green Bay and Brown County will be approving budgets for the year ~~2005~~ with tax rates close to last years. We congratulate Supt. of Schools Dan Nerad, Mayor Jim Schmitt and County Executive Carol Kelso for their hard work in preparing these budgets and concern for the counties taxpayers.

Continued

If buying prescription drugs from Canada is such a good deal, why didn't any of the candidates for the Wisconsin legislature who are so concerned with the cost of things ~~propose sending~~

"The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent blessing of socialism is the equal sharing of misery."
 . . . Winston Churchill

tanker trucks to Michigan. They could fill up for about 10 cents a gallon less due to their lower gasoline tax and bring it back to the people in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance reports that for 2003-04, there were 701 organizations with 802 lobbyists seeking to influence the Wisconsin Legislature. These are highly paid professionals skilled at their profession. They have access to and influence our representatives on behalf of their employers that does not necessarily reflect the interest of taxpayers. One question is, do we as taxpayers have the same access and influence as these special interests?

As usual, lots of things to wonder about.
Jim Frink

“Things That Make Us Wonder” consists of thoughts that occur to us, mostly taxpayer related in some way, that come to mind during the days news events. Some of them are relatively unimportant and probably not worth commenting about. Others could easily be expanded to full length feature articles worthy of further study and action to protect our interests as taxpayers. Often we try to put a different spin on items from what you read in the papers or see on TV. We try to cover a wide variety of subjects in a limited space, which also illustrates the wide variety of items of taxpayer concern which exist today. We acknowledge that our perspective of some issues in this column may be contrary to that of some our readers. However, one of our purposes is to encourage debate, as we realize there are two sides to every question. Comments are always welcome as well as suggestions for items to include in this section of the “TAX TIMES.”

“Blessed are the young, for they shall inherit the National Debt.”
. . . **Herbert Hoover**

October Meeting Notes.

Monthly BCTA meeting held Oct. 21, 2004 at the *Glory Years*.

State Representative Frank Lasee announced that he had developed a new, simpler version of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR). Being simpler, it should be more difficult to tamper with as it goes through legislative committees.

Brian Verheyden of the Brown County Executive’s Office presented an overview of the Executive’s proposed 2005 budget, which was presented to the Brown County Board on October 20th. The 2005 levy is \$69,369,034, up 2.6 percent from 2004. The county tax rate will drop from \$4.91 to \$4.64 per thousand, a decrease of 5.6 percent. This will be the lowest county tax rate in 16 years. Hurdles overcome in this budget include a \$5 million increase in health care costs, \$4.1 million for increased demand for human service programs, and \$500,000 for seven additional Communications Center workers.

To improve efficiency, internal organizational changes are budgeted in Human Services, Human Resources, Administration, Facilities Management, and the Sheriff’s Department. Another initiative is a technology improvement program for Human Services, County Planning, County Resource Management, and County Total Quality Management.

Mr. Verheyden noted that the Brown County tax levy had been increasing at 9 percent per year for 20 years. If that trend had continued for the past two years, the 2005 tax levy would be \$80.6 million instead of \$69.4 million.

Carlene Felmer discussed the upcoming \$14.8 million Howard-Suamico school referendum. She expressed concern that actual spending might approach \$22 million. She observed that the district’s budget is increasing 8.6 percent for 2005, an increase of \$58 for a \$150,000 home.

Ms. Felmer also reported on the Village of Howard’s quarterly stormwater fee of \$11 per ERU. She expects this fee to increase with time.

Rich Heidel, President of the Village of Hobart, gave an overview of

the village’s ownership of the Thornberry Creek Golf Course. Ownership of the 27 hole golf course, without the clubhouse, has consumed about one-third of the village’s \$24 million debt limit. An investment of this magnitude presents considerable financial risk for the village. While constraining the village’s ability to bond for essential public works, it is also a large property removed from the county tax roll. Mr. Heidel stated that this investment is an impediment to his goals of taxing the least and providing the best services. A Golf Course Advisory Committee of Hobart citizens is searching for a favorable way to resolve this issue and reduce the financial risk to the village.

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 18, at the *Glory Years*. Details on the last page of this *TAX TIMES*. **Dave Nelson – Secretary**

Judge Kelley to Speak at December Meeting.

Circuit Court Branch 4 Judge Kendall Kelley will be our speaker at the BCTA meeting scheduled for December 16, 2004. Our November 18, meeting will consist of nominations for BCTA directors and officers for 2005, and further discussion of ways to make our organization more active and effective.

Please plan on attending.
Details on the last page.

“We are going to tax and tax, spend and spend, elect and elect.”
. . . **Franklin D. Roosevelt**

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.” Send them to the BCTA, P. O. Box 684, Green Bay, WI 54305-0684, or call **Jim Frink at 336-6410.**

The TAX TIMES

Brown County Taxpayers Association
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The TAX TIMES - November, 2004

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule. (Mark Your Calendars.)

Thursday - November 18, 2004 – BCTA Monthly Meeting.
GLORY YEARS, 12:00 Noon.
Nomination of BCTA Directors and Officers.
Discussion of Recent election, BCTA Projects, etc.

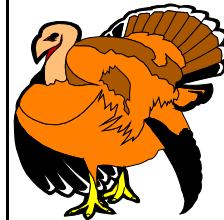
Thursday - December 16, 2004 – BCTA Monthly Meeting.
GLORY YEARS, 12:00 Noon.
Speaker, Judge Kendall Kelley,
Brown County Circuit Court, Fourth Branch

Thursday - January 20, 2005 - BCTA Monthly Meeting.
GLORY YEARS, 12:00 Noon
Program to be announced.

BCTA Monthly meetings are held the third Thursday of each month.
12:00 Noon at the *GLORY YEARS*, 347 S. Washington St., Green Bay.
Cost — \$6.50 for meal — Includes Tax & Tip. Payable at meeting.

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

Call Jim Frink — 336-6410 for information or to leave message.



November,
2004

“The office of government is not to confer happiness, but to give men the opportunity to work our happiness for themselves.”

. . . William Chan-
ning

“The politicians were talking them-
selves red, white, and blue in the

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