
◆ The TAX TIMES ◆

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Newsletter of the Brown County Taxpayers Association

August, 2006

Barking up the wrong horse, – or – Beating a dead tree.

I mixed a couple metaphors there to get your attention, as I fear I may quickly lose it when I begin my column in earnest.

First, stand in front of the mirror and answer this question, who really pays the corporate income tax? Then, I am going to urge you, for the gazillionth time, to badger your legislators to abolish the \$600 million/year corporate income tax. That is a single tool that could cut the size of government and grow the economy in one simply complicated step-leap.

What am I double-talking about? For starters, the corporate tax code composes about 25% of our state tax law, a candid Dept. of Revenue bigwig once said. It costs upwards of \$20 million a year for state workers to administer that complex code, process forms and enforce a Gordian knot of rules. If we could slash through the knot and get off businesses' backs, it would take more than a few inches off the size of government's Big and Tall trousers and let the economy grow like corn in an ethanol state.

And it could stop a budding IT fiasco. The DOR and the Dept. of Workforce Development have been working for years on combining tax collection systems for various withholding and employment taxes (see the UW payroll program of late). At the risk of wasting money already spent on this nearly decade-old project, axing the corporate tax might simplify things to the point where they could actually implement the joint IT project.

Canning the corporate tax code would also save in staff expertise at legislative bureaus. It would end administration of numerous lucrative tax breaks, funding for which could be used to offset the lost revenue. Other lost revenue could be offset by ending property tax breaks that those "greedy" business interests have acquired over the year. That's a statement intended for those who never built a business. And it would end DOR's crippling pursuit of tax shelters for corporate investment income. The dreaded, two-headed beast, "combined reporting," could be laid to rest with other boogeymen.

Next, there is our Dept. of Commerce, which gleefully distributes \$40 million a year, in the name of Governor Du Jour, through its Technology Zone Program, just one of many grant programs, which require dozens of application evaluators and processors, the deciders among whom are loyal to the supporters of Gov. Du Jour.

Government redistributing wealth in its infinite political wisdom and interest? I don't think this is what Adams and Jefferson had in mind.

And I haven't even touched on the \$8.5 million little piggies in WisDOT's Transportation Economic Assistance program, in addition to their other sundry grants. Sometimes government cooks best by staying out of the kitchen. You want a surefire recipe for creating jobs? We don't need a \$750 million Institutes for Discovery in Madison. Just demolish the corporate tax and ring the dinner bell.

At the very least, abolishing the corporate income tax is something worth a study by the Legislative Fiscal Bureau. And it may be a more practical step than a TABOR or a TPA for reducing government spending and waste.

Can somebody toss me a sturdy stick? I want another whack at that dead tree.

Richard Parins, President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government

Service agreement with Oneida Nation could serve everyone.

Recently you may have read about 300 (+) acres of tribal property in Hobart being approved for federal trust. I was quoted in the local newspapers at the time as saying that, while Hobart taxpayers have no need to panic, we should be concerned. Some village trustees criticized me for making those comments. This is something, in their view, that is best not discussed.

I couldn't disagree more. In fact, I am hereby making two proposals to local, county, and state elected officials, as well as to the Oneida Tribe itself.

The village's tax base isn't the only thing hurt when property is put into trust. Our school districts, Brown County, and the NWTC are also on the losing end - and in much bigger dollar amounts. I am therefore proposing that Hobart, Brown County, the school districts, NWTC, and other municipalities such as Green Bay and Ashwaubenon jointly negotiate one service agreement with the Oneida Nation.

While service agreement payments for each jurisdiction can be enumerated as separate exhibits to the agreement, the agreement itself could otherwise apply to everyone in its terms and conditions such as conflict resolution, term, renewal, enforcement, etc. This keeps all of the taxing jurisdictions "whole" and on an equitable footing.

It's hard to imagine how the Oneidas themselves could oppose such an approach. Such a successfully negotiated agreement would save them time and legal resources and could be touted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a real demonstration of cooperation with local governments. I will be pursuing this further with elected officials and legal counsel.

Secondly, the tribe makes no apologies for its publicly stated goal of reclaiming former reservation land. I fail to see how that is in the best interest of the village of Hobart. Yet, I have always said, and continue to say, that the Oneida Tribe is not doing anything illegal; the tribe is only taking advantage of what the federal government and the state of Wisconsin have allowed.

I therefore turn to these same governmental entities to address the other half of the equation: supplemental tax relief for the village and other taxing jurisdictions. In this election year, I am challenging Governor Jim Doyle and Congressman Mark Green - himself a resident of Hobart - to provide a plan by which the village, and other damaged taxing bodies, share monies from the gaming revenues being paid to the state by the Oneidas.

The amounts should be equivalent to the lost equalized assessed value of the properties lost to tribal trust. Lord knows, the state is currently realizing all of the benefits of the gaming revenues while the local taxpayers in northeastern Wisconsin shoulder 100 percent of the burden.

Again, I must believe that the tribe could assist in this initiative. I assume that the Oneidas would prefer to see those gaming revenues benefit the very local communities that host the gaming casinos. While it matters not to the Oneidas where their gaming revenues go, it could enhance their public image as

responsible citizens to assist us in our claim to recoup the portion of gaming revenues that rightfully belong here in Hobart and Brown County.

At the federal level, I also challenge the 8th Congressional district candidates to formalize a federal aid proposal for communities, like Hobart, who take on the role imposed on them by federal treaty law with the tribes.

The Oneida Tribe's gaming rights are as secure as ever. In face-to-face meetings with the tribe, I have stated that their goal of increased trust property, which diminishes property tax base for the schools, villages, technical colleges, and counties, is no different than if we were to oppose their gaming compacts - something we have never done. The lifeblood and future of Hobart is its property tax base; the lifeblood of the Oneidas is its gaming revenues. Each needs to respect the other's interests.

Within 24 hours of winning Hobart's recall election almost three years ago, I unilaterally had all references to the village of Hobart removed from all perceived anti-Native American Web sites. I also stated to then-Chairwoman Tina Danforth, and recently again to Chairman Jerry Danforth, that neither Hobart nor the Oneida Tribe are going anywhere. That leaves only one possible scenario. \

Let's get started.

Rich Heidel - President, Village of Hobart.

National Taxpayers Union Rates Congress.

There are many watchdog and special interest groups with an interest in the U.S. Congress and legislation which they may pass on their behalf. Most of these groups also seem to have the publicity mechanisms to praise or criticize those whose activities are in agreement or contrary to what they may expect for their lobbying efforts.

Unfortunately the interests of strict environmentalists may conflict with business interests, or education and labor backers may conflict with taxpayer groups and so on. The bottom line is probably not to pay too much attention to the ratings unless they conflict strongly with your own beliefs or interests. There are two sides to every question.

One respected rating is performed each year by the National Taxpayers Union, a non-partisan, non-profit organization which rates the Congress and Senate each year with a taxpayer score based on their actual votes on matters that significantly effect taxes, spending-debt, and regulatory burdens on consumers and taxpayers. They acknowledge that many variable are to be considered. While 100 would be a perfect score, it has never been reached in the history of the survey.

For the record, their average rating this year for the Wisconsin delegation in Congress was 43% with our Representative, Mark Green rated at 60%, which is somewhat above the national average. They rated Senators Feingold at 20% and Kohl at 14%. The complete survey results are available from the National Taxpayers Union, www.ntu.org.

"The politician's promises of yesterday are the taxes of Today."
... W. L. Mackenzie King

Fire Prevention As A Taxpayer Issue – Part II.

Your feature in the July, 2006 newsletter involving "fire prevention as a taxpayer issue" has prompted me to offer an additional perspective. As a Builder/Developer, I've had a strong interest in fire safety building code requirements.

There can be no doubt that today's new structures are significantly more fire safe than previously. Major reasons include fire-resistive building products; code requirements for one and two-hour fire separations within buildings; better electrical wiring; better insulation systems; and better early warning systems of a hazard. Also affecting fire safety, but rarely discussed, are vast improvements in the fire-fighting equipment and the proliferation of cell phones, which has resulted in a much quicker environment of alerting the fire department to a fire in progress.

I bring this up because I've also noticed that the costs associated with municipal fire departments continue to increase. I believe the new emphasis on "prevention" by fire officials is a thinly disguised employment safeguard, as the ever-decreasing volume of structure fires could otherwise logically translate into less employment in fire departments. I also object to fire officials who continue to advocate expensive fire sprinkler systems for new one and two story buildings, while knowing that older buildings without current safeguards are where most fires and fire-related injuries occur. I also believe that the usefulness and cost effectiveness of sprinklers in smaller buildings is debatable.

I realize it is easy to misinterpret or radicalize my thoughts. I respect firemen, and I believe in fire safety. However, I strongly feel that taxpayers are being burdened with excessive costs resulting from the failure of our elected officials and fire department personnel to adapt to a changing fire-safety environment.

Patrick Murphy - BCTA

"The government solution to a problem is usually as bad as the problem."

. . . **Milton Friedman**

"A fool and his money are soon elected."

. . . **Will Rogers**

Village of Allouez Considering Ward Representation.

The Village of Allouez has appointed a task force to examine using a ward system for the election of trustees rather than the present "at-large" system. A proposal calling for a numbered seats system was brought forth by citizens two years ago, but the village board at that time quickly quashed the idea for a variety of reasons, possibly motivated by the desire for job security.

While the present board is responsive to both the needs of the village and it's citizens, it has been noted that all geographic areas of the village are not represented on the board, with a possible communication problem between board members and residents.

About 20 years ago the BCTA proposed that the Green Bay School Board be elected on a numbered seat rather than the existing at-large basis. This was approved by the voters in a district wide referendum. The advantages were that a person could seek a position on the board by running against a specific incumbent rather than having to place in the top two or three candidates. The intent was to encourage more candidates for public office based on the performance of the incumbent and perhaps provide more geographical representation. Unfortunately the numbered seats system does not adjust for geographical representation. It was a good idea but the board soon reverted back to the old system without it had a chance.

Since Allouez is already divided into wards, election of supervisors by ward would seem logical in order to give representation to all residents. This is the way it works in Green Bay, DePere, and the Brown County board. With an "at large" system, office holders can live in the same residential area, and easily be re-elected as a group. An advantage of the ward system is that a candidate would only have to seek election in his own ward, and be more familiar with the people he represents. A committee is finalizing various proposals for presentation to the Village Board, which in turn may authorize a referendum for approval.

Jim Frink – BCTA

Where Does The Money Come From?

This is something you may wonder about as you watch all the professionally prepared ads on TV promoting political candidates. Check the website WWW.ethics.state.wi.us, which tracks donations made to candidates by party and interest. You can usually decipher their motives, which is not always if seldom in the interest of taxpayers.

Another site providing campaign contribution information is the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign at WWW.wisdc.org.

They disclosed that the largest contributor to date for Gov. Doyle's campaign was the Troha family of Kenosha which contributed \$236,842. They are involved with the Indian interests interested in building an \$808 million dollar casino on the site of the Kenosha dog racing track.

Good News! Tax paying for Spanish-American War to end.

Who says that once a tax is imposed, it never goes away?

The U.S. Treasury and IRS announced on May 25, that a 3% tax on long-distance phone calls originally imposed to finance the Spanish-American War will end as of August 1. The plan is to allow about \$15 Billion in refunds on their 2006 income tax returns. Taxpayers will have to calculate three years worth of refunds or claim a standard amount to be established by the IRS.

This obviously will be a lot easier than going through all of your phone bills since 1898..

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.BCTAxpayers.Org

TEN PRINCIPLES OF STATE FISCAL POLICY.

From the Heartland Institute.

Sound fiscal principles promote economic growth, protect citizens from uncertainty and excessive taxation, and help lawmakers deal with tough economic times. The following “Ten Principles” were prepared by the Heartland Institute, an independent research organization seeking to discover and promote free-market solutions to social and economic problems. They are intended as a guide for legislators in establishing taxes, budgets, economic development and providing for schools, health care and public employees.

1. Above all else: Keep taxes low. The evidence is clear and has been for many years. High taxes hinder economic growth and prosperity. Further, it has been proven in many cases that cutting taxes spurs economic growth.

2. Don’t penalize earnings and investment. Taxes on earnings and investment income are particularly harmful to economic growth. Generally, the top 10% of taxpayers pay 90% of the taxes. Continuously raising taxes on “the rich” has been proven to discourage business investment and job creation which create economic growth.

3. Avoid “sin” taxes. Taxes on specific goods and services are often unfair, unreliable, and regressive. Excise taxes may be attractive to elected officials because they are not paid by a majority of constituents and are less visible than other taxes. However, they are usually a poor source of state revenue, are often imposed unfairly without regard their costs impose on the rest of society. High excise taxes often lead to evasion, such as buying cigarettes from out of state sources. They are also regressive insofar as people with lower incomes pay a higher proportion.

4. Create a transparent and accountable budget. Focus attention and resources on providing those services that are the core functions of state government. The sole purpose of collecting taxes is to finance the core functions of state government. Unfortunately few states have budget processes in place that enable legislators to identify these functions and measure the performance of state agencies. Key elements of a transparent and accountable budget should include the following.

- Adopt a meaningful tax and spending limit to frame the budget debate.
- Enact a non-partisan revenue forecast process to project budget revenue.
- Utilize performance-based budgeting to make “build or buy” decisions.
- Utilize independent and comprehensive performance audits with results reported directly to the public.

5. Privatize public services. Privatization is a proven way to reduce government spending while preserving or improving the quality of core public services. Once a state’s core functions are identified, elected officials should decide whether to rely on government to produce goods and services or rely on

the private sector to do so. Costs are often unnecessarily high in the public sector because the discipline of the market is missing. Rules and regulations designed to hold government employees accountable are no substitute for the feedback private-sector companies get from competition and profit-and-loss statements.

6. Avoid corporate welfare. Subsidies to corporations and selective tax abatement are questionable politics and bad economics. Subsidies, tax abatements, low-interest loans, and special worker training are often offered to corporations. Such assistance is unnecessary if general taxes are kept low and uniform. If taxes are high and unequal, a legislator’s time is better spent working to change the system. Corporate subsidies are also bad economics. Even the wisest public officials cannot allocate resources as fairly or effectively as capital markets. Public officials try to pick winners and losers but experience shows they seldom succeed. It is better to leave money in taxpayers hands than to give it to a few politically chosen individuals and businesses in hopes they will make the best investment decisions. Lower tax rates benefit the entire economy.

7. Cap taxes and expenditures. A tax and expenditure limitation protects elected officials from public pressure to spend surplus tax revenues during good economic times. Politics cause government spending to rise beyond the level that most people, even government officials believe is ideal. During good economic times elected officials come under pressure to spend every available dollar, while when times are bad beneficiaries of government programs oppose any spending cuts.

8. Fund students, not schools. States and cities that have experimented with school choice have seen gains in academic achievement. Free and universal K-12 education is agreed to be one of the core functions of state government. However, by international and historical standards, public schools in the U.S. are costly and yield poor achievement results. School choice means parents are free to choose which schools their children attend and public funding follows the student. This allows parents to play a much bigger role in their children's education.

9. Reform Medicaid programs. Spending on Medicaid can be brought under control without lowering the quality of care received by Medicaid patients. After education, Medicaid is the largest single expense in most state budgets. There are many tools to control this cost while actually improving the quality of care to beneficiaries.

- Enroll people with preexisting medical conditions in high-risk pools offering subsidized private health insurance.
- Reduce the price of private insurance by removing unnecessary price controls and mandates, which increase health care costs by forcing consumers to buy insurance coverage for services they don’t need.
- Limit Medicaid eligibility to the truly poor and limit coverage to those services mandated under federal law.
- Implement disease management programs, which reduce unnecessary drug expenditures while protecting patients
- with multiple prescriptions from potentially deadly drug interactions.

Continued next page

10 PRINCIPLES – Continued.

- Empower state employees and Medicare recipients with Health Savings Accounts such as used in the private sector.

10. Protect state employees from politics. State and local governments should be prohibited from deducting funds used for political purposes from the checks of public workers. Members of public-sector labor unions are forced to pay dues, with much of the money going for political activity not supported by the rank and file. State and local governments condone this practice. Legally, there is no reason why state and local governments should do this for unions, and ethically there is reason enough to believe they should be prohibited from doing so without the explicit written consent of individual employees.

We acknowledge that our review of the “*Ten Principles of State Fiscal Policy*“, tends to oversimplify the complexities of preparing a state budget. These are guidelines from which to base the details. A couple of additions we would possibly add to the list would be, **#11 – Pay state and municipal employees well for their performance, based on wages and benefits prevailing in the private sector.** And **#12 – All requests for funds from state and municipal budgets should be based on “needs” rather than “wants.”** The complete report is available from: The Heartland Institute, 19 N. LaSalle St.,#903, Chicago IL, 60603. **WWW. Heartland.org**, Phone (312) 377-4000

Editors questions:

- #1. *Do you believe that these principles have been considered in preparation of the Wisconsin State budget?*
- #2. *Could some, or at least more of these principles be applied in Wisconsin?*

Jim Frink – BCTA

“They pick a president and for four years they pick on him.” . . . **Adlai Stevenson**

“Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly while bad people will find a way around the laws.” . . . **Plato**

“Trying to tell what is going on in the world by reading newspapers is like trying to tell time by watching the second hand of a clock.” . . . **Ben Hecht**

Keep Benefits on the Table in State Labor Discussions.

On the last official session day in the State Assembly, the Legislature finished business for the year by approving four state employee contracts. I voted against two of them and here’s why. For several years, many government employee unions have pushed for pay parity (*read as, they want more money*). In their minds, public employees are underpaid in comparison to their private sector counterparts and therefore deserve a raise.

Unfortunately, the Legislature played along. Many state employee contracts (including the two I voted against last week) now include salary increases higher than those being offered in the private sector. That is on top of the generous benefits state employees enjoy.

Wisconsin is not unique. According to the Employee Benefit Research Institute, by the end of the 1990’s average state and local employees were collecting nearly 50% more in total compensation (salary and benefits) than the average private sector employee. Local governments were paying 128% more than private businesses to fund health care benefits and 162% more on retirement accounts.

In the past, government employees accepted the fact that working for the government meant working for a lower wage. They knew a generous benefits package made up the difference. Today, many government employees want to be paid as well or better than those in private business regardless of their benefit plan. Let’s examine the typical benefits package a new state employee will receive.

According to WISCJOBS (the state’s online employment listing) a new government employee can expect to receive the following benefits: • **Paid Vacation:** *2-3 weeks for the first 5 years of service;* • **Retirement:** *The state automatically pays 5% of a vested employee’s salary into the account and matches another 5-10% for non-vested portion;* • **Personal Holidays:** *3-4 days to be used at the employee’s leisure (on top of the 9 legal holidays with pay);* • **Sick Time:** *The employee accumulates 10 hours of sick time every month (unused sick time is carried over every year and upon retirement is converted to pay health insurance premiums);* • **Health Insurance:** *The employee can choose from a variety of top-of-the-line health care providers for themselves and their family’s medical needs. The average monthly premium for a family plan is \$55 (not bad considering the real cost to taxpayers is over \$1200 a month, per employee);* • **A host of other valuable benefits including life insurance, access to tax-free health savings accounts, income continuation insurance, catastrophic insurance, dental insurance, long-term care insurance, commuter benefits program, deferred compensation, and workers comp.** Many of you reading this in the private sector are probably questioning your choice of careers at this point.

Wisconsin should look at our entire pay and benefits package. It should all be taken into account. We should pay competitively with the private sector, benefits should be included when we decide what we compensate government workers.

Let me say that I truly believe that the majority of government workers are hardworking and dedicated employees. They produce and deliver the valuable government services many of us have come to expect. However, I think that it is imperative for all government employees (myself included) to realize how lucky we have it. Our benefits and wages are among the best in the nation. We pay very little for the healthcare and other valuable taxpayer funded benefits we enjoy. The least we can do is admit it. Please let me and our other representatives what you think about this issue.

Representative Frank G. Lasee

Part D Drug Plan Needs A Cure.

In response to strong demand from Senior Citizens and political pressure, Congress passed the so called "Medicare Modernization Act of 2003. From all indications, this is one of the most expensive and least effective pieces of legislation ever passed by our government. Simplified below are listed what our senior citizens wanted from their government, and what they actually received.

WHAT AMERICANS WANTED:

- A traditional Medicare prescription drug plan which provided senior citizens with simple, cost-effective coverage and affordable prescription drugs.
- A prescription drug plan which requires Medicare to negotiate the lowest prices possible, just like the VA.
- A prescription drug plan without a costly "donut hole" coverage gap and lifelong penalties.

WHAT AMERICANS RECEIVED:

- A privatized prescription drug plan so confusing and complex millions of eligible citizens have not signed up for it.
- A prescription drug plan which actually *prohibits* Medicare from negotiating for the lowest drug prices possible for senior citizens.
- A prescription drug plan which leaves millions of seniors vulnerable to a \$2,850 coverage gap and penalties for late enrollment.

It does not appear that the problem with this plan should be a call for more massive government spending with another level of bureaucracy. The cost estimate to taxpayers is high enough already. In addition those who have signed up for the plan have already indicated a willingness to contribute \$500-\$1,000 annually of their own money in the form of private insurance and deductions from their Social Security deposits to participate.

When such a vital and costly program is designed and implemented as poorly as the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan, there simply has to be a better solution. Change it while we still can. Perhaps it could be made to work better if government wasn't involved at all.



PLAN ON ATTENDING. MONTHLY BCTA MEETING

THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 2006
12:00 Noon – Titledown Brewing Co.

Speaker: Dan Nerad, Green Bay Supt. of Schools.

Details on last page of this TAX TIMES.
Call 336-6410 for information or to leave message.

Renard Island – A New Taxpayer Issue.

The problem of what to do about Renard Island is apparently coming to a head. At a press conference on Aug. 3, sponsored by the Nicolet Drive Neighborhood Association, a timetable of the history of Renard Island, including mandates established by the Wisconsin DNR and the Army Corps of Engineers for proper closure of the island after all spoils have been deposited will be presented and discussed. As with most projects as complex and lasting over a period of several years, there are a number of issues to be resolved. Some rather technical and potentially very expensive to taxpayers.

Many items have yet to be resolved. For example, there is the possibility that additional spoils from new dredging will be deposited at Renard. This would delay the closure timetable for an undetermined period of time. Final closure will probably require capping the island with clay or similar material to contain contaminated waste material. Presently the cost of this is estimated at \$8 Million to \$33 Million or more if the DNR decides it is necessary to cover the sides of the island also. Monitoring equipment would have to be installed to assure that contaminants are not returning to the bay. There is a strong possibility that legal fees will be involved along the line. The problem is that these expenses could be the responsibility of Brown County or the City of Green Bay, dependent on who ultimately controls the island. There have been several proposals for development of the island as a scenic or recreation area in the future. A timetable of 5-10 years or more for complete closure of the site first could probably be realistic.

At an Aug. 3, news conference, William Acker, the environmental co-chair of the Nicolet Drive Neighborhood Association presented the following statements.

“Renard Island Closure Costs

We do not want Brown County tax payers to pay for the closure costs for Renard Island. We expect Brown County to pursue funding from the Army Corp, the Fox River Cleanup or other sources. The original Fox River Cleanup budget did have \$15,500,000 for the closure of Renard Island but those dollars were cut in the final budget. We will review the potential costs and or lawsuit costs at the meeting.”

“Renard Island Closure Plan

The Brown County Port & Solid Waste Dept. submitted the Closure Plan to the WDNR on Sept. 20, 2005. On February 15, 2006 the WDNR asked for additional information. Brown County submitted this second closure document on June 1, 2006. The document however did not provide all the information requested by the WDNR, and certain data was found to be false. We want Brown County to provide “all” the data that the WDNR has asked for. We will provide a list of the data not provided, and information on the erroneous data at the meeting. We will also discuss the importance of the the data.”

Obviously this could place a large and somewhat unanticipated burden on the taxpayers of Green Bay and Brown County at a time when funding for several other projects are causing budget problems. We appreciate the concern of the Nicolet Drive Association.

JF

Special Interests.

In the last six years the number of registered lobbyists in Washington has doubled with the total now being almost 35,000 or 65 lobbyists for each member of Congress. These lobbyists spend close to \$200 million per month influencing our congressmen for the benefit of their special interest clients.

It requires millions of dollars in funds for a candidate to win an election. Campaign funds are readily available from special interests at a price that affects all of us. Democracy is not working when money buys elections.

These special interests are able to influence our government, which is evident in much of the legislation coming out of Washington. Examples are the Medicare Part D bill which funnels billions of dollars of taxpayer money to insurance and drug companies and provide little for intended recipients. The energy bill gives oil companies huge tax breaks, while their profits are at an all time high. The bankruptcy bill was written for the credit card companies. The deregulation of banking, insurance and securities bill resulted in corporate corruption and loss of millions of jobs and retirement plans. Deregulation of the telecommunications industry led to price gouging.

Even after the Delay and Abramoff scandals, Congress has not addressed any meaningful reform. It is time for Congress to focus on real campaign finance reform that will stop the money game that purchases elections and legislation.

Jim Smith

“Political correctness is really a subjective list put together by the few to rule the many—a list of things one must think, say, or do. It affronts the right of the individual to establish his or her own beliefs.”

. . . **Mark Berley**

“Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us.” . . . **Theodore Roosevelt**

“If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him.”

. . . **Francois Voltaire**

July Meeting Notes.

Harry Maier Gives Redevelopment Update.

Monthly BCTA meeting July 20, 2006 at the Title Town Brewing. Financial reports and June minutes were presented and approved.

Green Bay Redevelopment Authority Chairman Harry Maier presented an update downtown Green Bay redevelopment activity. He explained that at least four developers had tried and failed before the present developer, Vetter-Denk, came along with a plan that seems to be working. Vetter-Denk is led by John Vetter, a Milwaukee architect who has completed several successful redevelopment projects in southeastern Wisconsin cities.

Leading the way in Green Bay were the Nicolet Bank building and the Baylake Bank project, which transformed the Boston Store building into the Baylake Bank on the first floor and the APAC facility on the second floor. APAC will have 850 employees when the new facility opens on July 31, and about 1,000 employees by the end of this year.

Groundbreaking is expected in November for John Vetter’s flagship project, the 17-story Astor Place building. The first three floors are designated for public use, with condominiums on floors 4 through 17. The pre-sell goal for the Astor Place condominiums was 40 percent, but 80 percent have already been sold. Construction costs are estimated to be \$33.2 million.

John Vetter has taken an option on the Younkers site. About 90 percent of the building is expected to be razed, with the south end being renovated.

The Bellin building has new owners who plan extensive renovations which leading to an additional 150 employees in the building. The new owners are in communications, which is likely to be the focus of new tenants in the renovated building. Diagonally from the Bellin Building, on the present parking lot at the northeast corner of Washington and Walnut Streets, a 30 story building is contemplated by John

Vetter. The Riverside Apartments on South Washington Avenue are being converted to condominiums. Already, 26 units have been converted. The remaining conversions will take place as leases expire.

Construction will begin in 2007 for the Boardwalk, on the west side of the Fox River between the Main Street and Walnut Street bridges. The Astor Place building is expected to contribute \$6.7 million of taxes to the Boardwalk project.

Washington Commons is available for sale. It is in bankruptcy. There is a one-year target for getting something going with this property.

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 17, at Title Town Brewing. The scheduled speaker is Green Bay School Superintendent Dan Nerad. Details on the back page of this *TAX TIMES*.

Dave Nelson – Secretary

National Debt Update.

As of August 1, the U. S. National Debt rose to a grand total of **\$8,399,300,963,784.01**. An increase of about Forty Billion since last month at this time. It was just last year at this time that Congress decided to increase the limit to \$8 Trillion. At the rate we are going they will have to increase it to \$9 Trillion in a year or two.

By the way, the interest alone on the National Debt amounts to more than \$1,000 per year for each of us. Just tell Congress to put it on our account. Our grandchildren will take care of it.

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.

THINGS THAT MAKE US WONDER.

The University of Wisconsin has announced it was scrapping its new \$26 million computer software program which was designed to keep track of the systems payroll. Their experts either couldn't figure how to make it work or where embarrassed by the big salaries people were making. No word about what they are going to do next and how much money that will waste.

* * * * *

Members of Congress are being criticized for the amount of money they spend for personal transportation. Not only back and forth from Washington to their districts but everywhere else they decide to go and call it official business. It is one of the perks of the job. The further they live from Washington it takes longer and costs more to travel.

While the assumption that every visit and contact may be politically motivated could be implied, they are still our primary contacts with the federal government, and local officials, civic groups and others are constantly requesting personal appearances for a variety of reasons. This goes with the job. While there is no question that the cost and time of travel at taxpayer expense should be controlled, we expect them to make personal appearances. We note that when a corporation or special interest picks up the tab there is always the question of buying influence.

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The Federal government has announced that the projected deficit for this year is now estimated to be only \$296 Billion, or \$127 Billion less than previously projected. This "good news" equates to about \$1,000 for every U. S. citizen. Figure it out for yourself.

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Now, after reading the above, a recent article in the paper claims that a computer program used by the IRS to screen income tax returns for fraud has not been operating due to some operating problem or other. They further estimate as a result the IRS is losing at least \$300 billion in fraudulent corporate and individual income tax returns. Under reporting of income, unauthorized deductions

and fraudulent refund claims the software was designed to detect. Is it possible that if the IRS was doing their job we wouldn't have the \$300 billion deficit. This sounds like a management problem that is very costly to all of us.

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This fall we will undoubtedly witness one of the most expensive and mud-slinging election campaigns yet. Already we are seeing blatant distortions of candidates voting records by their opponents. Much of it financed by third party interest groups. No matter what the candidates personally tell us what they believe in or are going to do, power and control of Congress by political parties is the goal.

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Gov. Doyle announced plans to make Wisconsin more energy independent by the year 2036. The dramatic increases in both price and world demand for energy the past couple of years should make it impossible to predict what the situation will be then. It will probably take more than ethanol and reconstituted cow manure by then. Maybe scientists at the University of Wisconsin will come up with something.

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Brown County is faced with replacing the roof at the old arena at an estimated cost of \$690,000. While the money would come from the Arena renovation and reserve fund set aside from their revenues it still raises the question of why \$218,000 was spent just 2 years ago for repairs when a replacement was needed at that time. The Visitors and Convention Bureau has established that the Arena brings sufficient business to the area to be maintained.

* * * * *

Georgia-Pacific's plan to deposit umpteen million tons of sediment from the Fox River in their Ashwaubenton landfill has been put on hold.

Alternatives being considered include building a pipeline along the Fox River trail and piping the stuff to the southern part of Brown County, which would be messy and expensive, or sending it by truck to a landfill in Southern Michigan which doesn't make

any sense at all. Apparently when the EPA and DNR said clean up the river they left out a few details.

* * * * *

The Green Bay Board of Education has decided to proceed with their plans for a \$75 Million referendum that includes a new east side high school.

Their projected need is based on extensively prepared data, considering the need 2 or 3 years from now when the new school would be ready. We acknowledge that parents expect the very best in facilities and educational standards for their children, but as taxpayers should realize the financial burden that is created on everyone.

Since the proposed boundaries were established for the new school, the cost of energy has risen dramatically making busing of students more expensive. Higher costs of heating could call for a more energy efficient design.

It will still be up to the Board to convince voters that the School Districts growth plans are not outpacing property taxpayers desire to support or ability to afford their plans.

* * * * *

The Wisconsin State Election Board has ruled that if a person registering at the polls to vote cannot produce a valid drivers license, they can still vote. Their ballot will be set aside and not counted until the next day, assuming they bring their license as proof of residence. Wouldn't that also mean that the election results would also have to wait?

Excuse us, but don't we have enough problems already with close races and recounts without waiting to see if someone who didn't come prepared to vote has a drivers license or not? Aren't part of the new election polling place standards designed to give more accurate and prompt election results?

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It would be nice to be able to operate a business or own a home and not have to worry about paying property taxes at the end of the year. Especially when you receive all of the service which your taxes provide. There are a great many organizations and institutions exempted by law from the burden of property taxes. This usually applies to sales and in come taxes also. While our soci-

ety would probably agree with most of these exemptions, some may be questionable. If property is exempt, someone else including homeowners must make up the difference. This also applies when Native Americans purchase land and remove it from tax rolls. It would seem logical for state and national governments review the qualifications for tax exempt status and periodically re-certify property as exempt.

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Sometimes it is bothersome that the news makes such a big issue over the amount of money raised by political candidates. This has more to do with the amount rather than the special interests which are usually represented. Often overlooked are that popularity and doing a good job are also factors.

One part of the equation often overlooked by our media however, is the amount of soft money expanded on behalf of specific candidates by others. This includes various PACs, trade unions, educational interests and every other group with their hand out for our money including gambling interests, trial lawyers, health care providers and contractors looking for govt. business.

While financial disclosure are required from candidates, it would be interesting to know the profits by TV stations from airing the propaganda ads paid by special interests.

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The Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation (DOT) is claiming a shortage of cash to complete all the construction and maintenance projects on their drawing boards. They also claim high finance charges for previous bonding to be a factor. Didn't they have so much money last year that the governor borrowed some to pay other state expenses? Ask him.

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Most people seem to agree that the nation's provisions for health care is a mess. The cost of insurance is sky high, driven by the rapidly increasing cost of services. A large proportion of our population cannot afford either insurance or health care. Providing mandated health insurance for government employees is a major factor increasing the taxes we pay.

Being an election year, some of our well-meaning politicians are propos-

ing what they call "solutions" to the problem. Usually these turn out to be plans to provide insurance or health services at government expense to those who don't have it. In other words, make health care cost even more at taxpayer expense. Such solutions do not seem to solve the real problem. Why is health care so expensive in the first place? Some of the problem could be blamed on government, with the rules, paperwork, mandates, regulations, restrictions, etc. that have been placed on the system. Most private industry is able to examine and control costs to remain competitive and keep up with the times and health care as an industry probably could also if it really wanted to.

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We have been seeing a series of TV commercials urging opposition to the proposed marriage amendment referendum to the state constitution. They seem to imply we could all lose our rightful benefits. It appears these ads are sponsored by labor union interests who fear the loss of their own benefits to be proposed in future negotiations rather than the loss of what already exists under state law or a sudden support for same sex marriages.

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Like many states, New Jersey is experiencing severe budget problems brought about by too much spending and not enough income. Their newly elected governor promised to keep property taxes stable and not proposes any major state tax increases. However after four months in office he proposed raising the sales tax to 7%, highest in the nation, and which brought opposition from just about everyone.

For lack of a better solution, the governor then proposed closing popular state parks, beaches, and the casino control board without which the Atlantic City casinos cannot operate. The Casinos also employ over 30,000 people and provide up to \$2,000,000 tax revenue each day. This really got people upset but it didn't take long for the legislature to approve the sales tax hike. Apparently they decided people would rather pay \$300 more when buying a \$30,000 auto than lose the chance

of getting rich at the casinos.

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The dictionary describes the noun *propaganda* as #1-Any systematic, widespread dissemination or promotion of particular ideas, doctrines, practices, etc. to further one's own cause or to damage an opposing one. #2-Ideas, doctrines, or allegations so spread: now often used disparagingly to connote deception or distortion.

Another description could be "As used in TV commercials to distort the voting record or integrity of a political opponent." We will probably see a lot more in the next couple of months.

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 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."

"America is a nation that conceives many odd inventions for getting somewhere but it can think of nothing to do once it gets there."

. . . Will Rogers

"The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help."

. . . Ronald Reagan

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The TAX TIMES

Brown County Taxpayers Association
P. O. Box 684
Green Bay, WI 54305-0684

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and more.

The TAX TIMES - August, 2006

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule. MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

Thursday - August 17, 2006. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.
TITLETOWN BREWING Co. 2d Floor Meeting Room.
Speaker – Dan Nerad, Supt. Green Bay Area Public Schools.

Thursday - September 21, 2006. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.
TITLETOWN BREWING Co. 2d Floor Meeting Room.
Program to be announced. Being an election year and
approaching municipal budget time we will try to have an
appropriate speaker.

Thursday - October 19, 2006. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.
TITLETOWN BREWING Co. 2d Floor Meeting Room.
Program to be announced.

Unless otherwise notified, BCTA monthly meetings are held the Third Thursday of
each month, 12:00 Noon, at the Tiletown Brewing Co., 200 Dousman St.

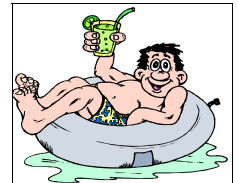
Meetings are open to the public.

BCTA Members, guests, and other interested persons are cordially invited
to attend and participate in our open discussions.

COST: \$7.00 per meeting – Includes lunch, beverage, tax & tip.
(Payable at meeting)

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

August,
2006



“There are always too many Demo-
cratic Congressmen, too many Re-
publican Congressmen, and never
enough U.S. Congressmen.”

. . . H. L. Mencken

“The middle of the road is all the
usable surface. The extremes,
right and left are in the gutter.”

. . . Dwight D. Eisenhower

SUPPORT THE BCTA

New Members are Always
Welcome. Call 336-6410
Write us at P. O. Box 684
or visit our website
www.BCTaxpayers.Org
for Details.