

Truth in Spending.

"Let us swear while we may, for in Heaven it will not be allowed." ~ Mark Twain

I have arrived. Ecco mi, sono qui. (That's Italian.) I am somebody.

No, that is not a daily affirmation, like SNL's Todd Smalley (who by the way is running as a taxer for Congress next door in Minnesota.) It's just me bragging because I have finally been maligned in the newspaper. Hooray! Though it was just a chat room, I didn't get any ink. But a man needs goals and aspirations.

The chatter's complaint was about my use of expletives in this newsletter. But I wax unrepentant. Do expletives devalue my message? [Close your eyes, kids.] "Hell no!"

Mr. Twain noted, "Under certain circumstances, urgent circumstances, desperate circumstances, profanity provides a relief denied even to prayer."

The very existence of this newsletter evinces "desperate circumstances," for if all was well in our supernumerary government seats, there would be no need for heated hecklery. But as it is, there are all too many Artful Dodgers picking our pockets and Oliver Twists with their tax coffers, begging, "Please, sir, may I have some more."

Hell no! I say again.

And referring to our esteemed governor as Diamond Jim is simply an apt animadversion of his Leadership.

When Governor Prodigal and the Spendthrift Legislature write us an austere budget ditty reflecting the elegant common sense of a Mozart, not raspy fiscal solecisms like a Tom Waits, the derision and vulgarity will vanish.

Only the addled and innumerate would parade budgetary gallimaufry as fiscal responsibility. Take the recent Green Bay School budget - please! You don't have to be a Youngman to see that 3.5% budget boost hiding behind the 1.6% levy rate cut. Now that's flagitious legerdemain. It simply galls me, the parsing and presumptive skew of reality that property valuation will increase 2.6%, yes when the porcine soar over Green Bay.

Did you notice my fancy new words? I'm trying to culture myself, so maybe I'll get a compliment in the next chat room.

What do you call someone who mournfully styles an increase as a cut in support, mewling, "It's for the kids," when their own analysis shows that 88% of any school budget goes to salaries and benefits? A government bureaucrat.

Hell no! I say again, because it's fun to vituperate.

Not to diminish our deserving educators and administrators. I write simply to countervail vapid attempts to disguise profligacy as fiscal rectitude. It's time to reinstate mandatory audits, to elucidate spending at all levels of government.

You know, I found all my new words using Google. 'Tis so simple to click and paste and whammy, you find the answer. Detailed and honest government finances should be so easily available, unless you have something to hide.

But please, find better IT contractors than the state.

Richard Parins - President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government

So-Called "Healthy Wisconsin"

The Wisconsin Senate has rolled a provision into their version of the budget they have called "Healthy Wisconsin." (*It is interesting that the media doesn't use "so-called Healthy Wisconsin" like they do for proposals they don't care for.*)

The Senate Democrats took three universal" (*socialized*) medical health care schemes and put them together behind closed doors. **They rolled \$15 billion in new taxes (a 14% payroll tax to start) into the budget and are now out there selling it to the people of Wisconsin.**

There has been some argument that this is not socialized medicine. I beg to differ. An employer will pay at least 10% for every employee's wages, an employee will pay at least 4% of their wages (to start). The money will be collected by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) as a tax—all \$15 billion worth (current state general tax collections are \$12.6 billion). DOR will turn the money over to a governor appointed committee of 16—they are:

- (a) 4 labor or union members,
- (b) 4 business and employer representatives,
- (c) 1 public school teacher labor representative.
- (d) 1 small business member,
- (e) 2 farmers,
- (f) 1 self employed member, and,
- (g) 3 representatives of health care consumer organizations.

These people will make decisions on how to spend more than \$15 billion of taxpayer's money and how to provide Wisconsin's 5.5 million people with medical services.

These 16 people will be given the powers to decide how to spend this money, who gets it and eventually how services are delivered and in what manner. The bill gives them the powers to do this. The bill says they have all the power "necessary and convenient" (this is the actual language in the bill [page 246 lines 3-5 of Senate Budget Bill](#)) to carry out their plans.

The legislation leaves nearly all of the details to the 16 member committee. Ask a reasonable question and the answer is, we don't know, this board will figure it out.

Going to payroll taxes and a single payer system will cut out insurance agents and companies. (The left would be talking about the loss of jobs if they were government employees and wondering about what would become of them.) This is how they say they will save money. Claims still have to be paid, people still have to be signed up and maybe they will try to detect fraud and overuse (maybe not). All these services cost money and will need to be done.

They say we are going to save 20% from the \$18 billion spent today on healthcare in our state, add more people (currently uninsured, underinsured, illegal aliens, and anyone who can get to Wisconsin. As soon as they get here, provided they are pregnant women or children under 18. If your kid needs an operation, come to Wisconsin). They are going to replace every private insurance plan with this one size fits all, committee run, committee

controlled plan.

They say we will save 20%, cover hundreds of thousands of new people and not impact quality or wait-times and we get to choose our own docs. (Gee! I wish we could do this with the University of Wisconsin system, or maybe just the Law School.) I want their magic wand for the rest of government services.

There is no real way to do an actuarial study of this plan, because no one really knows what the committee of 16 will decide in the future or how many sick people will come from other states and other countries.

One thing is clear; the gang of 16 will have the power to raise taxes to pay for the program. They will have the power of life and death, by deciding what services and drugs are **available** and when and through the management of waiting lines.

There are some in our state who think this is a good idea. There are some in other states who think it is a good idea, too. (Kentucky is already encouraging Wisconsin business to move to their state.)

It feels nice to believe that the government will take care of all our needs all the time. It also feels nice to be in the cannibal's cooking pot in the warm soothing water before it boils

Rep. Frank G. Lasee

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Editors Note: After the above article was written, the "Healthy Wisconsin" plan was withdrawn from the proposed 2007-08 state budget being negotiated by the Senate, Legislature and the Governor. Whether the plan was truly intended as a serious effort to improve health-care in Wisconsin or was a political ploy to smoke-screen other controversial budget issues is a matter of speculation but it will likely be an issue in the 2008 elections and be re-introduced again in some form or other. JF

National Debt Update.

As of October 1, 2007, the U. S. National Debt stood at **\$8, 978,260,780,221.89**. That's Trillion, not Billion. The interest alone has cost \$190,150,699,401.27 so far this year. That's Billion not Million. This still amounts to \$631.27 just in interest for each U. S. Citizen. We are sure you could probably find something better to do with your money than pay interest on money the government spent 20 years ago.

The state of Wisconsin is not much better. Not too many years ago state law prohibited spending in excess of income. Now Wisconsin's state and local governments are burdened with a total of \$36.9 Billion in debt, with interest payment accounting for 4.1% of expenditures. Payments on interest by state governments exceed the expenses for natural resources, corrections, or sewers and solid waste disposal.

Anyone who has dug themselves into a hole with a credit card could relate that borrowing more to spend more is not a good idea.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.BCTaxpayers.Org
EMail, BCTA@ExecPc.Com

September Meeting Notes. *Paul Jadin Addresses September BCTA Meeting.*

Monthly BCTA meeting Sept. 20, at Tiletown Brewing. Former Green Bay Mayor (1995-2003) and current Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce President Paul Jadin addressed the meeting. He noted that the mayor has two primary functions, providing a vision for the city and creating budgets.

Mr. Jadin explained four main functions of the Chamber of Commerce. Member Services communicates with members, provides services to members, and manages special events. Education supports educational issues such as the Golden Apple awards, workforce development, and Leadership Green Bay. The ADVANCE Economic Development program focuses on developing and retaining local businesses, local economic growth, and attracting new businesses to the area.

The Government Affairs Committee creates a legislative agenda which is presented to the full Chamber Board for approval.

He explained that a primary legislative need is to address the cost of government employee benefits. [Jo Egelhoff of FoxPolitics.net cited a recent WISTAX article that shows public employee benefits are 50 percent higher than employee benefits in the private sector.] He stated that we need a rollback of benefits for new government employees hired after January 1, 2008. He noted that overtime abuse increases retirement costs. We are making progress in tort reform, he commented. He is concerned that the \$15 Billion Healthy Wisconsin medical plan, proposed by state Senate Democrats, will attract the indigent to Wisconsin for free medical care.

Mr. Jadin stated the illegal immigration is a federal issue. Unfortunately, the legislation proposed does not address the illegals that don't come forward and register. "What will be done with them?" is an unanswered question.

Rich Carlstedt reported that the Green Bay Schools Enrollment Task Force has had three meetings to date. The Task Force has 50 members. The Task Force meeting minutes are posted on the school district's website www.greenbay.k12.wi.us/01/info/enrollment/.

In addition the school district has a need for over \$50 million of building maintenance.

Copies of the 2007 edition and a multi-year compendium of 50 STATE COMPARISONS, published by The Taxpayers Network were distributed. The next meeting is scheduled for Oct. 18. **Dave Nelson – Secretary**

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@ecPC.Com.

Since 2000, Wisconsin's Population Growth Moderate. Some Areas Losing Young, While Seniors Surge.

With population increases ranked 32nd among the states, Wisconsin is growing modestly in an even slower-growing region. As the state's senior population surges, growth will continue to slow through 2030, with major implications for business, government, and education.

These are key findings from "Population changes matter!," a new report from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance.

New federal data for 2000-06 shows Wisconsin grew 3.6% compared to the U.S. at 6.4%. In the region, most growth was even slower. Illinois grew 3.3% (ranked 36th), Iowa 1.9% (41st), and Michigan 1.6% (44th). Only Minnesota grew faster, at 5.0% (23rd). Nevada led the nation at 24.9%.

Wisconsin's increases are occurring largely along a "V" running south from the Fox Valley to the Milwaukee suburbs, west to Dane County, and northwest to counties east of the Twin Cities. Just 15 counties account for two-thirds of all population growth in the state. Dane County, for example, accounted for 14.8% of the total net increase, followed by Waukesha (7.4%), and Brown (6.4%).

The state's moderate growth can be attributed primarily to low birth and migration rates. The state reported 435,000 births and 290,900 deaths, for a net "natural increase" (births minus deaths) of 144,100, or 2.7% of the state's 2000 population (32nd nationally). Immigration was also below average at 1.2% of the 2000 population (30th).

Of Wisconsin's 72 counties, 20 reported more deaths than births from 2000 to 2007. "The combination of declining births (and subsequently lower school enrollments) in areas with rising populations of retirees can be politically difficult," said Todd Berry, WISTAX President. "Declining school enrollments lead to tighter state-imposed revenue caps, which in turn, increase the likelihood of new referenda to loosen caps and spend more. At the same time, however, a growing share of voters are childless," he added.

Forecasting growth from 2000-2030, the Badger State expects a 14.7% overall increase, while the U.S. increase for the same period is projected at 29.2%. Around the region, Minnesota is expected to grow 28.2%, twice as fast as Wisconsin, but Illinois (8.2%), Michigan (7.6%), and Iowa (1.0%) will all lag.

The largest increase in Wisconsin will be among the 65-and-over group, anticipated to grow by 609,672, or 86.8%, by 2030. The next-largest increase is among the 45-64 age group, likely to grow 24.8%. Almost all age groups under 45 are expected to shrink or remain static. As a result of this shift, the state's median age would rise from 36.0 to 41.6 years by 2030.

Even more significant is the "dependency ratio," which would shrink from 1.40 workers for every dependent in 2000 to 1.17 workers for every dependent in 2030. The "dependency ratio" compares the combined number of youth (under age 20) and seniors (65 or older) to the size of the working-age-or taxpaying-population (20-64 years). The shift would stem mostly from baby-boomer retirements.

According to Berry, "Population is important to labor supply, tax revenues, public service demands, and economic growth-so marketers, educators, politicians, and business leaders need to pay attention to these trends."

For a free copy of Focus, "Trends II: Population changes matter!," contact WISTAX by e-mail at wistax@wistax.org; by phone at 608-241-9789;

"Hot" Home Market Was Key to Property Tax Shift.

Is Tax Shift to Residential Properties Ending?

A long-term boom in residential and commercial real estate combined with changes in property tax law has led to a major shift in property tax burdens toward these properties and away from agriculture, manufacturing, and personal property, according to a new study from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX). In addition, an aging population and the general economy may slow the demand for residential property even more and halt the long-term tax shift. WISTAX, a nonpartisan public-policy organization celebrating its 75th anniversary seeks to inform Wisconsin citizens through nonpartisan public-policy research.

In "The Great Property Value Shift," WISTAX researchers noted that the residential share of the property tax burden grew from 39.7% of the total in 1945 to 72.5% last year. Several factors explain the shift. The most important was demographic-increased demand for residential properties (both single-family and vacation homes) sparked by baby boomers. As that generation matured and moved into their prime buying years, additional demand for commercial properties also resulted.

A second factor in the tax burden shift was law changes that removed certain properties from the tax rolls or reduced their value for property tax purposes. During the 1970s, manufacturing machinery and equipment (M&E) and several types of personal property, including "Line A" stocks, were removed from the property tax rolls. This shifted some of the property tax burden onto residential and commercial properties. However, a larger shift occurred in the late 1990s when law changes allowed agricultural property to be assessed at its use, rather than market, value. WISTAX President Todd Berry noted that "it is important for Wisconsin property taxpayers to understand that the long-term shift of the property tax burden toward residential and commercial properties has been due mostly to residential construction and rising home prices. Only a small portion of the shift was due to legislative action."

The WISTAX report also notes that the long-term boom in residential real estate may be over. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Wisconsin residents between the ages of 25 and 54-the prime home-buying years-rose from 1.8 million to 2.4 million. That number is projected to decline to 2.3 million by 2010, and will not reach 2.4 million again until 2030.

A free copy of The Wisconsin Taxpayer with the article "The Great Property Value Shift" can be obtained by writing WISTAX, 401 North Lawn Ave., Madison, WI 53704-5033; e-mailing wistax@wistax.org

Editors note: Some estimates are that approval of the state budget as it is now proceeding could result in as much as an additional \$600 million (or more) being levied top state residents through property taxes. While in the past, increased real estate values and new construction have added sufficient value to the property tax base to largely offset increased tax levies, this may no longer necessarily be true. Large inventories of unsold homes and depreciated values would be to blame. The assessed valuation placed on your property may not necessarily represent its true value.

JF

Here's what's critical in Cigarette Tax deal.

Assembly speaker Mike Huebsch offered to accept a \$1.25 per pack increase in the cigarette tax and a transfer from the state's fund that pays medical malpractice claims. According to Greg Bump's WisPolitics budget blog, "Robson acknowledged that Huebsch has agreed to the \$1.25 per pack tax increase for cigarettes, and that he has agreed to transfer an unspecified amount from the Patients' Compensation Fund." [Emphasis is mine.] Wow.

Doyle has consistently (*beginning in 2003, with a \$10M swiping attempt*) tried to raid malpractice dollars to balance his budget - and consistently this has been summarily dismissed by a Republican legislature. Senator Kanavas, an ongoing critic of the raids, has called them possibly illegal - and certainly not an appropriate use of the fund.

The governors requested raid for the 2007-09 budget is \$175 million. Considerably over the \$10M requested in 2003.

This year's Assembly budget prohibited the Governor from raiding the Patients Compensation Fund for general fund - or any other (*like the governor's spanking new health care fund*) - purposes. According to the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance, the fund has total assets of \$750 million - and liabilities of \$690 million. It's supposed to be available to aid medical malpractice victims - and to moderate malpractice insurance costs for Wisconsin doctors.

Note that this tragic raid on a fund that contains absolutely zero tax dollars may only be possible because of 25% increases in required annual payments into the fund. Premiums were increased after a December, 2005 recommendation, when the state Supreme Court struck down the cap on excessive medical malpractice awards; the Fund's Actuarial Committee noted that "Wisconsin providers are now at a higher risk of excessive damage awards due to the loss of Wisconsin's cap on economic damages. Information also presented by the actuary suggests that additional and larger fee hikes may be needed in the future."

So all that cash was just too much for Gov. Doyle to ignore - and ignore it he didn't. Dang it. Speaker Huebsch - your attempts have been valiant to date. And I know you're juggling continuous requests from Sen. Robson to give in on the oil tax and the hospital tax and the recycling fee and, and, and.... Keep at it - in that you've not yet specified an amount to give up from this Patients Compensation Fund - can it maybe be just a few bucks?

-Jo Egelhoff, FoxPolitics.net.

"Government is instituted for the common good; for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people; and not for the profit, honor or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men." . . . John Adams

"Calling an illegal alien an undocumented immigrant is like calling a drug dealer an unlicensed pharmacist." . . . From The Internet

The punishment of wise men who refuse to take part in the government is to live under the government of worse men." , , , Plato

Public Benefits 50% Greater Than Those in Private Sector. State-Local Government Benefits Averaged \$12,171 Per Worker.

A new report from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX) establishes that State-local government employees in Wisconsin received an average of \$12,171 in fringe benefits in 2005, exceeding benefits for private sector workers by more than 50%. Public benefits cost Wisconsin taxpayers \$4.62 billion in 2005, or an average of more than \$800 per person. These are the key findings of the latest Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX) study, "Public and Private Benefits in Wisconsin."

In every state, public benefits are greater than those in the private sector. However, Wisconsin's gap (50.1%) was much larger than the nation's average (34.9%). It was also larger than the gaps for all states bordering Wisconsin: Illinois (34.5%), Iowa (45.8%), Michigan (18.4%), and Minnesota (30.1%). The largest gap was in Oregon, where public benefits were nearly triple those in the private sector. If Wisconsin's state-local employees received the same level of fringe benefits as the state's private workers, Wisconsin governments would have spent \$1.54 billion less in 2005, WISTAX said.

In addition to costing more, public benefits have also grown faster than private ones. From 2001 to 2005, Wisconsin's public benefits per worker climbed 41.6%, or an average of 9.1% per year. Private benefits have also grown quickly (up 34.8%, or an average of 7.8% per year), but at a slower rate than public benefits.

One consequence of the large increases in benefits is that they account for a growing share of compensation. In Wisconsin, state-local government employees received 26.4% of their total compensation in the form of fringe benefits in 2006, up from 21.6% five years earlier.

Nationally, public employees received 23.7% of their total compensation in fringe benefits.

The rapid growth of fringe benefits costs has important consequences. One, according to WISTAX, is that it limits salary increases. From 2001 through 2005, total compensation per worker rose at similar rates in Wisconsin's public (4.0% per year) and private (3.8% per year) sectors. However, while public benefits per worker rose 9.1% per year during these years, private benefits rose less-7.8% annually. The faster growth in public benefits led to slower increases in public wages and salaries (2.4% per year) compared to those in the private sector (3.0%).

In this vein, WISTAX researchers noted that rising health insurance costs have had a negative effect on Wisconsin teacher salaries. State law requires school districts to increase total compensation at least 3.8% annually. When benefit costs rise 9% or more, there is little room left for salary growth.

The new WISTAX study looked at salary and benefit data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Among the major employee benefits included in the study were health, life, and disability insurance, employee contributions to pensions and other retirement plans (including Social Security), and contributions to state unemployment insurance funds.

A free copy of the report titled "Public and Private Benefits in Wisconsin" can be obtained by writing WISTAX, 401 North Lawn Ave., Madison, WI 53704-5033; e-mailing wistax@wistax.org;

2008 Time To Run For Office.

While the 2008 Presidential elections are already attracting a lot of attention, the Spring elections will also be very important to local voters. Up for reelection will be county boards, county elected offices, the Green Bay city council as well as seats in all other municipalities.

Incumbents will have to defend their records, and if anyone else wants their job, now is the time to move.

Brown County Clerk Darlene Marcelle reports that nomination papers for the county board are now available, but cannot be circulated until Dec. 1, 2007. Jan. 2, 2008 is the deadline for filing. The spring primaries will be held on Feb. 19, with the general election scheduled for April 1.

Nomination papers for city, village and town positions should be obtained from the respective local clerks.

Elections for President, Congress, and the Wisconsin Legislature will be held in November, 2008.

We always encourage those with an interest in public service to step forward.

Needed, A Good Collection Agency.

Through the years, the City of Green Bay has established many ordinances regulating that rental units be maintained to standards covering safety, sanitation, and general appearance for occupants.

These units are subject to periodic inspections and violations are subject to fines payable in municipal court.

It has been brought to our attention that these fines are not necessarily paid however. At present, there is a past due balance of over \$150,000 owed the city by the top 26 violators. Is this any different than property taxes due, or for any other municipal violation subject to fine?

Budget Update - Sept. 28 Deadline Passes

A lot has happened in the past week of budget negotiations. Unfortunately, when all was said and done, a whole lot of nothing was accomplished. For the past two weeks, the Assembly's proposed budget compromise (AB 506 and 507) to fund our schools and local units of government. These stand-alone bills would prevent property taxpayers from being thrown under the "property tax hike bus."

Despite the overwhelming support for this compromise received from Assembly Republicans and Democrats alike, the Senate Democrat leadership refused to schedule these bills for a vote. So much for bipartisanship.

Being the 8th highest taxed state in the nation is already bad enough. Do we really want to be #1?

Rep. Karl Van Roy

"Definition of a Camel: A Horse designed by a Committee."

. . . Anon

"How come so many people who run for office slow To a crawl after they are elected." . . . Doug Larson

Things That Make Us Wonder.

One really disturbing facet of the now side-tracked "Healthy Wisconsin" proposal was that the administration and future policy making including keeping the plan solvent (*new taxes*) would be in the hands of a 16 member appointed board.

This board would be heavily slanted to represent labor unions and special interest consumers with little input from insurance or health care professionals or providers. It also was apparent that none of the representatives as proposed would really care about what the plan would cost or its effect on our economy.

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Fortunately the UAW strike against General Motors only lasted two days, with both sides able to compromise on key issues. Whatever happens at GM, good or bad always has a significant trickle effect.

The strikers claimed that job security was their main concern. This is interesting in that not too long ago GM was considering closing down the Janesville plant as a cost cutting expedient, which could have a major impact on Wisconsin economy.

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Everyone laughed recently when it was suggested that funding for the UW law school be reduced because we "already had too many lawyers in the state."

Now a *Wall Street Journal* article claims that demand for legal services has not kept up with rest of the economy. Graduate lawyers entering the work force are finding fewer high paying jobs with high profile firms, and are even blaming their law schools for failing to warn them of the weak market for their services. One factor is that tort reform laws around the nation have reduced personal injury lawsuits. No doubt Congress will recognize this as a crisis and somehow subsidize these poor individuals.

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While the City of Green Bay tries to control illegal immigration by not licensing business who hire them, it is unlikely it will solve many prob-

lems. How about an ordinance making it illegal to rent an apartment to undocumented aliens. It becomes more apparent that the federal government is to blame for the problem and should be held responsible.

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It has come to the attention of the Legislative Audit Bureau that there may be discrepancies between Indian casino profits and what is reported to the state. The compacts allowing casinos specify controls including electronic meters in gaming machines to assure accuracy in reporting. The Governor's Dept. of Administration's Div. of Gaming is responsible for compliance.

Audits indicated that 2 tribes under-reported payments due the state by over \$900,000, while some tribes actually paid more than was due under the compacts.

The important thing is that with casino gambling increasing and the huge amount of money involved all accounting be open and accurate .

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A recent "*Forbes*" magazine article confirms that since the close 2000 and 2004 Presidential Elections political parties have been trying to abolish the Electoral College method of choosing a President and relying on the popular vote.

While both methods have supporters, any change would be politically motivated to give advantage to one party or the other. In the mean time, states keep changing their Congressional boundary lines to give advantage to incumbents and change their primary laws in order to gain national attention and prestige.

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It's been suggested the next time a hurricane like Katrina hits the Federal Government would be better off if they just sent everyone a check rather than try to go in and help.

A recent report claims the Government expanded \$127 Billion in resources and tax relief to the Gulf area, which equates to \$425,000 per person. A New Orleans family of four cost taxpayers \$1.7 million. This doesn't include the millions of private donations from you and me. FEMA bought

tens of thousands of trailers which were never used along with a lot of other wasteful projects that unfortunately were neither effective or appreciated.

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The Wisconsin Democracy Campaign which is a watchdog group over Wisconsin politics claims that as of Sept. 25, the state has wasted \$17.2 Million of taxpayers dollars in Legislative salaries, fringe benefits and other costs because they have not been able to pass the state budget, due July 1.

Considering the make-up of the proposed budget, and the new taxes and fees involved, delaying the budget is probably cheaper than passing it.

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Feb. 17, 2009 is the deadline established by the FCC on which all television broadcasts will be in digital format. Probably very few of us understand what this is all about, or how to prepare for the change. TV sets made before a certain date will become obsolete or require installation of a converter. This will take a lot of explanation.

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How is the state budget being negotiated? The results will effect everything from how much we pay in taxes to health insurance coverage and everything from how much it costs to run a car to school costs. Rather than hold public negotiating sessions. The Governor has holed up with selected lawmakers from both houses and parties in the Governors mansion in Madison. Lets hope they know the difference between compromise and surrender.

Only three of the participants are allowed to meet at one time, and in closed sessions. State law specifies if four or more get together at one time, the meeting would have to be open to the public. One observer noted that approval of the budget has come to deals being made behind closed doors. In addition, the Governor still has his veto pen to use.

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One of the controversial items dropped from the budget was the "Healthy Wisconsin." universal health plan. Sponsors of the plan say they will reintroduce it as soon as the Legislature reconvenes.

At least it should be open to

public input and discussion rather than clandestinely mandated upon us by a handful of politicians who decide it is in the better interests of all of us.

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We are all proud of the University of Wisconsin and the prestige they bring our state. Nonetheless they often seem to have the attitude that the rest of the state, its people and industries exist simply to support their existence.

An example is a recent AP article with the headline, "UW-Madison warns of budget cut problems." The article goes on to complain about the budget proposed by the Legislature would force layoffs of staff members, and force the cancellation of thousands of classes in major fields of study, and that no parts of the campus would be immune to the effects of these damaging cuts. Strong words indeed.

If a budget is to be approved that the people of Wisconsin can afford and support, many programs throughout the state which have grown out of proportion will have to be cut. Perhaps if the University is so concerned with instructing its present enrollment, they could cut back on some of the capital expenditures they are constantly proposing. Other state agencies are tightening their belts while still providing services.

What the University calls cuts are actually a reduction of their requests over last years budget. The assembly budget still gives them a substantial increase in spending but they can always use all or more.

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A recent article in the Journal/Sentinel, (written by a UW professor) calls for collective bargaining for the UW faculty. They claim other schools have this and the 17,000 faculty members and academic staff at the University is the only state group denied collective bargaining.

The writer even claims there would be "significant savings" for the state because a unionized faculty and staff would be more dedicated to their primary mission of education of students, etc. etc. Maybe they could also teach elephants to fly and do research on trees that grow money.

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The Dept. of Revenue has dis-

closed spending \$915,000 this year for interest on refunds of overpayments of estimated tax liability. It could have been as much as \$4 million more but they paid 160 people overtime to catch up on their work.

Didn't they just spend about \$40 million on computer systems to eliminate this sort of problem?

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The Citizenship and Immigration Service spent \$6.5 Million to change 100 questions on their civics test to become U.S. citizens.

The questions dwell less on American history per se but focuses more on diversity, geography and government. It is supposed to require more study by applicants than previous, and still requires a proficiency in English including reading and writing.

Legal immigrants must have resided here for 5 years, (3 if married) and be of good moral character.

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With pressure increasing to get a state budget approved, it is reported that lawmakers are being deluged by special interest groups, mostly fearful that spending requests beneficial to their interests will be eliminated.

These groups are generally will financed and have a lot to gain or lose. Included are state employee unions, the University of Wisconsin, smokers concerned with the proposed tobacco tax, etc. Unfortunately Joe Taxpayer who also stands to gain or lose does not have the resources or organization to speak up and be heard.

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At last word, it appears the proposed \$1.25 per pack increase in cigarettes will remain in the budget. This is almost double all of the increases made since lawmakers found it as a lucrative source of income.

The increase has the potential of raising \$500 Million per year. Of course the announced intention was to discourage people from smoking so next budget we will have to find a way to make up for the difference.

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It's bad enough that a large percentage of our everyday items are imported from China,, and that there have been a substantial number of re-

calls of defective merchandise.

Now Congress is proposing a special import tax to cover inspections of these imports to assure they are safe and satisfactory for our use.

Shouldn't it be considered that profits by our own manufacturers and retailers is what drives these imports, and quality control should be their responsibility.

* * * * *

The coming of Fall usually marks the end if road construction season. We all appreciate the improvements made to our infrastructure and agree this is good use of our tax money.

Do your sometimes get the impression, however, that once the barricades are up and detours are established no one is in any hurry to complete the jog at hand. So what if drivers are inconvenienced or business suffers.

Would it really cost taxpayers more if a little overtime was paid so the jobs could be done sooner?

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, from the days news events. Some are relatively unimportant and probably not worth commenting about while others could easily be expanded to full length feature articles worthy of further study and action to protect our interests as taxpayers. We try to cover a wide variety of subjects in a limited space and put a different spin on items from what you read in the papers or see on TV. 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."

"We would rather do business with 1,000 Al Queda terrorists than one single American."

. . . Sign Outside Philadelphia Mortuary.

"Committee – A group of the unfit, appointed by the unwilling, to do the unnecessary." . . . Stewart Harol

The TAX TIMES

Brown County Taxpayers Association
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Green Bay, WI 54305-0684

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The TAX TIMES - October, 2007

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

Thursday - October 18, 2007. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.
TITLETOWN BREWING Co., 2nd Floor Meeting Room.
Speaker _ Circuit Judge Kendell Kelley.
Discussion of upcoming County, City & School budgets.

Thursday - November 15, 2007. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.
TITLETOWN BREWING Co., 2nd Floor Meeting Room.
Speaker and program to be announced.

Thursday - December 20, 2007. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.
TITLETOWN BREWING Co., 2nd Floor Meeting Room.
Speaker and program to be announced.

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

Meetings are open to the public.

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

COST: \$7.00, Payable at meeting. Includes lunch, tax & tip.
Call Jim Frink – 336-6410 for information or to leave message.



**October,
2007**

"Every day you meet a delegation going to some convention to try and change the way of someone else's life."
. . . Will Rogers

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."
. . . General George Patton

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.