

## A Dickens of a Christmas.

Happy holidays, friends. Or should I say, Merry Christmas. Our wonderful minders of the mint, the state Legislature, spent precious time arguing about whether the Capitol Holiday tree should be officially called a "Christmas" tree.

And who brought you this vital debate? The party that was so tired of pointless social conservative proposals like concealed carry and the gay marriage ban, the Democrats and "Tiny Marlin". Is this Scrooge's conciliatory Christmas turkey?

The party that so passionately wants to reform school funding and health care - taxpayers' two gnarliest dragons - wants to spin its wheels about the official title of a Christmas tree which also contains decorations commemorating seasonal holidays of other cultures.

So here I am compounding their error.

Back to business. Our union-friendly county executive, Mr. Hinz, gave us a lovely lump of coal in our Christmas stocking - a 5% boost to the property tax levy. Not to mention the local government levy hikes meeting or exceeding the 3.86% permitted by Gov. Double-down Frankendoyle. A 4.5% boost in Green Bay and 3.9% in Allouez, to name but two, as I labor down the list,

I wish for our local budgeters a visit from three ghosts on Christmas Eve. A ghost of budgets past to remind them of the union-taxpayer partnership that once was, a ghost of budgets present to remind them that union rank-and-file are calling them lackeys and stooges while the taxpayers are grumbling and fumbling with their checkbooks.

And next a visit of the ghost of budgets future showing them a ghost town, boarded shop fronts, roads with potholes sprouting elms, rusted wrecks on the shoulders of the once bustling Hwy 41, with "Florida Or Bust" banners in the window, or "the Phoenix Express" attached to the trunk.

Or something closer to home, like themselves helping customers at Wal-Mart or Home Depot, waiting tables at The Blackstone or God forbid, the thankless telemarketing cube, manning the phones at Eastbay or Gateway.

That would turn their ho-ho-ho into oh-oh-oh! Bligh me, Mr. Cratchit

I must stop now and ponder solutions to this dilemma, because as much as I dislike our budgets present, I dread even more our budgets future. As much as our ersatz leaders deserve their just desserts, I would like to spare them for OUR sakes. We may see darker days following the next round of elections.

So, I am writing a letter to Santa right now asking for some intelligent alternatives or anything that can shock our budgeters out of business as usual. I ask you all to do the same. And let me know what you get on Christmas Day.

Have a Merry and Blessed Christmas, and perhaps, a pleasantly shocking New Year, dear Friends.

**BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION.**

*Richard Parins* - President

---

---

**The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION**  
*Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government*

---

---

## Americans for Prosperity:

### *Defending Taxpayer Interests.*

The Wisconsin Chapter of Americans for Prosperity (AFP-WI) is an organization of citizen activists that has been recognized as the premiere grass-roots organization having impact on the public policy debate in Wisconsin. The organization now has members and leadership in all 72 Wisconsin Counties and chapters in 21 states.

This membership growth has been made possible by sponsoring events throughout the state in an effort to educate citizens on local, state and federal tax and spending policies.

During 2007 AFP-WI sponsored events including a state wide web cast "Healthcare: Unlock Consumerism" broadcast to 17 cities, grass roots schools in all areas of the state, health care forums with Steve Moore and John Fund from the Wall Street Journal, a taxpayer rally with Newt Gingrich in Waukesha, the inaugural "Taxpayer Tailgate" for volunteers at Miller Park prior to a Brewers Game, "Defend Wisconsin - Taxpayer Rally", the largest anti-tax rally in the state's history held at the state capitol in Madison, and the "Friedman Freedom Legacy Lunch" in Milwaukee.

Americans for Prosperity Foundation-WI also sponsored the "American Solutions" web broadcasts in 14 cities, and the "Healthy Wisconsin Truth Tour," which traveled to Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, Rhinelander, and Wausau. After educating the citizens of West Bend on the school referendum that was the largest proposed in Wisconsin history, it was defeated by 63%.

The national organization of Americans for Prosperity sponsored the "Defending the American Summit in Washington, D.C. the largest gathering of grass roots activist in the nation. All the GOP Presidential candidates spoke to over 1,700 members with 75 members from Wisconsin in attendance.

The first major event for 2008 is planned for February 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> in Waukesha. The "Rock Stars of 2007 Award Dinner and Conference" will feature national speakers and workshops to train our citizen members to be effective watch dogs of the public policy debates on the local, state and national levels.

There is no cost to membership in Americans for Prosperity and entitles citizens to updates and admissions to all Americans for Prosperity events. The website for Americans for Prosperity-Wisconsin chapter is [www.afpwi.org](http://www.afpwi.org) and daily updates are posted to the WIBLOG and can be viewed by clicking on the WI Blog icon at their web site. To become a member email contact information to Mark Block, State Director, at [markb@afpwi.org](mailto:markb@afpwi.org) or call 414-475-2975 to get a "Home Headquarters Kit".

**Mark Block – State Director, Americans for Prosperity.**

## Property Taxes and Insurance Costs.

Property taxes are becoming an ever increasing burden on the property owner, especially those with fixed incomes. The fastest rising expense item adding to our tax bill are the fringe benefits, more specifically health insurance benefits for government employees.

According to the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, local and state employees in Wisconsin received an average of \$12,171 in fringe benefits in 2005. This exceeds the benefits received by private sector workers by more than 50 percent

While private sector employers have discontinued or reduced these benefits due to their cost, state and local governments continue expensive health insurance coverage for their employees and even continue to add benefits.

The following chart shows the cost of health insurance for employees of the cities of Green Bay and De Pere. The figures were obtained from the human resource departments of the respective cities. The taxpayer cost to the city of De Pere for employee health insurance will be \$1,996,540 for the year 2007. If this cost continues to increase at the present rate of 8% per year, and assuming the same number of covered employees, the annual cost will be \$4,310,378 at the end of 10 years. The annual cost to the city of Green Bay would be \$27,319,898. at the end of 10 years. Unfortunately this makes it difficult to fund other items in the annual budget.

Obviously it will be difficult to absorb these increases indefinitely. We note that some units of government have developed ways to reduce the costs of insurance benefits to their employees. Private industry is forced to reduce employee benefit costs in order to survive. Reducing rather than simply allowing these costs to increase should be given top priority in future budgets.

**Jim Smith – BCTA**

"The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states of worshipping almighty god agreeable to their conscience is not only the choicest of blessings but also of their rights

. . . **George Washington**

It is only the warlike power of a civilized people that can give Peace to the world."

. . . **Theodore Roosevelt**

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

. . . **Plato**

## There oughta be a law...

A Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX) newsletter earlier this month detailed 17 earmarks and eleven "Amendments from nowhere." (*When is a state budget not a STATE budget?*)

The newsletter's message is plain and simple.

"If a state budget is to focus on statewide concerns and if local projects, such as transportation projects, are supposed to be evaluated based on relative merit, the average citizen might wonder why and how these spending earmarks and targeted mandates found their way into the 2007-09 budget. The short answer is that legislators were "taking care" of constituents.

WISTAX goes on to suggest that including policy and earmarks in the state's biennial budget bill might "prompt a look at several sections of state law." Prompt a look? Sounds like serious stuff to me. Here's where WISTAX suggests we look.

- Wisconsin Constitution, Article IV, sec. 18: "No private or local bill which may be passed by the legislature shall embrace more than one subject, and that shall be expressed in the title." *Emphases are mine here and below. Pretty simple and straightforward, don't you think?*
- WI statutes, Section 13.05 Any member of the legislature who gives, offers or promises to give his or her vote or influence in favor of or against any measure or proposition ... in consideration or upon condition that any other person elected to the same legislature will give or will promise or agree to give his or her vote or influence in favor of or against any other measure or proposition pending ...is guilty of a Class I felony.
- WI statutes, Section 13.06. Any member of the legislature who gives, offers or promises to give his or her vote or influence in favor of or against any measure or proposition ... in consideration of or on condition that the governor approve, disapprove, veto or sign... any other measure or proposition... in the legislature ... is guilty of a Class I felony.

Wow.

Earmarks - or get serious about the deficit? Even the *Journal Sentinel* says - it's time. "The time for a sensible discussion about spending and priorities is now." And there really ought to be a law. SB 34 is just one piece of legislation that means to get serious about Wisconsin's budget deficit. The bill will mandate GAAP budget accounting and mandate deficit reductions. Wow. What a fantasy. Any chance of getting this thing past a Democrat-controlled Senate?

**-Jo Egelhoff, FoxPolitics.net**

## National Debt Update.

On December 2, the National Debt had climbed to a new record of **\$9,154,131,418,867.49**. This is an increase of \$88 Billion over last month at this time, and amounts to \$30,155 for each one of us. Just think of what the Federal Government could buy with just the interest they are paying.

So far, we haven't heard any of the 2008 Presidential candidates show any concern over the debt, while at the same time they talk about the high price of oil, balance of trade, home mortgages and all of the wonderful things they will do if elected.

Problem is the National Debt is causing many of our problems. Why should the guys who print the money worry about it? **JF**

"The real issue with property taxes isn't how much is being spent, or the cost of services, it's peoples ability to pay."

. . . **Mark O'Connell - Wisconsin Counties Association**

"The Constitution does not say Government shall decree the right to keep and bear arms. The Constitution says "The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed" . . . **Ronald Reagan**

## Spend Now, Pay Later.

Borrowing allows politicians to expand programs without actually paying for them today. By committing the state to 30 years of payments, the Governor and the Legislature can spend now and pay later.

Government borrowing seems normal, but until 1969 the state's Constitution prohibited public debt. Since 1969, the state's debt has ballooned to over \$8 billion and growing. Each budget will be harder than the last because paying the principal and interest has to come first.

No one wants to pay more taxes. But the alternative to higher taxes, slower spending and program growth, isn't popular with some politicians. Politicians, of both parties, enjoy the power of increasing state spending.

Often borrowing is used to free up tax money for other spending. It also frees up money to make low priority projects possible sooner.

Debt commits the state to years of payments. The more you do it, the bigger the payments get. Wisconsin is on a repayment treadmill.

Suppose I buy a house this year. What bank would let me buy a second house next year, and a third the following year? (Well, maybe if I rented the houses out or if I had an ever increasing source of income.) The stewardship program has been buying lands with borrowed money for decades. This past year the state borrowed over \$60 Million to buy more land. This borrowed money burdens future taxpayers, and takes the property off the tax rolls. Soon stewardship debt payments will exceed the \$60 million borrowed.

So, the governor's answer to the problem of debt service getting bigger than the amount borrowed is to borrow more. (After all it is for a good cause. Not only will old people enjoy this acreage, our children will too.) The legislature trimmed the governor's proposed 10 year borrowing of over \$1 billion to \$850 million.

Short term decisions made by elected officials create long term issues. Whenever borrowing is used to pay for this year's spending, two things happen: debt payments go up and expectations for continued growth of the program increase.

Since the last recession Wisconsin has sold off the tobacco settlement money, used creative accounting, increased taxes, and borrowed even more to get by. While other states have been enjoying surpluses and rebuilding their rainy day funds, Wisconsin is like a dog chasing its tail. **Rep. Frank G. Lasee**

*If you would like to receive Rep. Lasee's weekly notes, please E-Mail him at [Laseesnotes@yahoo.com](mailto:Laseesnotes@yahoo.com)*

## The State Budget and Property Taxes.

Over the next few weeks, homeowners across the state will receive their dreaded property tax bill in the mail. Unfortunately it has to come at this time of year when folks are already spending a lot of money on Christmas presents and parties, but that's just part of life and we have to plan our finances accordingly.

Most people in this state believe that property taxes in Wisconsin are way too high, and I definitely agree with them. Some of the critical services provided at the local level, such as schools, fire and police protection, and road construction and repair, are supported through a combination of state aid and local property tax dollars. That means that getting property taxes down and keeping them down is a shared responsibility of both state and local governments. We need to work together to make sure these services are adequately funded while still keeping government spending and taxing in line with the taxpayer's ability to pay.

If you look at your tax bill, you will notice line items for your county, local municipality, and local school district. The officials you elect to represent you on each of those boards are responsible for setting their spending priorities and adopting an annual budget. You will see a line item for our local technical college as well. This board also has the authority to levy taxes, but unlike your local officials, these members are not elected. The property tax levy is greatly influenced by the growth in the local property tax base. For example, we've seen tremendous growth in both Howard and Suamico. Growing communities like these can spread the tax burden around easier than in a community that is either land-locked or experiencing smaller or limited growth, such as Green Bay.

With the recent passage of the state's budget, legislators from both political parties came together and took a number of critical steps to fight against high property taxes. More state aid means school districts need less money from local property taxpayers. We made no cuts to the state's Shared Revenue program which helps local governments pay for things like police and fire protection.

Keeping property taxes in check requires more than just the state giving money to local schools and government. There needs to be control in the growth of local government spending because simply put, the more you spend, the more you have to tax to pay for it.

In our bi-partisan budget, I voted to renew the Property Tax Freeze that the legislature adopted and Governor Doyle signed into law in 2005 requiring local governments to limit their annual spending increases to 2% or the change in net new construction, whichever is greater. This plan was approved once again by the legislature for tax years 2007 and 2008, but unfortunately, Governor Doyle's veto pen raised the 2007 tax year limit to 3.86%.

We are doing what we can at the state level to provide much needed property tax relief, but as previously mentioned, this is a shared responsibility. We worked hard with the passage of our state budget to show that state government can fund critical services and still live within the taxpayers' means. I believe that our local elected officials, with the additional state aid we provide to them, can and should do the same with your property tax dollars. Local officials should be held accountable for their spending and taxing decisions just as we are here at the Capitol.

When your property tax bill comes in the mail, take a few minutes to look it over and decide for yourself if your local elected officials have adequately shared the responsibility to fight against rising property taxes.

**Representative Karl Van Roy**

## November Meeting Notes.

Monthly BCTA meeting Nov. 15, 2007..

Jerry Bader, host of the Jerry Bader Show on WTAQ-AM, spoke about "smell the taxes you're standing in." He cited the November 5th Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel article concerning the Miller-Coors merger that compared the tax climates of Denver and Milwaukee and concluded that the tax advantage between the two cities was "Uncertain." Jerry likened the Milwaukee writer's obliviousness to Milwaukee's burdensome state and local taxes to be like "barn smell" on the farm. After you work long enough in a dairy barn, you lose the ability to distinguish the smell that permeates your barn clothes.

Jerry asked where the white collar employees for the new MillerCoors headquarters would choose to live. After many years with a taxpayer bill of rights in Colorado, Denver residents have a much lower state and local tax burden than Milwaukee residents. There is no uncertainty that the tax advantage goes to Denver. Wisconsin citizens are numb to high taxes. Wisconsin's tax burden is too high. Even small increases are unacceptable. Our message to elected officials must be clear: Spend less!

Responding to questions, Jerry explained a return of the Fairness Doctrine would destroy talk radio. The outcome of the February referendum for a fifth high school in Green Bay was a surprising lesson. The state budget fiasco was another lesson that elections count. With only one taxpayer friendly legislative body in Madison after the 2006 election, we got what we deserve.

Rich Carlstedt reported that the Green Bay School District Enrollment Task Force is looking at individual school buildings. Rich is concerned that the 37 buildings, with 4 million square feet of floor space, have an annual maintenance budget of less than \$1 million.

Mark Block of Americans for Prosperity reported that his organization started with 250 members and has grown to 11,000 members. He wants to increase membership to at least 55,000. Americans for Prosperity has been outspoken about controlling spending and taxes in Wisconsin.

Jo Egelhoff of FoxPolitics.net observed that the Wisconsin Way project to reform state and local tax inequities appears to be headed toward a questionable outcome. Members who attended the Wisconsin Way meeting in Green Bay agreed, commenting that most of the speakers at that meeting had no concerns about the levels of spending and taxing in Wisconsin. They wanted to shift the tax burden to others and find new sources of tax revenue.

The next meeting will be Thursday, Dec. 20. It will be held in the "Frost" room on the ground floor of Tiletown Brewing. Details on the back cover of this *TAX TIMES*. **Dave Nelson – Secretary.**

## One Way to Property Tax Relief.

What do Wisconsin's trade union halls, professional sports venues, and manure storage facilities have in common?

The answer is the same as housing authorities, charitable organizations, art galleries and fraternities. They are exempt from paying property taxes, and as exempt organizations are exempt from paying sales taxes on their purchases.

The general rule in Wisconsin is that all property is subject to tax unless it is specifically exempt. The specific allowances for exemptions leave a lot of room that the tax people refer to as "Gray areas" leaving room for interpretation.

When property tax regulations were first proposed and developed as a way of funding public services, there was no question that religious institutions, cemeteries, hospitals, non-profit charitable groups and government property should be exempt. The percentage of tax vs. property value was relatively small, and property being exempt was not as much of a factor as it is today. Problem is that the list of exempt organizations has grown through the years, and the requirements for claiming exemption in some cases may be rather loose.

The Dept. of Revenue estimated in 1996 8.4% of property in the states cities was exempt, and that in some municipalities as much as half of the property is exempt. New exemptions are added by the Legislature for whatever reasons.

The problem is that #1, Exempt organizations use the same city services, e.g. streets, garbage pickup, police and fire protection as residents and businesses paying property taxes. #2, With taxes constantly rising, they become a greater expense to be borne by those who pay taxes. #3, Some exempt organizations are financially able to pay a service fee. In some cases they compete with tax paying business.

In 2003 the **Wisconsin Alliance of Cities** recognized this problem and petitioned the Legislature to amend the State Constitution to "**Empower counties, cities, villages or towns to levy taxes or charge an amount to reasonably approximate the tax of services for law enforcement provided..**"

Although the laws haven't been changed yet, there is no reason this could not be done on a city to city basis. There are exempt entities in Green Bay paying a service fee on a voluntary basis, and we understand this is used to some success in Milwaukee. The funds go directly to the municipality, and would offset only that part of your tax bill.

Exemptions and allowance could be made on a case by case basis. The only problem is with more money to spend, they will find a way to do it.

**Jim Frink – BCTA**

## Understanding the County Budget Process.

The municipal/county budget process can be confusing – it's often difficult to understand – but is critical; as it sets the amount of property taxes we pay. I served on the Outagamie County board for 14 years and on the finance committee for 8 of those years - and attended this year's budget meetings to better understand where the county administration and board are taking us in the area of taxes. Outagamie County's budget and process is similar to other counties in the area.

The key spending indicator to look at is the **tax levy**. The tax levy for Outagamie County for 2008 will be \$55,091,640, an increase of **4.95%** and indicates real dollar increases in spending.

You may be asking yourself, "Didn't the governor just impose a 3.86% cap this year and a 2.0% cap next year?" The answer is yes but the devil is in the details. Debt service payments after July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005 are not counted toward the cap. So the county has increased its debt, some of which is now being used for ongoing operations, as road repairs and has also increased the tax levy to the new 3.86% maximum allowed via the governor's budget veto.

As a taxpayer, you may wonder why we're not looking at reducing spending as other counties around us are doing (namely Manitowoc and Sheboygan county who have put together budgets that either had zero increase in the levy or an actual decrease, as Sheboygan). These are good questions that you should be asking your county executive and board supervisors.

Red flags are appearing that do not bode well for future budgets. In the past the county was allowed to exceed the levy cap if the net increase in new construction was over 2.0%. Outagamie County has been fortunate that new construction has always been above the cap, hiding spending problems much like high water hides rocks in the river. New construction in 2006 was 3.4%. 2007 will probably come in at 2.8%. The projection based on the economy and the housing market is projected to be at 2.0% for 2008.

The river is dropping and the rocks are beginning to show.

We are also now starting to borrow for our infrastructure instead of paying as you go and seriously looking at priorities. We are beginning to mimic the state by paying for infrastructure with a credit card.

### Issues that must be addressed in 2008

1. Salaries, Wages, and benefit costs are far and above inflation and definitely far above the 2.0% levy cap, which will be real next year. Since about 75% of the costs of operating the county is labor, this is the one single factor that will effect how this county will operate in the future and what significant program cuts will have to be made. All union contracts are up this year and negotiations will be critical.
2. The Health Center (Brewster Village) is now being subsidized by you the taxpayer to the tune of \$4.0 million per year (!) and rising due to increased costs and flat revenue increases from the state in the form of Medicaid payments. The county must look at the potential of privatizing this operation as other counties have done.
3. A serious look at priorities and what could be cut should begin now in anticipation of the "perfect storm" brewing for next year. It will be the most difficult year the county has ever faced and we will need an administration and county board that is willing and capable of addressing these difficult issues now.

*Other counties such as Sheboygan have done an excellent job in setting priorities, preparing for times when critical budget decisions would have to be made. Outagamie County would do well to embark on a similar analysis. For more information on the budget process check "It's the tax levy stupid"*

**Mike Thomas – Former Outagamie County Supervisor**

## Things That Make Us Wonder.

**The 2008 Presidential Election** is almost a full year away but the influence peddling handicappers are trying to save us the trouble of voting by predicting who the next President of the United States is going to be. Usually as the result of their own questionable polls.

If you aren't sick about hearing about it already, wait until next year when all of the millions of dollars collected by the candidates and their allies starts to show up on local TV.

\* \* \* \* \*

**The high price of gasoline** has been causing more "drive-offs" than authorities can investigate. Assuming these are often the same violators, and that service stations often have surveillance records available, it would seem if a data-base of offenders could be established and publicized it might help a little.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Most area counties,** school districts and municipalities have managed to present 2008 budgets keeping property tax increases within the 3.86% limit determined by the governor as part of the state budget. We understand some units even increased their spending because they were under the 3.86%.

The question is whether assessors will be able to continue arbitrarily raising property values every few years or if values will actually drop as a result of economic conditions.

\* \* \* \* \*

**The Wisconsin Legislature** is again considering limitations to the Governor's "Frankenstein" veto authority.

What was formerly a well intended tool intended to allow the Governor to eliminate what he considered wasteful spending or frivolous policy items from the budgets presented to him for approval has been turned into a "monster" through interpretation.

Rather than reduce spending, new expense items have been added. Funds have been transferred from one segregated account to another to change spending priorities. This year with the stroke of a pen the governor increased property tax increases from 2 to 3.86%, or almost double. Once a power is granted it is difficult to take away.

\* \* \* \* \*

**The Federal Government** has apparently taken note of all the states raising their cigarette taxes and wants some of the action themselves. The Federal tax is now 39 cents a pack. They claim it could be used to raise the \$35 Billion needed to finance the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or whatever else they may dream up that costs money.

Over the past seven years the average state cigarette tax has doubled from 42 to 84 cents. Wisconsin went from .77 cents to \$1.77 in just one year.

\* \* \* \* \*

**For many years Michigan** has imposed a fee of 10 cents on the purchase of canned beverages. This was refunded when the cans were returned to a registered retailer, and intended as a method of encouraging recycling and preventing roadside litter.

Now the state finds they are losing as much as \$15 Million per year from recyclers who are collecting cans and bottles from other states, crushing them to become unidentifiable, and claiming credit from the states bottle deposit fund. What did they think would happen?

\* \* \* \* \*

**It seems most proposals** for campaign finance reform suggest using public (taxpayer) financing for election campaigns. While the present system is full of flaws and encourages "government for sale," would public financing be an acceptable alternative?

At present, the State of Wisconsin allows a \$1.00 check-off from your income tax return as a partial aid for people running for state office.

According to the state election board, only about 5% if eligible taxpayers authorize the deduction, and the number keeps dropping each year. Hardly an endorsement from the public for the use of taxpayers money.

\* \* \* \* \*

**We are all concerned** with environmental pollution, and with conserving our precious resources for future generations. Standards to decrease exhaust emissions and increase fuel mileage would accomplish both goals.

A Federal Appeals Court Judge in San Francisco recently rejected the governments year-old fuel economy standard for light trucks and SUV's because they didn't thoroughly assess the "economic impact of tailpipe emissions that contribute to climate change.

The questions here are: While protecting the environment is important, perhaps conserving energy may be even be more important, and #2, How does a judge in San Francisco get to strike down a Federal law or ruling that was legislated and passed by authorities in Washington?

\* \* \* \* \*

**One of the more frequent** ideas as to how government units could reduce expense and therefore taxes is by more use of private contractors. The theory is that a lot of expensive government red tape and overhead would be eliminated or at least reduced.

Those on the public payroll often resist such suggestions as being a threat to their livelihood.

A recent article in the *Milwaukee Journal* claims that use of private contractors cost the state \$12.5 million more last year than if the work had been done by state employees. It also appears that some of this information was fabricated by disgruntled state employees. For example, state law requires that a detailed and accurate cost analysis be prepared in advance to warrant the hiring of private contractors.

The way the state works, preparing these cost analyses would cost far more than the \$12.5 million.

\* \* \* \* \*

**A group called the Wisconsin Way** has been going about the state holding public meetings seeking ways to reduce our property tax burden, make Wisconsin taxes more fair, and yet provide more funding for education and public services.

That's a tall order considering that just about all conventional methods of taxation are being utilized to the maximum in our state already .

While reducing property taxes sounds great, the main sponsors of the group, The *Wisconsin Counties Association* and the *Wisconsin Education Association Council* have never

shown a concern for the average taxpayer. The recent Green Bay meeting was dominated by public education and municipal employee interests, with little concern shown for the tax-paying public. It will be interesting to hear their recommendations.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Researchers at UW-Madison**

have announced dramatic advances in stem cell research without the use of embryonic cells. This will open the door to unlimited biological research. Recall that stem cell research was made a political issue in the 2006 elections.

\* \* \* \* \*

**It should be comforting** to all of us living in Wisconsin to know that the state Dept. of trade and consumer protection is keeping after Wal-Mart to make sure their scales are working.

They were fined \$89,705 for selling coffee weighing less than the amount shown on the bag.

While we certainly don't defend Wal-Mart and some of their questionable methods of operation, other retailers also use methods to confuse consumers. You're the buyer – beware!

\* \* \* \* \*

**An article in the Journal-Sentinel** reports that as a result of Wisconsin's minimum markup laws, consumers here often pay more for their purchases than they would in neighboring states. Wal-Mart admits they charge higher prices in their Wisconsin store simply because they do not want to run the risk of violating these laws.

While these laws were originally written during the 1930's depression to protect small retailers, many different circumstances now apply. Unfortunately the small locally owned business is a thing of the past.

Legislation has been introduced to try and remedy the situation. It will be called the "*Competitive Marketplace Act*" rather than the "*Unfair Sales Act*" we now have.

Now if they could just figure out a way to prevent people from selling their Packer tickets at five times the listed price.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Although it isn't** really a tax,

the monthly cable TV bill sure seems like one. It increases just about every year – like it or not. Recently there was a flurry of TV ads asking you to call your representative and encouraging him to support a bill to allow cable competition. It turns out this was AT&T with a new service to sell.

Now the Big-10 Network wants to make their services available by a \$2.00 monthly charge from all cable users, which would likely be added to monthly bills. They assume that this is what everybody wants. From this the UW would receive \$6.1 million annually of which 70% would go to the athletic dept. and the rest as financial aid for low-income students and support the schools library.

The NFL is asking for a similar deal for their network, but is only asking for seventy cents a month per cable subscriber. They might have a lot more to gain once they get their foot in the door though.

\* \* \* \* \*

**A recent article** in "*Forbes*" explores the high cost of college education. They claim that since 1983 the cost of keeping colleges running as outpaced the Consumer Price Index by 48%. Tuition's have risen at a far faster pace.

However, in 1980 colleges spent an average of 35.1% of their budgets on teaching while in 2003 the amount was 27.7 %. The biggest problem seems to simply be not controlling costs. Since 1983 utility costs for the average school have risen 124% after inflation while commercial users have held these costs to 60%.

Costs of health insurance and other benefits have risen much higher than in the private sector. There is generally little incentive to cut costs while overhead and administrative costs keep rising out of proportion to teaching costs. In the meantime the federal and state governments keep pouring more taxpayers money in to the system.

\* \* \* \* \*

**The Wisconsin DOT** has announced plans for a \$470 million makeover of highway 41 on the west side of Green Bay. Construction is to

start in 2010 and take 5 years. They claim money for the project won't be available until that time.

In the meantime, improvements of I-94 from Milwaukee to the Illinois line which were estimated to cost \$942 million in 2003 has now been estimated to cost \$1.9 Billion.

Maybe the DOT should ask Governor Doyle to give back some of the money borrowed to balance the state budget the past couple of years.

\* \* \* \* \*

**In a somewhat related** subject, backers in southeastern Wisconsin have been pushing for a commuter rail line from Kenosha and Racine to Milwaukee (KRM) and connecting to existing lines to Chicago. They claim it would only cost \$198 Million to build, and suggested a \$15.00 surcharge on car rentals for financing.

The financing plan has run into snags so now they are proposing a .35% sales tax and enlisting support from other state metropolitan areas to go along with their plan.

While their idea could have some merit, it would seem that right-of-way issues and more realistic cost estimates should be addressed.

Perhaps some of our *TAX TIMES* readers remember the North Shore Line which offered hourly service between Chicago, Milwaukee and all points in between. It ceased operation in 1963, and much of its right of way has been taken over by urban sprawl. It would cost more than \$198 Million just to do a feasibility study on replacing it.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Every once in a while** it is deemed necessary to fire police officers for misconduct or not performing their duties. The same as any other sensitive employment. Somehow or other they often keep receiving their pay at taxpayer expense until all avenues of appeal have been exhausted.

Milwaukee alone has paid \$4.4 Million in wages and benefits for fired officers since 1990, and blames state law for the problem.

\* \* \* \* \*

**It was not too many years ago,** (1969) that the Wisconsin Constitution prohibited the state from borrowing

**Continued on page 8** →

money or being in debt. We were setting a good example at the time.

In 2006, the state debt stood at \$8.28 Billion, an increase of 87% in ten years and three times the rate of inflation during that period. It is about double the amount collected by sales tax each year. Interest on state obligations is a \$874 million dollar item in the state budget, This would be enough to run the Dept. of Natural Resources with \$250 million left over to give to schools.

Deficit spending on a large scale goes back to the Thompson administration, and once it starts it is difficult to stop. The interest alone sees to that. Todd Berry, president of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance says the debt grows from risky decisions by the governors and legislators to benefit themselves politically. It has created a huge hole for the Federal Government and individuals who misuse their credit cards. It certainly doesn't benefit taxpayers or the states economy,

The problem is spending and initiating new programs which will have to be paid for in the future.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Gov. Doyle has called** for a special session of Legislature Dec. 11, to tackle the problem of campaign finance reform. No specific proposals have been made except to revisit some of the ideas from previous sessions. However the Governor is proposing public financing for Supreme Court and limited amounts for other state races.

Considering the money spent in 2004 and 2006, the 2008 elections promise to be the most expensive in history.

We would agree that campaign contributions on all levels are sometimes construed as "government for sale," both by the recipient and the donor, and the system needs changing.

You can be sure however that neither of the major parties will concede any changes giving an advantage to their opponents.

\* \* \* \* \*

**It is noted that in 2007** Gov. Doyle signed fewer bills (38) into law than any previous year of his administration.

Whether this is good or bad may depend on how you look at it. Perhaps bad because Wisconsin's partisan politics make it difficult for the Leg-

islature to agree to on any legislation, good or bad for the welfare of the state.

Perhaps good because Wisconsin already has so many laws on the books that they often overlap each other and are soon forgotten about or disregarded due to their irrelevant nature. At one time lawmakers pointed with pride to the number of proposals they made which became law. This was before the Wisconsin Statutes took 5 full volumes to cover and a law degree to understand. Whatever happened to the "Sunset Law" whereby obsolete or archaic statutes were updated or eliminated? Maybe we need another law.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Once the State Budget** was signed the legislature approved wage increases for non-union state employees averaging 5% over the next 18 months. (*The legislature gets 6.3% and the Governor 7.4%.*) . This did not satisfy the UW faculty who claim their salaries are still way behind other similar institutions.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Section 70.11 (36)(a)** of the Wisconsin Statutes provides that property contained in a professional sports complex, including parking, is exempt from general property taxes. While we can't disagree with this exemption as many sports venues are owned by cities and the state, it can still be expensive for other property taxpayers.

For example, the Packers who would qualify for this exemption have announced the purchase for about \$30 Million of property adjacent to Lambeau Field. Some of it at double the assessed value.

Will this property be removed from the tax rolls accordingly?

\* \* \* \* \*

**We commend Mayor Schmitt** for personally visiting Green Bay's new homeless shelter It is probably difficult for most of us to realize the need for such facilities or the circumstances involved. We are fortunate to have many fine charitable organizations available who are concerned with the less fortunate. Many services they offer also serves to reduce our tax burden.

\* \* \* \* \*

**One encouraging item** in the paper last week was that the Green Bay metro area could see as many as 2,000

new businesses by the end of year. Apparently the entrepreneurial spirit is not dead.

While many of these are one person operations and may not survive the winter, we must remember that virtually all successful business's start our small and grow in an orderly fashion. Small business's as a group employ more people and contribute more to the economy than so-called "large business." We wish them all success.

\* \* \* \* \*

**State inspectors of all sorts** regularly visit business and municipal establishments to make sure that all applicable codes and conditions are being complied with. Stiff fines and penalties are handed out for violations.

Apparently the state itself is exempt from this harassment. For some time it has been known that Charter St. power plant at the University of Wisconsin has been in violation of the federal clean air act. Big time.

Although the facility spent over \$2.5 Million in repairs during the past 10 years, they neglected to contact the DNR for necessary permits or install required modern pollution controls to prevent soot, smog and mercury by the required 90% percent. (*Trying to save the taxpayers money?*) It took a suit from the Sierra Club and a ruling from a federal judge to get them to make improvements. There are 12 other state owned power plants which will have to be inspected for air quality compliance.

After the Charter St. plant is brought to compliance it is estimated they can save about 20,000 tons of coal a year. Only problem is it will cost about \$1-3 million more for the state to use natural gas and oil.

\* \* \* \* \*

**The Homeland Security Dept.** has announced plans for foreign visitors to the U.S. to have 10 fingerprints scanned as they enter the country,

We assume this means everyone from German families visiting Disneyland to those seeking to become citizens and live here.

While this may be a necessary security measure, it could discourage tourism and reciprocal measures to Americans traveling abroad. Would visitors from Canada also be included Also, will this measure help control the illegal immigrants pouring in from Mexico which seems to be the biggest problem on most peoples minds?



\* \* \* \* \*

After spending about \$23.4 Million of state and federal money to prepare a federally mandated voter registration list it appears the system still does not work properly.

Basically it is a massive software program designed to detect dead people, felons, non-residents and other ineligible people from voting in Wisconsin.

The system relies on a database of birth dates, drivers license records, post office address and past voting records to determine their status at the polls.

There is no doubt that some precincts are more prone to voting fraud than others. Some office seekers will do anything to beat the system. However it also seems that the vast majority of polling places are manned by conscientious workers and the systems used in this area for voting are secure and cost effective.

No doubt if the system did function the cost of operating and updating it would be excessive for many municipalities.

Exercising the privilege to vote has become less of a priority than ever during recent years, and having to undergo an identification check is not going to help. Further, there is no guarantee that this information will be personal information has always been state government.

One possibility is the biggest critics of the new system are the political parties themselves because the database doesn't include the persons political party of choice.

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

*"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."*

### Run for Office in 2008.

In addition to the Presidential Election in 2008, there will also be races for the Legislature, State Senate, the entire Brown County Board of Supervisors, elected county officials, the Green Bay City Council, and supervisory posts in all communities of the county.

Already several incumbents have announced they will not seek reelection

Brown County Clerk Darlene Marcelle reports that nomination papers can be circulated after Dec. 1, and must be filed in her office by Jan. 3, 2008 for county races or with the clerk of the respective municipalities for city, town, or village races.

Primaries, if needed will be held on Feb. 19, and the general election will be on Tuesday, April 1, 2008. The Presidential primary for Wisconsin will also be held on Feb.

In most cases the pay is insignificant, the hours are long and perhaps somewhat frustrating. The rewards are an opportunity to serve the community and perhaps make an impact on how things are done.

### Thank you for membership renewals.

Dues renewal notices for the BCTA are mailed throughout the year on the anniversary month when you first joined the organization. We made a mailing the middle of November and are pleased that the majority of members have already responded. Thank you.

We are always seeking new members. Check our website or send us an E-Mail if you know anyone who may be interested and we will send them the necessary information.

### An Interesting Web Site.

Perhaps this one has been around for a while but it was new to me.

Check out [ZIPSKINNY.Com](http://ZIPSKINNY.Com)

All you do is enter any ZIP code for information. If you don't know the ZIP code you want click on the map of the U.S. and the community you want.

You immediately get a ton of information including the population of that particular ZIP code broken down by age, race, marital status, income, occupation, education and homeowner status.

They give you the number of households included and even a map of the ZIP code area. It even includes graphs and charts to make it easier to compare the information.

You can even enter up to 20 different ZIP codes to compare significant statistics.

It is apparent that a lot of the information came from various government sources although the Website appears to be a private operation. The information could be useful for anyone planning an advertising campaign or for that matter, finding a good place to live.

Check it out.

"Finance is the art of passing money from hand to hand until it finally disappears. . . . Robert W. Barnett

"The secret of life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake them you've got it made." . . . Groucho Marx

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 [BCTA@ExecPC.Com](mailto:BCTA@ExecPC.Com).

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE**  
**[Www.BCTAxpayers.Org](http://Www.BCTAxpayers.Org)**  
E-Mail, [BCTA@ExecPc.Com](mailto:BCTA@ExecPc.Com)

# The TAX TIMES

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

PRSR STD  
U. S. Postage  
PAID  
Green Bay, WI  
Permit No. 255

## Inside This Issue

A Dickens of a Christmas.  
Americans for Prosperity: Defending Taxpayers Interests.  
Property Taxes and Insurance Costs.  
There oughta be a law.  
National Debt Update.  
Spend Now, Pay Later.  
The State Budget and Property Taxes.  
November Meeting Notes.  
One Way to Property Tax Relief.  
Understanding the County Budget Process.  
Things That Make Us Wonder.  
Run for Office in 2008.  
Thank you for membership renewals.  
An Interesting Web Site.  
and more.

## The TAX TIMES - December, 2007

### BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

- Thursday - December 20, 2007. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.**  
TITLETOWN BREWING Co. "FROST" Room,  
Note: This meeting will be held in the "Frost" room which  
is on the main floor of Tiletown off of the main dining room.  
**We have a number of items to discuss including the  
oncoming elections. Plans for the coming year including  
our annual taxpayer survey and candidate questionnaire.**  
*Please plan on attending.*
- Tuesday - December 25, 2007. "MERRY CHRISTMAS."**
- Tuesday - January 1, 2008. "HAPPY NEW YEAR."**
- Thursday - January 17, 2008. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.**  
Details in the next Tax Times.
- Thursday - February 21, 2008. BCTA Monthly Meeting. 12:00 Noon.**  
Details in the next Tax Times.

Unless otherwise notified, BCTA monthly meetings are held the Third Thursday  
of each month, 12:00 Noon.

**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.



## December, 2007

"It is not the function of the govern-  
ment to keep the citizen from fall-  
ing into error: it is the function of  
the citizen to keep the government  
from falling into error."

. . . Justice Robert H. Jackson

"Nothing brings out the lower traits  
of human nature like office seek-  
ing."

. . . Rutherford B. Hayes

### **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](http://www.BCTaxpayers.Org)  
for Details.**

Gross Annual Premium	Annual Cost to Employee	Annual Cost to Taxpayer	# of Employees Covered	Annual Cost to Taxpayers
<b>DePere Family Plan Employees</b>				
\$ 16,715.00	\$ 2,507.00	\$ 14,209.00	83	\$ 1,179,347.00
<b>DePere Single Plan Employees</b>				
\$ 5,476.00	\$ 821.40	\$ 4,855.00	49	\$ 228,095.00
<b>DePere Single Plan + 1</b>				
\$ 10,192.00	\$ 1,528.80	\$ 8,663.20	68	\$ 589,097.60
<b>Annual Taxpayer Cost</b>				<b>\$ 1,996,539.60</b>
<b>Green Bay Family Plan Employees</b>				
\$ 15,690.00	\$ 1,569.00	\$ 14,121.00	782	\$ 11,042,622.00
<b>Green Bay Single Plan Employees</b>				
\$ 5,476.65	\$ 547.66	\$ 4,928.98	327	\$ 1,611,777.51
<b>Annual Taxpayer Cost</b>				<b>\$ 12,654,399.51</b>