

To Your Health!

Happy New Year, friends and taxpayers. I hope you had a less controversial Christmas than they had down at City Hall. You just can't press atheists' buttons like that, they go nuclear and call out their attorneys. You'd think tolerance only ran North, like Jefferson St. There is something to be said for protecting minority rights; this IS America, after all, but sheesh, lesson learned, or is it?.

Anyway, did you all ask Santa for ideas on soothing or slaying the tax dragon? I got a dream on Christmas Eve although it could have been the Bushmill's in the eggnog. I believe in Santa Claus and we Faithful believe full bore, without a parka, eyes wide into the gusting headwind of doubt.

Now, about that dream. Here's how it went; "the good county executive, Tom Hinz, made his union buddies an incredible deal in their new employment contract. He completely renovated their health care benefits throwing out the Cadillac, rolling in a Toyota Prius.

The package offered long-term health insurance only, supplemented by health savings accounts with a generous employer contribution and a NACo Prescription Drug Discount Card from the Counties Association. He'd struck fee-for-service deals with most of the area health clinics, so county workers got better deals on doctor visits, even though that came out of their HSAs.

Then, you know what? This only happens in dreams. He refused to back off of it! The union's jaw dropped when they read his offer, summarily refusing to discuss it. And the now stern, former Sheriff Hinz said, "Tough beans! That's my first and final offer." The awestruck union threatened walkout to which Hinz reminded them is illegal. So they took him to court, which ordered arbitration. Still, the Good Sheriff Hinz would not budge. The courts found him in contempt and alas, threw him in jail, and county government continued on the terms of the previous contract. And there sat Good Sheriff Tom.

Whilst belligerent workers in rotation called in sick and picketed, in disbelief Good Tom sat bravely in jail, declining daily to reconsider his offer. Then all hell broke loose. One day at lunch, almost like at the Chrysler plants, all county offices closed, workers chained and padlocked the doors and walked out; except for Hinz former colleagues, Sheriffs officers kept to their patrols.

Then who should come to the rescue but Americans for Tax Reform. Grover Norquist marched into court with his own legal eagles and bailed Mr. Hinz out of jail. Norquist proffered an actuarial study that found the county's old health coverage and Hinz's hybrid coverage to be theoretically equal in value. The Good Grover 's powerfully be-suited attorneys then filed a motion to have Hinz's contract enforced.

In a gesture of Good Will, they drove Tom Hinz to the county offices where he spoke to the striking workers. He told them of the potential pocket money they'd have at the end of each year, if they took good care of themselves. He suggested wage hikes could be more generous because health care would now be primarily their responsibility.

"I have been to the mountain," he boomed, "and come back with the law. I shall fare no better or worse than you. We are all in this together and together we can part the water and walk to the promised land." And you know what? Half the strikers dropped their signs, with a sense of calm on their faces, came over and shook his hand. There was a massive group hug that looked like a rugby scrum. Rank and file approved the contract. The county only saved about \$1 million, but they sure shifted the proverbial paradigm and the future looked bright. Then I woke up.

I saw Mr. Hinz on New Year's Eve. I forgot it was a dream, gave him a big hug and said, "You're my hero, boss." Suddenly realizing what I'd done, I shuffled quickly away. One can only imagine his look of incredulity.

Anyhow, I look forward to hearing the ideas Santa brought you. Drop me a line at rparinsster@gmail.com. I'll put your ideas into next month's column. A votre sante! Na zdrowie! Slainte! Prost! Cheers!

Richard Parins
President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in overnment

Welfare for Politicians.

At the Governor's request, the legislature went into special session (we were scheduled to meet anyway) to vote on a system designed to put tax money in the pockets of politicians running for office. This is called "campaign finance reform"? The Governor has brokered no agreement nor has he attempted to, making this special session likely unproductive in this legislature, with a Republican majority in the Assembly and a Democratic majority in the Senate.

It takes money to inform many, to sell an idea, a candidate, or a political view point. Those with money (including unions), those that buy ink by the barrel, or come into our homes every night on the news, will have an advantage in any system. This will not change under a welfare for politicians scheme.

The two biggest spenders on politics in Wisconsin are WEAC, the state teachers union (more than a million in an election cycle) and WMC, the state's chamber of commerce (usually about half as much). They make independent expenditures, over which the candidate, by law, can have no control, or input. Special interest expenditures have outpaced expenditures by candidates in heavily contested races.

One of the Governor's "reforms" is to finance the Supreme Court race with our tax dollars. A candidate that accepts \$100,000 tax money in the primary and \$300,000 tax money in the general election will be required to limit other fund raising. This amount pales in comparison to the nearly \$6 million spent by candidates and outside interest groups in the last heated high court race.

Candidates were outspent by special interests, by the way. So, according to our governor, somehow the candidates will be better and cleaner (he should know) because they will get tax money and spend less. Then special interests will be buying even more (than they do now) advertising in comparison to the candidates themselves.

Whether we like it or not, spending translates into advertising a point of view for, or against, an issue or a candidate. This is free speech. The Supreme Court has spoken on this issue. Free speech is the true fly in the ointment for all those that want to reform the financing of elections by limits or additional tax money.

If the legislature does choose to give more money to those running for office, it will be in addition to the total spending already done. This "reform" will have the opposite effect of the stated desire: limiting special interest influence (is government money special interest money?). Special interests will grow their influence as the individual candidates run more limited campaigns. The candidate's message and ability to distribute it will be further muddied and drowned by special interests.

Often in the capitol, it just doesn't feel like we're doing anything meaningful unless we are throwing taxpayer money at it. Somehow, welfare for politicians and candidate spending limits will get others with interest in election outcomes and the results afterward to limit their own spending and influence voluntarily. When pigs fly. **Rep. Frank G. Lasee**

To receive Representative Lasee's Weekly Newsletter/Notes,
Email Laseenotes@Yahoo.Com

December Meeting Notes.

Monthly Brown County Taxpayers meeting held Dec., 20, 2007 at Titledown Brewing.

Rich Carlstedt gave an update on the Green Bay School District Enrollment Task Force. The Task Force has agreed upon a methodology for projecting future enrollment numbers for the district. Next, the Task Force is addressing the issue of school capacities. At a meeting this afternoon (Dec. 20), District personnel will present their methodology for assessing high school building capacities.

A key variable in school building capacity analysis is the utilization rate for classrooms, the percentage of time the classrooms in a building are scheduled for classes. Projected utilization rates for District high school buildings can range from 80 per cent to 87.5 percent. Higher classroom utilization rates will reduce the need for additional building construction. An alternative methodology to calculate school building capacities uses a square footage per student approach.

The District's low maintenance expenditures are a matter of concern. Some states require that 7.5 percent of school budgets must be for maintenance and repairs. The Green Bay School District is well below the 7.5 percent budgeted level for repairs and maintenance. Items over \$1 million are bonded for. There are concerns that some teaching equipment is being included in bonding issues and financed over 20 years.

The need for four-year old kindergarten was discussed. In the last Green Bay School District budget, teaching positions were reduced by 24.5 FTE's and support staff numbers were reduced by 20 FTE's. In light of this, the Board of Education's approval for the addition of four-year-old kindergarten classes for all four-year-old children in the District appears to be debatable. A member reported that the initial recommendation to the Board was to provide four-year-old kindergarten for about twenty-five especially needy children. Why the Board decided to add four-year-old kindergarten classes district-wide in a tight budget year deserves a lucid public explanation.

Preparation of a questionnaire for Brown County Board candidates was discussed. Questions that will differentiate the candidates' positions on spending and taxing issues should be sent to Jim Frink at 336-6410.

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for Jan. 17, 2007, at Titledown Brewing. This and future meetings will be held in the "Frost" room which seems better suited for our purposes. Details on the back cover of this TAX TIMES. **Dave Nelson-Secretary**

National Debt Update. On January 1, 2008, the Debt stood at \$9,159,499,830,129.62, which is only about five billion more than last month. However, just read an article that said the government owes about \$45 trillion more that in will take in during the next 75 years for Medicare, Social Security and other programs. Free health insurance anyone?

"Do you ever get the idea that at this point Washington is run by two rival gangs that have a great deal in common with each other, including an essential lack of interest in the well being of the turf on which the fight?" . . . **Peggy Noonan**

State Sales Tax Receipts Lagging.

The recently approved state budget assumed sales tax receipts of about \$4.2 billion to help fund the states spending requirements. This was assuming a normal increase of about 4-5% per year. However, during 2006, while corporate income taxes grew by 14.1% and individual income taxes grew 7% sales taxes grew less than 1%.

Since it's beginning in 1962 as a "3% temporary tax" on luxury items, the sales tax now provides about a third the states general fund revenue. This years budget anticipated an increase of \$200 Million. A shortfall of this amount that will have to come from somewhere else. (Or even be forced to cut spending.)

The state offers several excuses for this shortfall. Primarily the slow housing market has reduced the demand for household furnishing, and that competition from the internet on which sales tax is not submitted is taking its toll. While their may be some validity to this, their may be other factors involved.

The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX) in their article, "*The incredible shrinking sales tax*" reports of a study by the University of Tennessee estimating Wisconsin loses between \$365 and \$572 million in sales tax each year due to internet sales. Even if this number was somewhere in between, say \$465 million, it would represent a loss of business to Wisconsin retailers of \$9.3 Billion. (*465 Million x \$20. It takes a \$20 sale to produce \$1 in tax.*) While we acknowledge some businesses are more susceptible to internet competition that others, if Wisconsin business was truly losing \$9 Billion a year due to the internet you would truly hear some complaining in Madison..

The Wistax article uses other data provided by the state which raise questions. For example if personal and corporate income taxes were up 7 and 14%, it would be logical that taxable sales would have been up accordingly. That depends on the economy and where people spend their money. Just about everything costs a lot more, and a lot of things like groceries, housing, gasoline, property taxes and whatever take their share of personal income but are not subject to sales taxes.

The report also lists the top of

categories of sales tax producers as tallied by the state. For example, from 2005 to 2006 sales taxes from the sales of automobiles showed a 4.8% decline. There supposedly no way you can buy an auto on the internet and register it is Wisconsin without paying sales tax. Food and beverage stores show a 10% reduction in sales tax. Do we now buy groceries over the internet? Utilities and fuel showed an 18.3% reduction in reported taxes. This may be due to milder weather or people conserving energy but perhaps the state should check with the utility companies.

The point is that some of the problem could be due to economic conditions in the state caused by any number of reasons, or by the way the DOR keeps track of things. We understand they have had problems with their software.

In the meantime, there have been many solutions offered for the shortage of revenue. Having each state try to collect internet sales from sellers is often suggested but has not been supported. Problem is that sellers would have to deal with literally thousands of sets of laws for counties, cities, various exemptions and the like. In turn, states would have to deal with virtually every mail order retailer in the country.. A simplified national system has been suggested but there are too many variables involved at this time.

Here in Wisconsin, it has been suggested we simply raise the tax to 6%, as other rates already are this high and higher. They forget are income, property, cigarette and other excise taxes are already among the highest in the country while our ability to pay is well below average.

A study done in 2006 by the legislature and the Wisconsin Counties Assn. estimated the state could take in \$3.9 billion per year by taxing items now exempt such as advertising, legal services, personal services, consulting services, accounting and other items now exempt. The idea has not been popular except in Madison.

One item that is already in the laws is paying any sales taxes due on your income tax return as a *Use Tax*. Space is already provided but this provision is ignored but is probably ignored by filers 99.9%. Whether it would make any difference, the state seems to make very little effort to advertise this provision;

Jim Frink – BCTA

BCTA To Send Questionnaire To City Council And County Board Candidates.

As we have done for the past several elections, the Brown County Taxpayers Associations will send brief questionnaires to candidates for election of reelection to the Green Bay City Council and Brown County Board of Supervisors.

Our concern is that representatives of the people be prudent with taxpayers money in their decisions.

We are appreciative for all who step forward to run for these important jobs and will welcome any candidates for public office to attend our upcoming meetings as listed on the back page of this *TAX TIMES* and be recognized.

BCTA 2008 Taxpayer Survey Being Prepared.

For the past several years we have sent our membership a survey to help determine their consensus on various current issues and determine what areas we should focus our attention on during the coming year.

This will be included in the Feb. *TAX TIMES*, and we hope that everyone will take the time to complete and return it promptly so the results can be compiled.

If you have any areas or questions you would like to see included just send an E-Mail to BCTA@Execpc.com., or call Jim Frink @ 336-6410.

Slight Change in Meeting Venue.

Our December 20, monthly meeting was held in the "Frost" room at Titledown Brewing,

After some discussion, it was determined that this would be a better site for our meeting insofar as the acoustics were better and not necessary to climb the stairs. It will be arranged to accommodate a larger attendance.

"Nothing brings our the lower traits of human nature like office seeking."

. . . **Rutherford B. Hayes**

"A free society is one where it is safe to be unpopular." . . . **Adlai Stephenson**

Ending Raids on Segregated Funds.

Since coming to Madison as a State Representative, one thing that has always bothered me is the practice of raiding segregated funds to pay for other items unrelated to the original purpose or intent of the fund. An example of a segregated fund is the money we pay annually to "Registration Fee Trust" for our license plate renewals. The money is set aside in a trust so that it can only be used for the purpose of the fund: state transportation expenses. At least that's how it is supposed to work.

One of the most well-known raids occurred with the 2005-2007 budget. Governor Doyle used his Frankenstein Veto pen (more on that later) to raid \$427 million from the transportation fund to pay for other things unrelated to transportation. At the time, the Secretary of Transportation stated that the raid would have no effect on the stability of the fund or the timing of planned road projects. As a former business owner, this sounded like nonsense. That's why I wasn't surprised when, several months later, the Secretary drastically changed his story and told the legislature that there was a massive deficit in the transportation fund which required fee hikes and project delays.

We have always fought against these raids because the belief was it is fiscally unsound policy. Robbing Peter to pay Paul to fill a hole in the state budget is merely a temporary fix. Not only does it pass the problem onto the next budget, but it can also worsen the problem in the long run. Furthermore, citizens pay their hard-earned money into these funds expecting that their dollars will be used for the intended purposes. Raiding these funds is a violation of the public trust.

I am pleased to tell you about Assembly Joint Resolution 34. I co-sponsored this bill which would create a constitutional amendment prohibiting the practice of raiding segregated funds to pay for items unrelated to the purpose of the fund. This legislation passed the Assembly with a strong bi-partisan vote of 91-6.

AJR 34 now moves to the Senate for consideration. However, all constitutional amendments have to pass the legislature in two consecutive sessions before going to the public for statewide approval.

Slaying the Frankenstein Veto

Fate rests with the voters on the April 1, 2008 ballot. Much has been written about Governor Doyle's use of the Frankenstein Veto.

You may recall that in the 2005-2007 budget, Governor Jim Doyle used his veto pen to erase 752 individual words, letters, and numbers over a couple of pages of text having to do with state legal services. He left behind a sprinkling of over 30 words and numbers transferring \$427 million from the segregated transportation fund into the general fund and giving the Secretary of Administration (an unelected political appointee of the Governor) the power to spend that money at his own discretion. Also, for the first time in state history, the veto was used to increase state government spending. This proposed constitutional amendment was introduced early in January in the hope of stopping Governor Doyle from using the Frankenstein veto again when considering the 2007-09 state budget.

The leadership of Senate intentionally delayed the vote in the Senate until after the budget was passed so that the Govern-

nor could retain the power for one more budget. Sure enough, when the bi-partisan compromise budget landed on his desk, Governor Doyle used his Frankenstein Veto pen to weaken the Property Tax Freeze, creatively increasing the levy limit from 2% to 3.86% which translates into an additional \$41.4 million in property taxes. .

I'm pleased to report that the Senate, after months of delay, finally voted unanimously this week in support of a constitutional amendment to slay this ugly beast. Now all that remains is for you, the voting public, to give the final approval in a statewide referendum. When the legislature reconvenes in January, the Assembly will agree to the Senate's timeline to have the measure appear on the April 1, 2008 ballot.

Governing is about checks and balances. The constitution gives the legislature the power to write laws and spend money and the governor the power to approve or reject those proposals. No single elected official should have the ability to re-write laws, increase taxes, or change spending priorities without any oversight.

I hope you will join me on April 1, 2008 to slay the Frankenstein Veto. Doing so will ensure adherence to the democratic principle of "separation of powers" and restore integrity and accountability to the Governor's office. This good government reform is long overdue. **Representative Karl VanRoy**

SUPPORT THE BCTA

"Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government."
New Members are Always Welcome.

Call 336-6410

**Write us at P. O. Box 684
or visit our website**

**www.BCTAxpayers.Org
for Details.**

Have a voice in how your tax dollars are spent

"Realize that the doctor's fight against socialized medicine is your fight. You can't socialize the doctors without socializing the patients." . . . **Ronald Reagan**

"To define democracy in one word, we must use the word "cooperation." . . . **Dwight D. Eisenhower**

"Don't interfere with anything In the Constitution. That must be maintained, for it is the only safeguard of our liberties." . . . **Abraham Lincoln**

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.BCTAxpayers.Org

EMail, BCTA@ExecPc.Com

Things That Make Us Wonder.

The City and County budgets for 2008 have been approved and property tax statements sent to pay the bill. We appreciate the factors involved in deciding which items to maintain and which to eliminate in order to please as many people as possible. One controversial item was reducing the K-9 police dogs. We realize this is an expensive to maintain. As far as the dogs themselves are concerned, they don't receive overtime pay, mileage expense, health insurance or retirement benefits. Perhaps we should hire more dogs.

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Wouldn't it be nice if the people who mail your tax bills would devise a form that didn't take five minutes to open and be a little bit easier to decipher. A return envelope like everyone else who sends a bill would be nice also. We heard of one party who received a parking ticket because he didn't anticipate the long line when he paid his taxes in person.

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First the Green Bay City Council gains state-wide attention on their endless debates on what to do with placing released sex offenders back in the community and withholding business licenses from those found to hire illegal aliens. Then we had the ongoing problem with establishing homeless shelters. Next the fuss over displaying religious symbols on City property.

One common thread is that few of these issues carry a major tax implication regardless of their outcome, but they certainly generate a lot of emotion and publicity for the city. We are fortunate that in the meantime the council was able to approve a budget for the coming year. In view of the increases in spending and taxes raised to pay the bill, perhaps it is unfortunate there wasn't more public outcry on this issue.

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Considering all of the valuable time spent by the City Council on the Christmas display and other issues, during recent months perhaps it

is too bad there is not a more simple way to settle such differences of opinion - such as a binding referendum. Let the voters decide when the council can't do the job. At least with a referendum, one way or the other the majority vote is usually accepted as the will of the people and accepted as such by opponents. Not by a noisy minority trying to wag a dog by its tail.

It is disturbing that much of the opposition, including law suits, came from activists from out of the Green Bay area. Also the media which often ignores what happens at city council meetings made sure this story was well covered. To their credit Mayor Schmitt and council president Fradette have agreed to pay costs and legal fees as they arise.

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On the budgets, it seems the previously mentioned controversies regarding sex offenders, homeless shelters and holiday decorations brought more public attention than next years budget hearings and their accompanying tax increases. At least the press and TV news presented it that way.

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The use of compact fluorescent light bulbs is being strongly encouraged and possibly will become mandatory in the future. The need to save energy sources and protect the environment are given as reasons.

It would seem that assuming we all agree to save energy, and it is really, really, really important (It is), the government should ask the energy suppliers to go through their records and identify the residential, municipal and commercial users who by their monthly usage seem to be consuming more than their share of energy which is so important to all of us. Ask them to cut their usage by 10-25% accordingly. Somehow it just doesn't seem equitable for all of us to switch to something which may save us a few dollars when are witness to massive wastes of energy in stores, industry and sports events.

Two other concerns are that when we have had mild winters or cool summers lowering energy use-

age, the utilities have used that as an excuse to increase their rates due to lower profits. Al so, we have heard the majority of the compact fluorescent bulbs are produced in China, which makes us dependent upon them as our source of light bulbs.

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The total amount of delinquent taxes due the Wis. Dept. of Revenue has been estimated to be at least \$300 million. In 2006 the Dept. began posting those who owed \$25m or more on the internet, and this program has been somewhat successful as a collection tool. Starting In January, names, addresses, and type of tax for those owing only \$5,000 or more will be posted and publicized. This will add about 14,000 names to the list.

While this may cause some embarrassment and errors, collecting due taxes is more palatable than raising everyone else's taxes to feed the demands of government.

Normally, one doesn't owe taxes unless they make sufficient income to have a liability, and the observation is that delinquents have had ample time and every opportunity to rectify the situation.

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We always appreciate whatever efforts the state makes in reducing their payroll and becoming more efficient. That is how private industry survives when conditions dictate.

However we wonder if its announced closing of 19 of their 26 field offices will truly be cost effective. Their goal is to cut 200 employees.

Assume the average person does desire to pay taxes due. Complying with the massive regulations imposed by the DOR and legislature can be a challenge that many accountants have trouble with. Local offices able to offer assistance and assist with delinquency problems should be able to effectively increase the cash flow for the state. Unfortunately in recent years they have grown rather aloof, perhaps forgetting that it is not always easy for well-meaning taxpayers to have to deal directly with someone in Madison.

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A recent article in the Journal-Sentinel reported that during the last fiscal year, employees of the Dept. of Corrections were paid \$36.3 Million in overtime pay. That's a lot of money.

Staffing cuts to cut expenses and more prisoners due to changes in sentencing laws were blamed. One question is would it be more practical to hire more personal and reduce the overtime? Another possibility is that overtime is being used as a benefit at taxpayers expense.

Whatever the cause it would seem that when more prisons are built and staffed a better balance between what is necessary for society and what taxpayers can afford should be set.

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It seems just about every county in the state has a need for increased jail capacity. Housing prisoners has become a big business. Nearby Outagamie and Winnebago Counties both need more jail capacity and have considered the possibility of a joint facility between the two. Apparently state law requires each county to have its own jail but they can rent space to other counties or lodge their prisoners.

This is not exactly what the supervisors of the two counties had in mind but they are still working on plans.

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The question of illegal immigration has become somewhat of a political issue in that no one want to talk about it or offer solutions.

A Wisconsin Policy Research Institute poll indicates 76% of Wisconsin residents overwhelmingly oppose issuing them Wisconsin drivers licenses (87% in Green Bay) and 86% oppose discounted tuition for illegal immigrants at State Universities.

This seems to be a problem them won't go away by itself but one consensus seems to be there are laws established regarding immigration and citizenship and they should be strictly enforced.

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Perhaps similar to what Green Bay was attempting in controlling illegal immigration by going after employers, the federal government announced a clampdown on compa-

nies that hire illegal workers. Nationwide fewer than 100 owners or hiring officials were arrested for violations during 2007. Any other suggestions?

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The cost and availability of health care are concerns to all of us, whether we are working, retired, have a good health plan or can afford a plan. We must be aware that any government supported plan also carries a great deal of uncertainty, regardless of good it may sound.

A recent badger poll (of only 507 state residents) concluded that 51% of Wisconsin residents supported a proposed state run plan. The poll didn't disclose the specific wording of the questions asked, or the demographics of the respondents. The article did state their was less enthusiasm when the size of the tax hike to finance the plan was mentioned.

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The State of Wisconsin no longer releases information to the public regarding real estate transactions citing privacy concerns. Now if they would just stop selling all the other information they have like motor vehicle records, hunting licenses, professional licenses, etc., we could trust them

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It is strange that an individual is only allowed to make a \$5,000 political donation, and that political donations are no longer tax deductible. However, if an organization is qualified as being tax exempt, you can donate most any amount to them you can afford and take credit on your income tax return.

A recent article in the Washington Post notes that the IRS is getting wise to the fact that many non-profits are using the money donated to them for political purposes. Support of causes candidates and legislation helpful to their agenda. Many of these groups are formed for the purpose of political activism but are eligible for non-profit status due to lenient qualification standards.

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As of January 1, the new \$1 a pack cigarette tax went into effect. It has been touted as a way to pro-

vide funding for anti-smoking publicity and treatment, and is anticipated to take in about \$300 Million per year in revenue. However only about \$30 Million has been ear-marked for anti-smoking education which makes us wonder, was the real concern about discouraging smoking or revenue for the state budget?

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There are always ways for a community to raise money if they just watch what other cities are doing.

For example, an article in the New York Times claims that the City of Detroit is proposing the sale of about 90 of their cities parks to private individuals. While the parks are mostly small and expensive to maintain, they do provide green space in otherwise blighted neighborhoods.

The sale would net about \$8.1 Million dollars which the city would probably spend in the flash of an eye. What next? Naming rights for city hall?

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While casino gambling in Wisconsin has proved a popular pastime for many people, much is said about the winners but little is ever publicized about the losers.

A recent article in the Janesville Gazette, where a new casino is being considered claims that calls to the Green Bay based Council on Problem Gambling have increased 168 percent during the past 10 years. The average amount of annual debt of those having problems has increased 89 percent from \$22,699 to \$42,918.

While casino gambling is a factor, scratch tickets, Powerball, internet and sports gambling are also popular. It is noted that gambling is prevalent on college and even high school campuses. More people are participating due to TV advertising and availability of gambling sources. The article stated that for 97% of the population gambling is not a problem but the other 3% will gamble if they can afford it or not.

When people go on welfare as a result of their gambling addiction it does becomes a taxpayer problem.

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The state's efforts to install a computer based voter registration system is still in the works, and is now esti-

mated to cost about \$21.5 million when completed. Whatever problems that have arisen with the software company contracted to install the system have not been disclosed but the intent was to be able to verify a voters residence and legal status when voting. It would seem that even if the system did work it would require more expensive upkeep than systems presently in use. In addition, the database required included information such as a drivers license number not presently required.

It would seem this information would be particularly useful to political parties planning their strategy for coming elections. Perhaps more information than some people care having disclosed.

If they ever get the system to work lets hope the result is to encourage rather than discourage people to vote, and the taxpayer money being used to set it up isn't being used to control elections or further invade our privacy.

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Including the voter registration software problem, the Wisconsin State Journal estimates the state has spent about \$180 million in recent years on troubled computer projects.

This includes an increase of \$31.9 million on a system to track Medicaid programs. The figure also includes a faulty Dept. of Revenue system to track sales tax remittances and a payroll system for state employees that hasn't worked properly. Even though some of these expenses were reimbursed by the Federal govt. the money still comes from the same place. You and me.

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Leave it to Madison to solve our problems. An article in the Wisconsin State Journal reports that a Madison alderman concerned that so much valuable land space for offices and shopping centers was used for parking space has proposed a limit on how much parking could be allowed. Something like allowing 4 spaces for each 1,000 sq. ft. of office or retail space. Most developments allow 6 to 8 parking spaces. He didn't offer any solutions for all of the people driving around looking for a place to park or the gas wasted doing so.

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State Senator Hansen of Green Bay has offered a proposal re-

quiring publicly traded companies to disclose the strategies they use to lower their income tax liabilities. He claims this was not intended to raise their taxes but to enact reforms to the tax laws.

While such disclosure could be helpful in tracking corporations from other states with operations in Wisconsin but somehow avoid paying taxes to the state it could create another level of bureaucracy with all of its roadblocks.

The Dept. of Revenue already has the tools to audit corporations for compliance with Wisconsin Income Tax laws. It is a matter of enforcement without creating more reasons for business to locate elsewhere.

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There is a lot of talk about Congressional earmarks and the cost to all of us. These are generally items added to the Federal Budget as amendments after everything else is in place. This year there was a total of 8,983 items identified as earmarks with a price tag of \$7.4 Billion.

Problem is, while our representatives complain about the money their colleagues are spending, they get better results for bringing federal money for this project or that to the folks back home.

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An article in the Dec. 18, Press-Gazette concerned a \$4 million shortfall in the Green Bay School District budget. We appreciate that the schools portion of our property tax bills showed little increase for 2007 and that the state budget will always present uncertainties. As taxpayers large increases presenting an undue burden to property owners are our primary concern.

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Campaign finance reform is a subject we will probably not hear much about again until after this years election. Those with the money are reluctant to share the wealth.

One proposal that has gained some attention is public financing of State Supreme Court races. While this should be strictly non-partisan unfortunately justices are sometimes able to interpret laws to suit whatever group puts them in office.

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The final item which makes us wonder is how a couple hundred thousand people in Iowa can set a precedent for the rest of the country as to who our next president may be. There is a lot of time left between now and November.

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."

"If you think health care is expensive now, wait until you find what it costs when it is free." . . . **P. J. O'Rourke**

"The right to be heard does not automatically include the right to be taken seriously." , , **Hubert Humphrey**

"To me, party platforms are contracts with the people." . . **Harry S. Truman**

Articles and views appearing in the "TAX TIMES" do not necessarily represent the official position of the Brown County Taxpayers Association. We want to encourage discussion and input on current issues of taxpayer interest and invite your comments or articles suitable for future "TAX TIMES." Please send them to the BCTA, P. O. Box 684, Green Bay, WI 54305-0684, or call Jim Frink at 336-6410. E-Mail Frink@ExecPC.Com.

The TAX TIMES

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

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The TAX TIMES - January, 2008

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

**Thursday - January 17, 2008. BCTA Monthly Meeting,. 12:00 Noon
TITLETOWN BREWING Co. "FROST" Room**
Note: Effective this meeting, we will meet in the first floor
"Frost" Room off of the first floor dining room. We believe
this room will be more satisfactory for our meetings and invite
all members and interested parties to attend.
Program – 2008 Officers, Current Business.
**CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE ARE CORDIALLY
INVITED TO ATTEND AND BE RECOGNIZED.**

Tuesday - February 19, 2008, Local primary elections.

**Thursday - February 21, 2008, Monthly BCTA Meeting, 12:00
TITLETOWN BREWING Co. "FROST" Room**

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.

JANUARY, 2008



"Politicians gave us the idea that
the things we could not afford indi-
vidually we could somehow afford
collectively through the magic of
government." . . . Thomas Sowell

"There is no Democratic or Re-
publican way of cleaning the
streets." . . . Fiorello LaGuardia

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

"There is no such thing as a non-
political speech by a politician.:
. . . Richard Nixon