

Heroes of 2010.

"We don't need another hero. We don't need to know the way home. All we want is life beyond Thunderdome." – Tina Turner

Ah, Tina, how wrong you are. We DO need heroes, real heroes, not the sin-eaters we've been sending in to do the job we lack the guts to do. Observe the seemingly fiscal Jeff Woods who've been driving state government drunk on taxpayer IOUs, all while we the people maxed credit card after credit card and used our homes for ATMs. Essentially, we are over that; the recession has shocked us out of economic arrest. Our hearts are beating again, our savings rate approaches 5%, hopefully on its way to a safe, sensible 8-10%. We need our lawmakers to be fiscal heroes who begin put government spending on a little diet of savings.

Where will we find these heroes? Not on Pandora with the cast of Avatar, or at 221B Baker Street with Sherlock Holmes, or in the sagacious 'Tweets' of Newt Gingrich, who picked Dede Scozzafava - New York's 23rd CD – not because she had fiscal chops but because she said she was a Republican. This left the real conservatives to back Doug Hoffman, who dropped his Republican tag for the Conservative flag, and lost to a spend-your-gramma's pension Democrat, adding yet another socialist to the Obama regime.

My heroes, OUR heroes, will begin to dismantle the fiscal racks built for our children and grandchildren; they will burn the yokes intended to harness us and our progeny to government slavery. We don't need schools with 4 vice principals, we need schools with four principles, yet not the 4 R's of yore. Foremost, we must see teacher loyalty to student learning, not loyalty to union limits on their salaries and creativity. This change in loyalty coupled with scientific, mathematical skills, and coalesced in a measurable comprehension and expression of these skills will truly be "for the kids." And yes, I believe the disciplines of music and the classical arts must be included, however the 'just do what you feel' need not, apply here.

Our new heroes will release us from our tax-free bonds – begged to pay WEAC's ever-increasing salaries and benefits. Our heroes will take a page from New Zealand, which found itself buried in bureaucracy and a mountain of debt. Yet after months of acrimonious debate, New Zealander's saw the Truth, liposuctioned off 40% of Government positions and programs, to become one of the world's most successful economies. Yes, there was pain, the pain of creative destruction. Remember, Governments only hinders creation of successful businesses or products we can make and sell. American Business works best when Government regulates least and eschews the all-you-can-tax buffets. It's always worked and our heroes must repeat and repeat the small-government message. I believe the largest part of this message will include tax reform of consequence, and the squeal will be deafening.

We can live without the perks that allow former Speaker Denny Hastert to collect \$44,000 a month in personal expenses if the costs are not related to his 7-figure lobbying pursuits. Oh, please....! We can send political aristocrat, Speaker Nancy Pelosi back to California – not aboard her \$480,000-a-month Gulfstream III C-32, refueled in flight, each and every weekend. Remember, we can ship her home not for the weekend, but forever! And we can return all her aiders and bribed abettors- from the bring-home-the-bacon maestros like David Obey to the two-bit porkers like Steve Kagen -back to civilian employment, to see life through our eyes, to walk a mile in our shoes, into life beyond the Thunderdome.

And We The People will be heroes – Tea party heroes, voters contributing time, energy and money to send lawmaker heroes to the Thunderdome, to restore life beyond. These folks are just ordinary people trying to accomplish something extraordinary. We don't really need another hero, but we must follow the advice of Mohatma Ghandi: Be the change you want to see. And we will have, not one, but 300 million heroes.

Richard Parins — President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
In our 25th Year of Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government.

The System is Alive and Well.

Like it or not, our Federal and State Governments are playing a much bigger role in controlling our lives. Hundreds of books and articles have been written in attempts to itemize and examine some of the forces involved, and I would like to make a few simple observations.

The way it was, (or seemed to be).

If my recollection is even a little bit correct, it was not too many years ago our elected officials in Madison and Washington, whether you voted for them or not, at least had the interests of the American public as taxpayers at heart when they debated and voted on legislation.

We had Democrats and Republicans and a few independents, each with their own platforms and agendas and ideas of what their ideal world would be like. They campaigned for their jobs promising to vote for this or that proposal, but you seldom heard of increasing taxes or vastly increasing the size of government. Legislation was proposed and moved through the process strictly on its merits, and within the restrictions established by our State and National Constitutions. Voting could be on party lines but with conscientious thought as to what would benefit their constituents and what they were willing to pay for. Looking back, things seemed to run fairly smoothly through most of our national and state administrations. That's the way the system worked and it worked well.

True, there were national crisis's that called for extraordinary and immediate attention. Often used as an example of executive power that exceeded traditional limits is the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt starting in 1933. Unemployment was 25%, our banks were failing, blame was being placed on the previous administration and people were expecting if not demanding help from the government.

His administration moved to propose and enact a cornucopia of proposals including Social Security and the Federal Unemployment Compensation Act. Succeeding administrations have constantly updated these benefits but always after due debate and procedure. The system still worked to the satisfaction of the majority. Elected officials were still more concerned with their constituents than their parties power agenda.

The System Changes.

Somewhere along the line the system made a drastic change from elected officials who were basically frugal and representing the people to a group dominated by three words; *greed, money, and power*. The words are interchangeable.

No doubt politicians exchanging votes with each other has always been an accepted practice. You vote for my bill and I will vote for yours. Perhaps one reason our statute books are loaded with trivial laws. In recent administrations, and with our casual regard for the National Debt and money in general, this practice has been refined to include spending the governments money on wasteful and unnecessary projects. It's called "earmark" or "Pork Barrel" spending and has gone completely out of control in recent years. Every Congressman and Senator can submit a list of projects the folks back home want and they know they will be approved by his or her colleagues. The party with the most power spends the most.

Unfortunately, with the way the system works today, these pork barrel expenditures of public money may not necessarily be so much for the public as they are for the big money that puts the legislators in office. It is no accident that this or that industry receives a grant, or a government contract, or that this or that contractor gets a lucrative public works project. Our own state budget was loaded with, or more accurately wrapped around provisions to enrich the legal profession, who were the largest contributors of funds to our governor and members of the state legislature. There seems to be little question that the money that puts our elected officials in office is the

money that drives much of their legislation.

Congress just approved the 2009 "Omnibus" bill providing spending for the 2010 fiscal year. Included are 5,224 "earmarks" with an estimated cost to taxpayers of \$1 Trillion. This despite promises by President Obama to reduce earmark spending levels to the 1994 level. These are in addition to the recent federal bailouts and economic incentive programs which will add about \$2 Trillion to the National Debt. When FDR took office, the National Debt was a little over \$20 Billion and WW1 was almost paid for. It is now about 600 times that amount at \$12+ Trillion and increasing at the rate of about \$20 Billion each week. Nobody seems to care.

The System That Works Now.

Despite a huge National Debt and a faltering economy the top item on President Obama's agenda has been a "Health Care Overhaul." Few would question that our health care system could use some adjustments, but is a complete overhaul of the system at this time the answer?

Nonetheless Congress, despite opposition from various interests such as insurance companies, pharmaceutical suppliers, hospital and professional associations who were concerned about what such a plan would mean put health care on the fast track. They started with a 2,000+ page document prepared by a committee that is doubtful anyone really took the time to read and understand. While very few specifics were made public the media did their job of creating hope for positive and beneficial results. Meetings were behind closed doors with little bipartisan input. The first problem was probably convincing the various interest groups to sign on.

This is where power and money come to play. Taking care of all of the interests profiting from a national health plan was one step. Campaign contributions could also be a factor. Next all of the various interests using health care services had to be addressed. The uninsured, those with conditions not covered by present private plans, pro-choice advocates and many others. These all added to the cost and complexity to the plan.

Health care reform was put on the fast track for passage by the House and Senate, even though sufficient votes for passage was not assured. No problem – reluctant voters were won over by making modifications to the plan to gain their votes, or in several cases promising expensive financial aid packages to various states in order to secure votes. Despite the fact the ultimate cost of a health care plan or how it will be paid is undetermined, approval to proceed was passed by both the House and Senate immediately after the final vote necessary for passage. was obtained. They must now compromise on a final version.

Closed door sessions, unilateral decisions, bribery with taxpayers money, being coerced to vote on party lines, ignoring public opinion, you name it. That's the system that's alive and well today and it somehow stinks.

We are all to blame.

While we can be critical of the way Washington does business and throws our money around, we also have our hand out for any aid they send our way. Wisconsin is at the bottom for federal return of tax dollars, and our representatives point with pride for every gift they give us. After all, an election year is coming up. In addition Governor Doyle has skillfully transferred various Federal aid and job creation funds to the state treasury, with few tangible signs of accomplishment.

On the local front, it was announced by Congressman Kagen that the Omnibus Bill provides Green Bay with \$1.1 million for new buses, \$300,000 for the library, \$600,000 for the YMCA and \$910,000 for St. Norbert College. All worthy causes and filling a community need. Trouble is every town in the country had a wish list that their local representative in Washington took care of, and it all goes to the balance due on the National Debt. Even health care. **Jim Frink - BCTA**

Health care IS NOT FREE.

Will the left ever figure that out?

These people are on a different planet. I was astounded by a piece in *OpenLeft*, complaining about Americans having to buy their own health insurance. And with their own money, no less! I kid you not.

I said it before, and I feel the need to repeat it: the public does not yet understand that the government is about to order people to buy health insurance, with their own money. Yes, the government is about to order people to cough up hundreds of dollars a month each.

And then this guy goes on to say "... the current health care reform bill orders everyone to buy very expensive insurance from the big corporations, with no public option and no Medicare buy-in. Even if you are in the income range where you receive subsidies you have to pay "only" 9 or 10% of your income, at a time when people are running up credit cards just to get by as it is. That is with the subsidies. Above that level you pay more."

Health care IS NOT FREE. Who do they think is going to pay for it?

And then there's Howard Dean, complaining that I'm not supporting seniors enough.

Real health-care reform is supposed to eliminate discrimination based on preexisting conditions. But the legislation allows insurance companies to charge older Americans up to three times as much as younger Americans, pricing them out of coverage.

Being old is a pre-existing condition? And charging seniors three times as much as a 20-year old is discrimination? What? I'm not taking time to look up the actuarials on that, but the 70 and over population must average health care costs that are about 20 times greater than the costs for a 20-year old - ?? So a premium three times as much is discrimination? What?

No wonder we can't pass health care. Why am I subsidizing someone who is 90 years old? Why is my daughter subsidizing me?

Repeat after me: **Health care IS NOT FREE!**

Jo Egelhoff, FoxPolitics.net

"Spending your way out of a recession is like drinking your way out of alcoholism.: . . . **Jay Leno**

"The essence of Government is power; and power, lodged as it must be in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse." . . . **James Madison**

"I think it is important; though, to recognize if we keep adding to the debt, even in the midst of a recovery, that at some point, people could lose confidence in the U. S. economy in a way that could actually lead to a double-dip recession." . . . **Barack Hussein Obama**

Cap and Trade Next on Obama Agenda?

The Cap and Trade Bill (HR 2454) is projected to be one of the greatest job-killing pieces of legislation of our time. It is based on Keynesian economic theory, which gives government the right to meddle in the free market. Unfortunately, small business will take the brunt of its impact as business doors close and local jobs disappear.

This bill mandates change beyond our wildest nightmares, creating a cycle that will decrease production of goods and decrease consumer spending.. These decreases will in turn cut production further; which will result in fewer jobs, higher unemployment, and more American companies fleeing overseas. These over-reaching mandates will cause energy prices to increase a projected 40% under the following examples provided by the National Federation of Independent Business.

Typical small manufacturing companies are already operating in a lean environment with average costs of \$130,000 monthly on energy (electricity, natural gas, and diesel) for a total of \$1,500,000 spent annually. This figure represents one-third of their total operation costs. HR 2454 is projected to increase operations costs by 40%. The impact on small manufacturers is to cut staff and raise prices.

Government tinkering with the Cap and Trade Bill will have far-reaching consequences for middle class families. It will cost the economy \$161 Billion by 2020, which is \$1,870 for a family of four. As the bureaucracy grows and restrictions grow, that number rises to \$6,800 for a family of four by 2035. [For more details, see the Wall Street Journal, page A12, November 17, 2009.]

The Fallout from the Bailout. Regulating the free market tends to backfire. The political gamesmanship of the bailed out bankers' lobbyists is one such example. After the billion dollar bailouts have stabilized the banks, banker lobbyists now lobby Congressional members with the taxpayer's bail out money. Why? - "for the expressed purpose of preventing bank regulations." [Washington Post. "Bankers making turkeys out of taxpayers," Nov. 25, 2009.]

The bailed out banks were given billions by two Administrations and two sessions in Congress. These banks created their own financial ruin -- due to poor investments and over leveraging their reserves as much as 100 to one. Middle class America, by contrast, received \$13.00 a week in tax breaks ... the equivalent of one Friday night fish fry per week.

It is no longer enough to simply point to the problems we face, or throw good money after bad. We need to contribute constructive ideas for a new chapter in American history. A few of my ideas, "Conservative Strategies for Rebuilding a Free Market Economy," are offered in the shaded box. These ideas, fleshed out in the attached links, can be the starting point for our discussions as we step forward to solve our Nation's problems.

Terri McCormick

(Terri McCormick is a candidate for the 8th Congressional seat.)

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.

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December Meeting Notes.

Terri McCormick Addresses BCTA.

Monthly Brown County Taxpayers Association Meeting held Dec. 17, 2009, at Tiletown Brewing.

Terri McCormick, candidate for the Eighth Congressional District seat presently held by Dr. Steve Kagen, addressed the meeting. She began by explaining that she comes from a military family with a long history of service to our country. Before serving in the Wisconsin State Legislature from 2001 to 2007, she wrote the first charter school proposal in Wisconsin, and started the first charter school association. Her first business was a literacy foundation.

She stated she is a strong believer in term limits, Terri left the state legislature after completing three two-year terms. She believes we must return to being a representative republic. Citing a report that only five percent of legislators' decisions are based upon principle while 47.5 percent are based upon fear, and the remaining 47.5 percent of legislators' decisions are driven by self-interest, she called for citizen legislators to replace career politicians.

As for the economy, Terri noted that the government doesn't grow jobs. She is concerned that Wisconsin is 50 out of 50 in the Dairy Price Index. She believes there is opportunity in education. She said she believes in free market competition, constitutional principles, and the rule of law.

Richard Parins led discussion on reports that the Green Bay School Board is contemplating an \$18 million referendum for the spring election. The proposed referendum would provide \$7 million for technology and \$11 million for maintenance projects. He asked that the Schools committee study the proposal so that the BCTA could be fully informed.

Rich Carlstedt commented that the District has been aware of most of these "urgent" projects since 2006, and had engaged in some of the energy savings in a recent 2.5 million dollar "Energy bond repayment" program. The short payback on some work could have been done earlier but available funds been used elsewhere.

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 21, 2010 at Tiletown Brewing. The scheduled speaker is State Rep. Roger Roth who is a candidate for the 8th District Congressional seat. Details on the last page of this Tax Times.

Dave Nelson – Secretary

"He that goes a borrowing goes a sorrowing."

. . . Benjamin Franklin

"The government solution to any problem is usually at least as bad as the problem."

. . . Milton Friedman

"\$100 Million is a lot but \$8 Billion is small."

. . . White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs

"Nothing just happens in politics. If something happens you can be sure it was planned that way."

. . . Franklin D. Roosevelt

The \$2.7 billion state deficit no one told you about.

A week before Christmas, an important report appeared on a Wisconsin government website. There were no press releases from Madison politicians. No headline news stories.

Yet no public official, taxpayer, or citizen can afford to ignore the report's bottom line: According to its just-released financial statements, state government closed its 2008-09 books with a \$2.71 billion deficit in its general fund.

To many readers, this might come as a surprise. By law, state government is supposed to balance its budget. On paper, it does. However, for more than a decade, governors and legislators of both parties have "balanced" budgets through use of accounting maneuvers, timing delays, borrowing, and billions in one-time money.

When the state controller, a CPA, prepares the state's official financial statements, he must follow generally accepted accounting principles, or GAAP. That means he must reverse the budget gimmicks and accurately represent the state's true financial condition. When he does this, the budget's black ink turns red.

What does this mean in everyday terms? Suppose you use your credit card to buy a new living room set. You take it home; the kids, their friends, and your pets make active use of it.

Credit card or no credit card, according to the state controller—who must follow accounting rules—you spent money. However, that is not the way the folks under Madison's Capitol dome see it. The living room furniture might be well used, but they don't budget the money until the credit card bill has to be paid.

Now, some state officials who have practiced politics full-time will try to reassure us by saying: "There's no real problem; it's just the recession."

True, this year's deficit is the largest ever reported. But it is the fifth consecutive year that the GAAP shortfall exceeded \$2 billion and the ninth that it has topped \$1 billion. We have not had a recession every year since the late 1990s. This recession didn't really get underway until early 2008.

Even more troubling than the size of the deficit is its trend. Since 1999, the shortfall has grown in every year except one: \$830 million in fiscal 1999, \$1.21 billion in 2000, \$1.48 billion in 2001, \$2.24 billion in 2002, \$1.93 billion in 2004, \$2.12 billion in 2005, \$2.15 billion in 2006, \$2.44 billion in 2007, \$2.50 billion in 2008, and now, \$2.71 billion in 2008-09.

"No need to worry. Other states are in worse shape," career legislators will tell us.

Hmmm. We don't yet know how other states' 2008-09 deficits will compare with our \$2.71 billion hole. But we do know what states reported in 2007-08. Wisconsin had a deficit of \$2.50 billion. Three other states were in the red, according to their statements: California (\$4.17 billion), Illinois (\$3.93 billion), and Maine (\$0.24 billion).

The problem with this comparison is that it ignores the relative size of states. California has 36.8 million people; Illinois, 12.9 million. Wisconsin has only 5.6 million residents. When 2007-08 deficits are compared on a per capita basis, the Badger State had the largest GAAP deficit in the nation (\$445 per person), followed by Illinois (\$305), Maine (\$181), and California (\$113).

Figures like these led the Pew Trusts recently to name Wisconsin one of ten states most in "fiscal peril." The news made headlines around the state. Of the states listed, however, only California, Illinois, and Wisconsin reported GAAP deficits last year. Pew said California "was in a league of its own." Yet it is worth noting that Wisconsin's deficit per capita was four times larger than California's.

Todd A. Berry, President, Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance

Founded in 1932, WISTAX is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization dedicated to teaching and informing Wisconsin citizens, public officials, and the press about our government.

Green Bay Schools consider Spring Referendum.

At the December Green Bay District School Board meeting, it was decided to test the waters for a Referendum of 18.2 Million Dollars. The actual decision to engage in a referendum was put off until either the January or February meeting by the board. This would afford enough time to place the consideration on the Ballot.

As a former member of the "Enrollment Management Task Force" which studied District Student loads, I find it quite disingenuous and alarming to see both Press and District references to this Task Force, as if "we" recommended the referendum.

We most certainly did not. (how could we without a thorough financial audit?)

We also did not create the "list" of projects they refer to ! The district provided a list of projects that they said needed attention, and the EMTF prioritized them, since the District apparently could not do so. (?) But we did not recommend them !

I quote the following from the Task force recommendations : "It is recommended that the Green Bay Area Public School District School Board investigate sources of funding to cover the cost to complete the list of capital improvement projects included in this report over the next 10 years. Potential sources of funding to complete the required improvements may include sequential referenda, use of funds from the General Fund, grant opportunities, private donations, etc., both individually and in combination"

So we now have a school board and Administration who suggest the task force is recommending this list, and who have disregarded the rest of the recommendation made, specifically "use of funds from the General Fund, grant opportunities, private donations, etc.."

The School board has two major functions First: to provide quality education to district citizens Second: to protect the physical assets entrusted in them

The School Board has yet to hold any meetings or public hearings on finding ways to pay for building maintenance, as was suggested by the above EMTF language, or even consider using The General Funds as most districts do. They refuse to schedule or use a set formula like 9 to 13 % of revenue. Unfortunately they are focused on quick fix Bond funds from the taxpayer's pocket as a resource instead of good management.

Lets hope they reconsider their role, and assume the proper responsibilities to the taxpayers and citizens before deciding on this issue.

Rich Carlstedt

National Debt Update.

e entered 2010 with a National Debt of **\$12.144 Trillion**, or an increase of \$105 billion since last month. It is increasing at the rate of about \$3 Billion each day, or about \$10 a day for each and every one of us. Does your pre-tax income increase that much?

Most of this debt is owed to "good friends" of ours like China, Saudi Arabia and Russia. They have shown signs of concern as to the stability of their investment with us. Look what has happened to the thousands of Wisconsin families who have lost their home due to foreclosure. The government warns us of the dangers of credit card debt. As of Jan, 1, consumer credit card debt was about \$873 Billion, or only 14% of the governments debt.

Jim Frink - BCTA

U.S. Senate: 'Naughty or Nice' this Holiday Season?

In the rush to pass the so-called 'healthcare reform bill,' U.S. Senator Ben Nelson, of Nebraska, stamped his feet and held his breath until he extracted his presents from Democratic Senate President Reid: among them, not having to pay for a \$50-\$100 Million dollar increase in Medicaid reimbursement dollars for his state. He was the 60th Democrat to get his stocking stuffed. (*Wisconsin is also several million in the hole with Medicaid expenses. Sen. Kohl and Feingold must have been sleeping when they voted for the "healthcare reform" bill.*)

Parents are used to dealing with children trying these shenanigans; and smart parents seldom give in, even at Christmastime. The hard truth is that if we gave our kids everything they demanded, our family budget would be more broke than last-year's toy behind the couch – you know, the one with batteries that are only made in China.

Each of these presents comes at someone else's expense: the taxpayers. In Senator Nelson's case, none of his Nebraska voters will pay for the substantial cost increases generated by new Medicare patients mandated by this plan. Apparently it is fine for Wisconsin taxpayers to foot the bill as long as Nebraskans are held harmless.

Democratic Senate President Reid would rather be like the parents that give their screaming kids everything they ask for. Here is what the Wall Street Journal reported: "Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said Mr. Nelson didn't get special treatment." "I worked with every Democratic senator" to make changes to the bill, Mr. Reid said. "Ben Nelson was just like the rest of them."

The majority leader added, "If you read the bill ... you'll find a number of states are treated differently from other states. That's what legislation's all about: compromise."

So giving a present to every one of the 60 Democratic Senators is the way that Healthcare funding decisions are being handled in Washington. It is not the way that we used to do business in Wisconsin.

In 2002, we led the Speaker's Taskforce for Local Government Healthcare Partnerships. We used a business model to address runaway Healthcare costs to state and local government. We held a dozen hearings around the State, listening to the people as they identified the reasons for cost spikes. With the help of private-sector talent, we crafted and passed the Competitive Prescription Drug Purchasing Pool (which saved \$25 Million for non-represented state employees alone, in the first year). We recommended the use of internet transparency for healthcare cost bidding, as well as a quality control system of standards where communities can view provider ratings on-line

This approach put free market mechanisms in place to ensure a level playing field for health care competition. Contrast this pork-free plan with the U.S. Senate Christmas-tree bill, and you can see that government can, and must, do better.

So I have a simple solution for all sensible American voters this Holiday season. Think about the permissive parents you see that give in to their petulant children. Compare them to the incumbent politicians in your district and state. Vote out every one of them that can't say no to more spending. In these economic hard times, that is the only way for our family budgets – and our nation – to survive.

We need to stop giving a "Tickle Me Nelson" to every U.S. Senator.

Terri McCormick

Things That Make Us Wonder.

WHAT'S THE BAD NEWS?

The "good news" from Washington is that only 307,000 households were foreclosed upon during November, a whole 8% less than the previous month. Is it possible this remarkable improvement is the result of fewer people left to foreclose upon?

Real good news would be that 307,000 people found jobs last month.

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TO BE PAID WITH BAILOUT FUNDS.

A Dec. 10, news story relates that Pres. Obama is summoning the chiefs of a dozen of the nations largest banks to the White House to urge them to support his efforts to reform financial regulation, and to make more loans to business to help the economy.

Isn't this how we got into the present financial mess in the first place?

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IT'S ALL ON PAPER ANYWAY.

It is reported that Congress is proposing to raise the National Debt limit by \$1.8 Trillion, to about \$14 Trillion, by the end of 2009. This doesn't do anything to reduce the National Debt. It just makes it legal to keep on spending and spending the nations money.

It was also reported that some members of Congress were concerned that exceeding the debt limit could possibly hurt their chances of re-election in 2010.

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DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE.

The Wisconsin Legislature has approved tough drunk driving laws containing much stiffer penalties and the chance of prison time. Sponsors claim costs of enforcement will be paid through increased fines but indications are that this will be insufficient.

Most people will agree with keeping drunk drivers off of the roads. No doubt this will create extra business for attorneys and keep the courts busy.

One problem may be what to do with Legislators, celebrities, and other high profile individuals who manage to get stopped for DUI from time to time. An example is the head of the State Troopers Union who was recently arrested for DUI.

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THE GOLD-PLATED EXPRESS.

Gov. Doyle is pushing plans to build a high-speed rail line between Milwaukee and

Madison, and on to the Twin Cities. Turns out this is all part of an Obama plan to criss-cross the country with trains supposed to go 180 miles per hour. This plan is promoted by a group called the U. S. High speed Rail Association who envision a system similar to what they have in Europe. Perhaps this group forgot this country once had a good rail system but it was allowed to disintegrate, partially because government taxed the railroads while subsidizing highway and airport construction.

So far \$8 Billion in stimulus money has been set aside for studies. How much more taxpayer money could be thrown at this scheme is anybody's guess. Somehow this sounds like it could cost trillions.

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READING, WRITING AND UNION DUES.

Gov. Doyle has signed the bill promoted by labor unions that will require the history of organized be taught in Wisconsin's public schools. He said students would now understand the importance of the labor movement in creating basic workplace rights. What will be removed from curriculums was not disclosed, but WEAC was no doubt delighted.

If the Legislature decides what the state schools should teach, why don't they concentrate on the quality of education we receive for our tax money? In 2007 according to the NEA, Wisconsin ranked 14th nationally in public school expenditures per student. Although their methodology was not fully explained, a survey published in the *U.S. News & World Report* comparing state high schools for the quality of curriculums in preparing students for college placed Wisconsin at No. 44. Between Arkansas and Mississippi.

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LAWYERS WILL GET THEIR SHARE.

The Federal Government has announced it intends to pay \$3.4 Billion to resolve a lawsuit over mismanagement of trust fund accounts held for American Indians tribal lands.

We acknowledge that our native Americans historically have suffered many injustices through the years.

Unfortunately this will come direct from taxpayers pockets rather than from the money they spend at casinos.

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ONE REASON TO GO TO SCHOOL.

The Milwaukee School Board has approved giving free condoms to students,

to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Students would have to talk with a school nurse first.

Perhaps this is necessary in Milwaukee but such diversions may also help explain why their school district has such a poor reputation for scholastic standards.

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IT'S FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

So far one good thing for the United States has emerged from the climate summit held in Copenhagen.

Diplomats from "developing" nations backed by noisy protesters were demanding "hundreds of billions of dollars" from the United States for the decades of American emissions they claim had contributed to global warming.

These arguments were flatly rejected by the top American negotiator. Of course he could be overruled by President Obama who just pledged to "help raise \$100 Billion as aid to poor nations." Guess where this will probably come from.

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GIVING PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT.

Isn't it amazing that the media can find every woman that Tiger Woods had affairs with, complete with photos, messages, etc., but they are unable to locate Pres. Obama's birth certificate or college records.

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READING THE FINE, FINE PRINT.

The *Press-Gazette* (and other papers) regularly print the legal notices furnished by government agencies. We realize this is required by law as a necessary and useful public function at taxpayer expense. It also provides a source of revenue for the local newspapers in the state with which we have no problem.

However, in their efforts to cut costs they use such a small type size that it is difficult to read even with a magnifying glass. There are no bold headings or category classifications to make it easier to navigate. In other words, it seems to be a waste of taxpayers money to comply with another archaic law.

We are sure there are better ways to inform the public while still accommodating the newspapers. How about printing the index of legal notices, or just a transcript in the paper in a fashion one can read and referring to a website if anyone is interested in all the details. Considering most everyone has computer access the information would be available for an unlimited length of time and easily retrieved or printed if necessary.

It would at least be something constructive for the Legislature to work on.

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WISCONSIN'S DIFFERENT TAX LAWS.

Most states impose their own income taxes at varying rates, and most of them use taxable income as reported to the IRS as the same amount of income subject to state taxes; *Except Wisconsin.*

Any individual or business itemizing income and deductions in Wisconsin, after wading through the IRS code must then complete their Wisconsin return which for whatever reason imposes different additions, deductions and allowances on certain items than the Federal Govt.

Recently the IRS made a ruling that as of Jan. 1, individuals could transfer funds from a traditional to a Roth IRA.

While this may or may not be suitable for everyone depending on individual circumstances, it still may be something to consider. However, as of this time Wisconsin is the only state not permitting residents to take advantage of this change even though it would mean tax dollars up front for the state. Shame.

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JOB CREATION OBAMA STYLE.

So far the Presidents job creation initiatives seem to consist of throwing federal money into pork projects, and extending benefits for the unemployed.

Reporting on his so called "Jobs Summit" he proudly proclaimed that he has "spoken with Labor Union Leaders, he has spoken with people from colleges and universities, he has spoken with mayors and other government officials and spoken with bankers" in his efforts to come up with a solution to the unemployment problem. "A shortage of funds is the problem."

One suggestion for him would be to talk with business association groups, local and national chambers of commerce, accountants rather than lawyers, and small business owners. They could probably give him an insight as to what government regulation and taxes mean to their business and offer some constructive suggestions with ideas that might work.

* * * * *

A LITTLE COPENHAGEN SNUFF.

From what we hear on the news, the U.N. sponsored climatology pow-wow in Copenhagen has been more a reincarnation of Woodstock that setting a world accord for climate control.

Virtually every nation in the world was represented along with 100,000 noisy Communist and other disruptive demonstrators, 1,400 prostitutes, and a wide variety of views as to who was to blame and what actions to take.

Also present was a gaggle of world dignitaries who arrived on the 140 private jets parked at the airport and rode around town in the 1,200 limousines brought in for the event. No doubt some of these delegates doubled up in the limousines giving demonstrators an example of their concerns for the environment.

We all realize the necessity of a clean environment. It is also important to preserve our precious resources for the use of future generations. Whether or not anything can be accomplished with actions from this conference remains to be seen. One size does not fit all, but we all must live with our neighbors. Every nation can probably reduce pollutants, but who flinches first may be the problem.

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WOULD A LITTLE SUGAR HELP?

Did you ever receive a bill in the mail more impersonal than your property tax statement? A lot of numbers not always easy to understand, usually a substantial increase over the previous year, no envelope enclosed to make sure you send your check to the right place.

They could at least put words like "please", "we regret the increase", or "thank you" somewhere in the fine print.

* * * * *

WHAT RECESSION?

An article in the *Chicago Tribune* disclosed that WHEDA. The group that handles low interest home loans in Wisconsin had an appreciation party for its 150 employees in Madison costing over \$10,000. Last year they had temporarily suspended operation due to liquidity problems. Cost of the party included \$7,000 to rent a ballroom and \$1,400 for flowers.

The occasion probably served as an opportunity the staff to discuss the high rate of foreclosures and what WHEDA could do to help people.

* * * * *

NATURAL GAS THE SAVIOR?

Citing 100 year reserves in the United States, financier T. Boone Pickens has been lobbying Congress to encourage the use of more natural gas to replace oil.

The motive would be to reduce

our dependence on imported oil and reduce environmental pollution. Great, Mr. Pickens is also in the gas business.

Problems might be that our use of natural gas increases with just about every residence or commercial building that is built. While the reserves of natural gas may be substantial, they are not infinite. Converting petroleum fueled vehicles and users of coal, etc., to natural gas would only accelerate its depletion. If present regulations prevent us from opening new potential oil reserves, would we be able to develop gas reserves? Where will the cost go in the future?

It all sounds good, but the answers may still lie with overall conservation, managing our reserves, and spending some of our economic incentive money which we seem to have so much of on a crash program to develop new sources of energy. Wind power and bio-fuels may be nice but they won't power cars or trucks.

* * * * *

WE MIGHT NEED MORE COWS.

The Agricultural Dept. has announced an agreement with the Dairy industry to reduce greenhouse emissions by 25% by capturing methane gas from manure piles. They claim they have a process to convert cow manure to electricity.

Sounds great but the next problem may be what do our farmers use for fertilizer to grow feed for the cows?

* * * * *

THE TRIAL THAT WASN'T.

It seems that when the Environmental Protection Agency ordered area paper mills to pay for cleaning up the Fox River, the cost was projected at less than \$300 million or so. After many delays, additions to the scope of the project, and determining up the mechanism to do the estimated cost has climbed to \$700 million with a good chance it will exceed a billion.

Two of the primary companies implicated, Appleton Paper and NCR Corp. brought suit in Federal Court seeking some relief from the huge costs facing them. As plans for the trial proceeded, it became obvious the Federal Court in Green Bay was too small for all the attorneys involved so plans were made to move it to Milwaukee. It was anticipated that the trial would last at least three months.

Just before the trial was to begin Fed. Judge Wm. Griesbach threw out the lawsuit for a number of reasons, including the unlikelyhood of a meaningful settlement.



While the Plaintiff's in the trial are still liable for cleanup costs, the real losers are probably the law firms who will lose out on several months of lucrative commissions.

A couple of other developments. There is still a chance that taxpayers will still have to pay a portion of the cleanup costs, and one by one, paper manufacturers are downsizing their operations or moving out of Wisconsin altogether.

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IS WASHINGTON SHARING OUR PAIN?

The Obama Administration has approved a 2% salary increase for Federal employees effective Jan. 1. Members of Congress already received a \$4,700 raise. In the meantime COLA increases for Social Security recipients have been suspended until further notice. The Social Security freeze has been a long time coming in efforts to stabilize the fund, and would help if they didn't keep raiding it for other purposes.

The Federal employee increase sets a poor example considering unemployment and the state of the economy. In the meantime there has been no evidence of the administration reducing its number of employees while state and local governments have reduced workers and salaries extensively due to the economy.

* * * * *

GREAT LAKES CLEANUP IMPORTANT.

Pres. Obama has pledged \$475 Million towards restoring the Great Lakes.

Eventually it will cost much, much more. This is a small amount as far as federal funding is concerned, and no doubt every city between Duluth and Buffalo has a list of projects to address. An example is that it is less than half of what cleaning up our Fox River is expected to cost.

Major problems are water levels and shoreline erosion, water quality, and invasive species. This should rate high on the federal list of priorities considering we drink the stuff every day.

Illinois just spent \$3 Million for poison in one of the nations largest jobs ever designed to remove Asian carp for a lock repair project on the Chicago River.

After they were done, they could only identify one Asian carp floating amongst the estimated 200,000 pounds of dead fish floating in the river. This probably proves they are either immune to poison or it will cost \$3 Million each to kill them.

* * * * *

WHO'S TO BLAME?

One of our biggest Great Lakes concerns has been the level of Lake Michigan, which has effected beaches, boating, and water quality. Through the years blame has been placed on the dry weather, natural cycles and the Chicago River.

However, the likely culprit could be the Corps of Engineers and their tinkering with the St. Clair River between Lakes Huron and Erie. If you look at a map, you will note that Lakes Michigan and Huron are directly connected and are the same elevation above sea level

Normally there is a 6' drop between lakes Huron and Erie which are about 100 miles apart. Natural erosion controls the flow of water, but the Corp decided that extensive dredging was needed to deepen the channels which also increased the flow of water considerably. They claim it's not their fault but draw your own conclusions.

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ETHANOL PRODUCTION COSTLY.

Ethanol producers have fallen on hard times, There is still a demand for their product, in fact the government is considering raising its content in gasoline from 10 to 15%. Problem is the price is tied somewhat to the price of gasoline which is much lower than it was a year ago.

Maybe government should subsidize ethanol even higher.

* * * * *

PROPERTY TAX DELINQUENTS.

The Press-Gazette reported that about \$15 Million of previous years Brown County property taxes was delinquent. This no doubt will no doubt impact the spending budgets of the various jurisdictions involved, and ends up costing all of us more.

Unfortunately this is a situation which could get worse due to the economy and the large number of foreclosures which we have been experiencing.

* * * * *

DOYLE'S RACE TO THE CASH.

Gov. Doyle seems to believe his friends in Washington are the answer to all of the states budget problems. A Dec. 23, *Journal/Sentinel* article reports the state may apply for a \$4.35 Billion share of Fed. "Race to the top funds."

The catch is that schools would have to hire special math and reading teachers and evaluate teachers more often among other things. Doyle claims we would

initiate more cost saving methods in state schools but would lift the school revenue caps which is about the only thing left to protect taxpayers from runaway school costs. As with any plan involving school aids there would be some winners and losers. Some school districts are more frugal with taxpayers money and are less dependent on aid.

So far most plans to control school spending have failed miserably.

* * * * *

DOWNSIDE OF PARKING METERS.

The City of Green Bay reports issuing over \$600,000 in parking meter violations each year. How this compares with parking meter receipts was not disclosed.

They reported the majority of these violations in the vicinity of City Hall and the Courthouse. Assuming some of these are never paid, and there are expenses involved with compliance personnel, meter maintenance we wonder if the meters are worth it.

People visiting the City or County offices never know how much time they will need and being ticketed due to the fact parking is metered does not make things any better. There is very little retail business in the metered area and the meters are probably somewhat responsible.

The question could be, would the downtown area be more profitable for the city if parking was more "user friendly?"

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THE COST OF CLEAN AIR.

We read the opinion that "Wisconsin will benefit from strong clean air regulations." No doubt referring to Gov. Doyle's initiatives in setting environmental standards.

We certainly can't argue with clean air but we do question ridiculous compliance rules that accomplish nothing. Hopefully compromises will be worked out that will be beneficial business and the environment as we proceed through the 21st century.

* * * * *

DO IT IF THE PRICE IS RIGHT.

Rep. Kagen has been disclosed as one ore of the top used of "franked", or taxpayer paid mail in Congress.

We note his mailings also consist of fancy 4-colored artwork and layouts also prepared at taxpayer expense. Recall several years ago Rep. Roth was criticized in the media for his practice of mailing rather plain but informative newsletter to his constituents about what was truly going on in Washington.

* * * * *

EAT IT OR BURN IT?

A Madison newspaper reports that Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk figures there is about 30,000 tons of food waste annually sent to Madison dumps. With modern technology this could be converted to produce energy, and has set aside \$350,000 of Fed. stimulus money to study the idea which they claim would bring in \$4 million a year and provide 45 jobs.

Great idea, if it was workable. Assuming much of this waste is edible leftovers from University dining halls and restaurants, why not come up with a plan for making this available to the poor and homeless we keep hearing so much about during the holiday season? Better than throwing it out.

* * * * *

BUY DIRECT AND SAVE!

The Milwaukee Business Journal reported that a group is working to buy the Northridge shopping mall which has been closed since 2003. They plan to reopen it as the "China Mall of North America," with 200 shops featuring Chinese clerks selling goods brought directly from China.

This plan will probably be welcomed as an economic improvement. One nice feature would be that you would know what you are buying rather than get home and find something you just bought with an established domestic brand name was actually made in China.

* * * * *

BIG BROTHER IS PROTECTING YOU.

Citing the death of 9 children over the past 9 years, the Consumer Protection Agency has ordered the recall of about 50 million Venetian blinds sold in the U.S.

Why don't they count those heavy duty blister packs that probably 2,483,581 people cut themselves on each year while trying to open them a safety hazard?

We agree that blatant safety hazards from any product should not be allowed on the market, but at which point do people have to take responsibility for theirs and their families safety without depending on the government to do it for them?

* * * * *

CASINOS SHARING THE PAIN.

An Indian Gaming Industry report disclosed that tribal casino revenues have increased about 1.5% nationally over 2008.

However, the 25 casinos operated in Wisconsin have shown about a 2% decrease, down to \$1.24 Billion from \$1.26 Billion. The tribes are required to pay 6.5% of

their net winnings to the state. Net winnings are what the casino has left after paying off winners before paying salaries and other operating expenses. The amount wagered or actual percentage of gross profit was not disclosed. Unfortunately money wagered at tribal casinos does not come back as a credit on your property bill statements.

A *Journal-Sentinel* article said the tribes cutting back on hiring and expenses as a result. Presently there are a reported 15,811 slot machines. If revenues continue to fall, no doubt the solution will be to build more casinos with the states blessing.

* * * * *

AT LEAST GET OUT AND VOTE.

This is an important election year, with local elections coming up in the spring and State and Congressional elections scheduled for the fall.

There are a number of qualified candidates already campaigning for state and national posts, but it is discouraging there is such a lack of interest in the local municipal and county levels. We hear this is true all over the state.

In the past, this would indicate complete satisfaction with the incumbents with no reason to want to replace them. This year perhaps the realization that the challenge of satisfying the voters dissatisfied with high taxes and fewer services is a factor. The cost and effort to seek an office every two years could also be discouraging.

In the case of some of our state and national elected officials however, even one year at a time in office can prove to be too much..

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STAND UP AND BE COUNTED.

The Federal Government plans on hiring up to a million "temporary" employees to take the 2010 national census.. With the current population at 308,214,000, that's one counter for every 308 residents.

When all the numbers are in, one result could be that Wisconsin will lose another of its remaining 8 Congressional seats. We already lost one as a result of the last census. Mainly because our population growth has not been as much as other states, and they only have room for so many Congressmen in the Capitol.

There are always a lot of difficult questions to answer during a census. How do you count illegal aliens or "undocumented residents" if you prefer? First you have to find them. Will they be counted or turned

over to authorities? A legislator from Milwaukee is complaining about prison inmates being counted as residents in the cities that have the prisons giving them an unfair advantage as to their number of residents.

If that is an issue how about college towns like Madison, with 30,000 "residents" from all over the country more or less just living there temporarily. What do you do with military personnel or transients? Is there a system assuring people are not counted twice? Everybody has to be somewhere as of a certain time to be counted. Right?

Whatever the reason, a complete and accurate census is important to all of us. Federal aids are often distributed on the basis of population. Business uses demographic data from the census to determine where to locate branches and services,

It can be argued that in some ways we are better off without constant growth. Forever enlarging our schools and other public services, enlarging our highway and other municipal services and losing some of resources to share with others may be progress but does it always leave us better off?

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 current news events. We use reliable, published information and statistics, Some items are unimportant and probably not worth commenting about while others could easily be expanded to full length feature articles worthy of future study and action to protect our interests as taxpayers. We try to cover a wide variety of subjects in limited space and perhaps put a different spin on items from what you read in the papers or see on TV. We acknowledge that our perspective on some items in this column may be contrary to some of our readers. However, one of our purposes is to encourage debate, as we realize there are two sides to every question. Comments or suggestions are welcome to include in this section of the "TAX TIMES."

"In America you can go on the air and kid the politicians and the politicians can go on the air and kid the people." . . . **Groucho Marx**

"I think we have more machinery than is necessary, too many parasites living on the labor of the industrious." . . . **Thomas Jefferson**

The TAX TIMES

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- and more.

The TAX TIMES - January, 2010

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

- Thursday - January 21, 2010. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon**
Titletown Brewing Co., “Frost Room.”
Scheduled Speaker – Rep, Roger Roth., 8th District
Congressional Candidate.
- Tuesday - February 16, 2010. Local primary elections.**
- Thursday - February 18, 2010. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon**
Titletown Brewing Co., “Frost Room.”
Scheduled Speaker – Mark Neumann, Candidate for
Wisconsin Governor.
- Thursday - March, 2010. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon**
Titletown Brewing Co., “Frost Room.”
- Tuesday - April 6, 2010. General Spring Election, Municipal Offices,
School Board and Referendums, County Board.**
BE SURE TO VOTE !

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

Also, all candidates For public office are invited to attend and be recognized.

COST: \$8.00, Payable at meeting. Includes lunch, tax & tip.
Call Jim Frink – 336-6410 for information or to leave message.

January, 2010 

“The American Republic will endure until the day Congress discovers that it can bribe the public with the public’s own money.”

. . . Alexis de Tocqueville

“The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.” . . . Thomas Jefferson

SUPPORT THE BCTA

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

www.BCTaxpayers.Org
for Details.