

Respectful Debate?

Rod Goldhahn, Vice President

Recently, a handful of us had the opportunity to listen to a presentation by David French. Mr. French is a Harvard educated attorney turned author and speaker. He spoke on the decline of free speech and active debate on our college campuses. We've all heard the stories about speakers who don't fit the narrative being shouted down by groups with opposing views, or even had their invitations withdrawn because campus and community security could not guarantee their safety. It is a sad commentary on where we've come in these last several years. It's gone from "I think my position is correct and these are the facts that support it, thanks for listening" to "my position is unquestionably correct and if you don't agree, my friends and I will paint you with vile descriptors and do all we can to squelch your ability to justify your position"!

At the BCTA, we try to encourage the open discussion of ideas and positions, and ask our members to draw their own conclusions. As the election season draws upon us, the robo calls and attack ads will soon be coming. To support the open exchange of ideas and positions, we have always invited any candidates for office who attend any meetings to introduce themselves and provide a brief commentary on their qualifications and key platform positions. In addition, for higher profile offices, we will invite the candidates from both parties to be the main speakers at our meetings. We try to do the same for major referenda facing area

voters. That has already started, so keep your eye on the "future meeting dates" portion of the Tax Times to see the scheduled speakers. The organization does not endorse candidates. We try to help you get as much information as possible to make your own decisions.

To do the best job possible to accomplish the above, we need help from our members. Taxation issues facing our citizens run the field from federal, to school districts, to local. To get the most coverage, we've tried to create a committee structure, based on units of government. In the next newsletter, you'll see a request from President Heidel for help with these committees. Many of you have particular interests and expertise that could help us with research for our members. It doesn't necessarily require a long term commitment, but will greatly help share the load in getting information to our members. We hope you feel you are getting your money's worth for your membership. By thoughtful consideration in joining one of our standing committees, you can help strengthen the organization to provide a greater service to taxpayers across the County. We are all volunteers, and recognize that people have a limited amount of time. We also recognize that some people do not like to speak in front of groups or pen position statements. We can work around those issues. Please take a look at our President's request and decide if you would like to help make us stronger. We are all in this together.

Rod

MARCH MEETING NOTES

Matthew Spets, Assistant Superintendent of Operations for the Howard-Suamico School District, presented the school district's case in support of the April 3 referendum question asking to exceed the state imposed revenue cap by \$5.85 million per year for the next five years.

He identified three critical needs for the district.

Reducing large class sizes: The district ranks 403 out of 422 with some of the largest class sizes in Wisconsin according to independent data from the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. The referendum plan proposes to hire 30 new K-12 classroom teachers phased in over the next two years. Initial projections show an impact of 3-4 fewer students per class in grades K-8, and 2-3 fewer students per core academic class at Bay Port High School. In addition, for the first time in the history of the district, open enrollment is closed for grades K-8 and limited at Bay Port to further reduce overcrowding.

Improving below-average compensation: The number of freshman college students who say they plan to major in education has reached its lowest point in 45 years (The Chronicle of Higher Education 2016). One of the top priorities the Community Task Force identified was resources to

retain, develop, and recruit high-quality staff to work directly with students.

Currently, the District's teacher salaries trail local districts by \$3,500 on average. Our teachers are actively being recruited to work elsewhere. The referendum plan would enhance the district's ability to keep our staff and recruit the best to join us in working with our students and families.

Maintaining aging facilities: The average district school building is 40 years old. A facilities study commissioned three years ago, that encompasses over 1 million square feet of building space, identified \$7 million in immediate needs. The prior state budget freeze of the school funding formula resulted in the district deferring its annual maintenance budget to address critical priorities (such as payroll).

The tax rate is projected to stay at \$9.19 per \$1,000 of property value. It is expected to be unchanged due to reduced debt payments and the growth of property value in Howard and Suamico

A similar referendum held last year was defeated with 70 percent of voters opposing it. There was no end date on the 2017 referendum question, which many voters were concerned about.

Dave Nelson - Secretary

APRIL MEETING NOTES

John Vander Leest, Brown County Clerk of Circuit Court, spoke about the duties and responsibilities of his office. Prior to his election as Clerk of Circuit Court in 2014, he served on the Brown County Board for 12 years and for eight years on the Green Bay City Council.

The Clerk of Circuit Court's office is a constitutional office. It provides support to the circuit courts in Brown County. The office maintains the official court records, manages and coordinates the general business and financial operations of the courts, and provides in-court clerks for the courts. The office generates revenue for the county and state by collecting fines, forfeitures, court costs, and fees. Staff duties

include: maintaining court files, indexing records, recording minutes and orders, maintaining the jury system, and communicating the courts actions to the public and various governmental agencies. Brown County's current court records are maintained and presented with the Director of State Courts in Madison through the Circuit Court Automation Program (CCAP).

John explained that, since his election, the office has increased collections of fines, fees, and costs due to Brown County. Payment hearings are used to bring back defendants who have not paid what they owe. Warrants are issued when high dollar amounts are unpaid.

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Since about two thirds of the office's operating costs are budgeted to be funded by debt collections, the increased collections are reducing taxpayers' costs by about \$200,000 per year.

When retirements or vacancies occur within the Clerk of Circuit Court's Office, evaluations are made to see if duties can be reassigned or combined to avoid hiring a replacement.

The State of Wisconsin Department of Revenue has created a state debt collection agency, which has more authority to collect debts than a conventional

debt collection company. This is a possibility as other counties have reported success with this alternative.

All restitution monies due on cases in Brown County are now being set up for tax intercept, amounting to \$40,000 to \$50,000 being returned to crime victims, which were not previously being collected.

A bilingual staff member has been hired who can assist with interpreting in court when needed, saving mileage costs for an out-of-county interpreter.

Dave Nelson - Secretary

Things That Make Us Wonder.

The snowstorm of April 13-15 caught most of us who were thinking that spring was around the corner by surprise and a reminder that winter isn't over until it's over. We commend all of our public employees for their time and sacrifices in getting things back to normal.

We do hope this will also be a reminder to our public officials that balances left in the snow removal accounts due to the mild winter to date should not be treated as a windfall to apply against other, perhaps less important projects which seem to come up from time to time.

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The sole duty of the State Supreme Court is to review Child Molestation cases decided by lower courts, and increase the penalties handed out if necessary.

At least that is the type of ignorance that hucksters retained to promote either of the candidate for the recent Wisconsin Court race thought people would (or should) believe,, and elect their candidate.

This is supposed to be a non-partisan position, meant to interpret the laws according to the constitution and not a traffic court but like many politics today, the sleazier the better. Too bad they don't enforce the rules of disclosure on TV ads so we could see who sponsors them.

Unfortunately, with politics, it is the parties paying for the advertising to obtain the position of power more than to seat the candidate based on their qualifications to hold office.

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Every so often some off-beat group in California wants to have the state leave the union because they think rest of us are out of step with their philosophy.

We read that a new group has formed saying fine, good riddance, go ahead. The people along the coast from San Diego to San Francisco can go their own way, elect Nancy Pelosi President, and make all immigrants welcome to their already overcrowded area.

There is often a shortage of labor just cleaning up after the frequent brush fires, mud slides and occasional earthquakes which occur, and make

La La Land even more unique.

The new group would call itself "New California." We don't know what the counties leaving the union would call themselves, as "New Mexico" is already in use.

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In a normal business operation, the treasurer is the person who signs the checks, discusses large expenses with management, keeps tab of the cash flow, and is known as "*The Money Man.*"

Each and every unit of government in the country has a treasurer with prescribed responsibilities, which in some cases is only that person you send your taxes to. With government, the treasurer is neither the person who decide how your money is spent, or if there is, enough in the bank. Generally, the governing body of a jurisdiction determines how funds are spent with little concern if funds for payment are available. Overdrafts to the account are usually of no concern either as there are options such as lines of credit or increasing debt limits

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Recently Wisconsin voters defeated a referendum to eliminate the office of State Treasurer. They probably wanted someone to blame. If state spending gets any worse.

Actually, in recent years, the office has been reduced to the treasurer and one staff member tucked away in a single room office somewhere in the confines of the State Capitol building.

Their job: According to the 2017-18 Blue Book. Keeping track of and disposing of the unclaimed property the state somehow or other keeps accumulating.

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The terrible school shootings in Florida has left every other district in the country seeking ways to prevent such a tragedy.

We read that a district in Pennsylvania even opted to place a five gallon pail of river rocks in every classroom. The idea being a terrorist would think twice before entering a room full of students ready to throw rocks at him.

This is possibly cheaper and as effective as other ideas we've heard.

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Not too many years ago, assets exceeding a million dollars or more earned one the lofty and respected title of "millionaire."

This year, in their annual listing, *Forbes Magazine* was able to identify over 2,200 individuals from throughout the world as being Billionaires.

There were only 149 on the list when first published just 31 years ago.

Almost every significant country in the world is represented, with a surprisingly high number from India, China, Hong Kong, and even Russia. The United States still leads with 545 billionaires roaming the streets, including a new #1, Jeff Bezos, who claims a net worth of \$122B. We congratulate him, but his legacy may be a lot of abandoned shopping malls around the country, as well as other disruptions in the way we all shop.

There have been reports that he has taken advantage of every tax law in the books while building his empire, and he could even become our first Trillionaire in a few years.

Each billionaire's rise to immense wealth may have been a little different, but we notice one common thread is the individual was somehow able to gain monopoly control of some vital resource, commodity, or service in their part of the world, somehow eliminate any competition while government looked the other way.

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The *Wall Street Journal* reports that in 2018, the 20% of American households with incomes of \$150,000 or more will pay 87% of individual income taxes while the lowest 60% will not pay anything. Which "half" demands the most services?

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Hillary Clinton has blamed the Electoral College, Russia, the DNC, Anthony Weiner, and a host of others

for her defeat. Now they are suing Russia and the Trump campaign team for their misfortune. Good luck.

If successful, perhaps Trump supporters should sue the nations media, Russia, and the DNC for putting a negative spin on absolutely everything the President does, or doesn't do. Our great two party has turned into a mockery regulated by special interests, attorneys and a somewhat hostile media drumming their own agenda and choreographing the whole show. Maybe some day elections will be held to elect attorneys to run the country who would then select politicians for advice. At least that's the way it seems right now.

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Big money support for political campaigns can come from many sources often clandestine and not for the same reason the average person supports a candidate. Whether she would have made a better President is a matter of speculation. The money usually goes for the power more than the individual these days.

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We agree that exhibition hall facilities are necessary to attract visitors, We could also ask why it will cost \$93 million to build. That's about \$360. per Brown County resident, and which should buy a magnificent structure. Is the cost of financing factored in?

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The Packer schedule is out, so other events in town can now be scheduled accordingly. We realize there are lot of considerations involved including the big national advertisers who help pay for the big salaries but more home games in October and November rather than December. People in the league office must enjoy watching people freeze

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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 TIMEES." Please send them to the BCTA, P.O. Box 684, Green Bay, WI 54305-0684 or email BCTaxTimes@gmail.com

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and want to see another "Ice Bowl."

Remember when every year the team played it's last two games in Los Angeles and San Francisco?

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The decision has made to maintain the Colburn Park pool and make a swimming beach at Bay Beach. Hopefully some way the public can enjoy Renard Island will become a reality one of these days.

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The new Brown County jail is already becoming crowded, and facilities in adjacent counties are also overflowing. Somehow building a bigger than needed with the thought of renting cells to make money doesn't make economic sense, but a regional facility with all counties contributing to a share of the cost could work to the advantage of everyone.

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President Trump really opened a can of worms when he increased tariffs on aluminum and steel imports. Many nations declared new tariffs of their own, and so far their have been several winners and several losers to sort out.

Whether it will help our economy and level the playing field remains to be seen.

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Anyone who uses their credit card as a banker, and just making the minimum payment due each month,

soon realize they are caught in a trap from which they cannot escape without drastic action - either cut your spending or increase your paying. Either choice is probably difficult for most. Regardless of your credit card and other debt is, you can add \$64,572 to the total for you and each member of your family. That's your share of the \$21+ Trillion dollar National Debt.

That is actually of what you owe as a result of our elected officials and their careless spending habits. First there is state and local debt. Then outstanding student loans, interest on outstanding debt, unfunded Social Security balances, Medicare, Medicare and Obamacare, and the list goes on.

Trouble is, our elected officials on all levels don't seem to care as long as they keep getting re-elected (Because of the wonderful things they do?) They tell us you can always print more money.

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Recycling still has a long way to go before its goals of self sufficiency and preserving the earth's resources are met. One problem is containers used for food products which can be difficult to clean and dispose of.

We have heard of masses of plastic cups and similar debris covering an area the size of the state of Texas floating in our oceans, and washing up on the shores of tropical beaches. We just read of a dead whale washed up on a beach in Spain which had 64 pounds of plastic garbage in its stomach and intestines. We doubt this outrage comes from the United States,

but the origin is likely printed on the evidence. Failure to recycle is one thing but dumping your stinking garbage in someone else's yard is something else.

As usual, lots of thin to wonder about.

"Things That Make Us Wonder," consists of taxpayer related thoughts that occur to us from daily 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 for inclusion in future "TAX TIMES."

Jim Frink - BCTA

Monthly Meetings @ The Village Grille

Monthly meetings are held at **The Village Grille**, corner of Hoffman and East River Drive, Allouez. The location has no stairs or steps, convenient parking, and a room to better accommodate speakers and conversation. There will be three selections from which to choose lunch - each one will be priced at \$10 (including tip.) Lunch is at 12:00 noon with monthly speakers presenting.

The TAX TIMES

Brown County Taxpayers Association
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**Things That Make Us Wonder
and more**

Meeting Location

The Village Grille, Allouez

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

**Thursday - May 17, 2018 BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at The Village Grille, Allouez
Speaker - Ben Schenkelberg- Arena Project**

**Thursday - Jun 21, 2018 BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at The Village Grille, Allouez
Speaker - Tom Sieber, Candidate 88th District**

BCTA monthly meetings are held the Third Thursday of each month, 12:00 Noon, at , at The Village Grille, Allouez.

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: \$10.00, Payable at meeting. Includes lunch, tax & tip.
Call Tom Sladek – 499-7701 for information or to leave message.**

May - Jun 2018



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New Members are
Always Welcome.
Visit our website
www.BCTaxpayers.Org
for Details.**