

Just when you thought Taxes might go Down

By Richard Parins, Former BCTA President

We now have a fully Republican Congress and Legislature with expectations that conservative fiscal policy may be on the horizon and what are the headlines? Our roads need repair and our ever-increasing budgets are insufficient requiring new methods to raise taxes. Call them what you may, tax increases are not a mythic commodity; they are real, they affect our day to day living. So given the likely fact that the economy is not yet performing to levels conservatives hoped this political lineup might score some winners in the economic field chances at winning?

So, taking this to a local level starting with the State of Wisconsin; can anyone tell me why our current Gas taxes are insufficient to repair, maintain current roads while planning for the inevitable upgrades, and new projects required to promote expansion that why we gave these employees, our employees, the tools and latitude to accomplish these necessary constructions? We await a complete audit of these divisions and their projects, although we have already learned of massive overruns, unaccountable performance milestones we should expect and demand from these divisions. Is it unrealistic to expect these departments to perform to standard industry expectations?

Now let's bring it down to the County level having been presented with a familiar .5% sales tax increase to accomplish unspecified, since detail has been limited, goals. I think many taxpayers and certainly membership of the Brown County Taxpayers Association would not discount the necessity first, adequate security of the citizens from those who would harm and disadvantage the body Brown County. Our, again speaking in an extemporaneous manner, I think folks just want their road system and its upkeep to work. These two bullet points speak to our basic agreements for governments and what

they should be required to fulfill.

The Body Brown County we believe are conflicted with the bullet train speed with the passage of this tax increase. I've followed BC politics and it's required performance benchmarks and my observations come down to the repeated foot-dragging, inability to act, for both County Executives and the Board of Supers, best illustration being the twenty years glide path taken to implement unified communication between various safety agencies.

Lastly, the City of Green Bay, the mere intimation of a "wheel tax" is suspicious at best. I only hope we can the City can turn away with wheels intact from implementing new taxes; and I applaud the Mayor for convening a Budget Committee empowered to discovering savings and reductions that may allay any tax increases. Yet, we travel our street and wonder what we may do to improve the quality of our infrastructure, we need to enlist the citizenry for suggestions as to how we can improve and maintain these very important structures, horizontal as there are. We all have questions as to why the streets are continually dug up and then patched. I think ourselves and our neighbors can promote ideas to make these repairs work or maybe not. We must have civility when asking and suggesting improvements; our City employees are our friends and neighbors, they deserve the respect due their position and service but that does not diminish our right to know and suggest. Get onboard, and pull the oars in the same direction, a good start. Come on everyone, we have the power to turn the ship into the wind and navigate our way to safe harbors.

Call the Mayor's offices and ask where can I serve, what can I add to the project or issue and move toward improvement. I love Green Bay, Baye Verte, our history is long and deep, we were the entryway to the Westward expansion of the United States; Duck Creek is the furthest west Alexis de Tocqueville traveled in his explorations and discovery of the American Experience.

Richard P.

May Meeting Notes

Representative Macco Speaks About Tax Reform

John Macco, 88th District Representative to the Assembly, spoke about the need for tax reform in Wisconsin. The 88th Assembly District includes most of eastern Brown County. Representative Macco is Chair of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee which handles almost all tax policy. He is also Vice-Chair of the Assembly Committee on Finance and Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee on Finance. He is one of four members of the unofficial "CPA Committee."

The GDP of the State of Wisconsin is \$294 billion, larger than many nations. State government spending amounts to about \$36 billion annually, about \$100 million per day. This is about \$500 per person per month or about \$6,000 per person annually. Collecting revenue to finance this spending is an ongoing challenge. He explained that our tax system subsidizes consumption and penalizes wealth creation.

Representative Macco pointed out that there are so many inconsistencies and exemptions in the Personal Property Tax that it is almost unworkable. Unfortunately, many municipalities are dependent on personal property tax collections. None of the \$53 million of 911 Service Fee collections actually go to 911 service.

From the six listening sessions he held recently, he learned that citizens are concerned with how to bring better tax reform to our state, how to give more flexibility to our teachers and schools and how to find sustainable funding for our transportation system.

The outcome of the Green Bay Public School District referendum was discussed. The BCTA opposed Question 1, which increasing the tax Levy by \$16.5 million for each of next 10 years for operational purposes. Rich Heidel stated that he has been in contact with State Senator Duey Strobel, who has introduced a family of bills to provide more transparency for school district referenda.

Representative Macco noted that 58 cents of each school dollar winds up in the classroom. In Wisconsin, we have 424 school districts in our 72 counties, requiring 424 superintendents and 424 sets of school management teams. In Brown County, we have eight individual school districts. Obviously, there are opportunities for consolidation and cost reduction without adversely affecting educational outcomes.

Dave Nelson - Secretary

Things That Make Us Wonder.

Headlines questioning the verdicts in both the Monfils and Halbach murder cases have been making both local and national news for several years, while costing taxpayers a bundle in court costs and/or false imprisonment expenses in the process. The defendants, and even Dr. Phil, who weighed in, certainly should know the truth and details of the crimes they were convicted of, and whether or not they were guilty, They will have to

deal with our legal system to prove otherwise. It was reported that Avery's appeal efforts have already cost \$600,000, and is certainly occupying our court system.

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Despite a generally strong economy, retailers seem to be struggling to survive. So they say anyway. Credit Suisse claims as many as 8,600 Malls could shut this year, while stores are complaining about competition from the internet. In some cases, the stores could be their own worst enemies. While investing heavily on inventory, they have cut their sales staff to reduce costs while relying more

on advertising to bring in customers. That might be the cause of the problem, While many people resent pushy sales help, but they do like someone to ask for help to find something they are looking for, and this is becoming more of a problem in even our finest stores. We realize that working in a retail store is not for everyone, but there are often plenty of applicants for job openings. Pay and benefits are minimal and the hours are long. You can count on more changes in the way we shop if the minimum wage is increased to \$15.

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June Meeting Notes

Wisconsin Media Check Presentation to the BCTA

Attorney Will McKinley, president of Wisconsin Media Check Foundation, explained the history and mission of his organization.

Wisconsin Media Check Foundation, Inc. (WMCF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to identifying and documenting instances of media bias in local news reports. Its mission is to serve the public by holding the local media accountable. Its website is www.wismediacheck.com.

When WMCF editors observe a consistent pattern of bias, they will publish the biased report with their own analysis of why the news story is biased. The story will be tagged with the type(s) of bias along with their analysis, thereby educating both the public and the media about biased reporting.

The other component of WMCF's mission is public outreach, speaking to interested groups such as the BCTA, and holding forums to enlighten groups about the effects of media bias. Periodically, WMCF holds forums in its Bias Symposium Series to let public figures who have been demonized by media bias to relate their experiences. Two public figures who have been featured at individual forums are Wisconsin Supreme Court Justices David Prosser and Rebecca Bradley. Justice Prosser was plagued by unsubstantiated reports that he had attempted to choke another justice in chambers.

Justice Rebecca Bradley was harassed during her reelection campaign by false reports of marital infidelity promoted by the Milwaukee media.

Attorney McKinley noted several types of media bias: (more at www.wismediacheck.com)

Bias by commission (unsubstantiated information)

Bias via headlines, graphics, photos, videos (not consistent with the whole story)

Bias by omission (ignoring facts that support opposing views)

Bias by selection of sources

Attorney McKinley encouraged BCTA members to visit the WMCF website and report observations of bias in the local media. As WMCF is funded entirely by donations, citizens' support is appreciated.

Glen Schwalbach reported on the Legislative Audit Bureau's audit of the Department of Transportation's (DOT's) management of the state highway program. The audit identified the need to include inflation estimates for state highway projects with timelines of several years. No unethical engineering practices were pointed out. Unfortunately, the report appears to be more focused upon cost overruns of old DOT projects and less on process improvements made by the DOT in recent years.

Dave Nelson - Secretary

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The US Postal Service continues to lose money despite efforts to "turn itself around." It is now over \$16 Billion in debt, and rising. It seems this has been their pattern for years, with the usual solution being to raise the price of first class postage a few cents "to keep up with inflation." Statistically the price of first-class postage has

gone up about 1500% during the past 50 years making it one of the factors creating rather than just keeping up with inflation. The problem is not necessarily that of the Postal Service itself but the U. S. Congress which sets the rules. For example, is Saturday delivery still a necessity? While the volume of mail handled has dropped in recent years, much can attributed to competition from the internet and package services like FedEx and

UPS which in many cases are more cost-efficient and user friendly. Their biggest problem, may be the rate structure. Not because it is not high enough already, but is ridiculously low for much of their volume. A charitable organization can make a bulk mailing for less than ten cents a recipient. The postal service will argue that since bulk mailings

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must be prepared and presented in a certain way to save them some work they offer special rates. All mail requires a minimum of handling and delivery expense regardless of how it is presented. We can understand special rates for large volume users and charities, but does that justify service at less than a fourth of the cost to you or me to pay our bills or mail Christmas cards? We couldn't pin down the cost of political mailings, but assume it is low judging from the volume of requests many of us keep receiving, which may explain the reluctance of Congress to act. They are mostly asking for money so they can send out more letters asking for money. The bottom line is the Postal Service could perhaps take a better look at where their money comes and goes before canceling out their "Forever" stamp program.

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President Obama made an issue of closing the U.S. Military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. "National

Review" claims according to the Office of National Intelligence, of 700 detainees who were released, 18% were confirmed and 12% were suspected of having returned to Jihad mischief. Maybe we should have been giving them ankle bracelets before releasing them

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A "study" by a Delaware based survey concluded that of 400 metropolitan areas in the country, Green Bay was the drunkest city. #1. Ten of the top twenty cities in the survey were from Wisconsin so we had some tough competition to receive the honor. Maybe it was all the publicity in the paper given the new brew-pubs in the Lambeau Field area that put us over the top. The criteria in these comparisons is always open to scrutiny, and most of us will agree that overall Green Bay has far more plus's than minus's that the surveys often manage to overlook. We'll drink to that.

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Federal laws require that voting districts be uniform in regards to population, and reconfigured as necessary from time to time. Ideally this would be by county or some geographic barrier or highway. Unfortunately the development of computers and availability of voting records has made it easier to establish voting districts generally favoring partisan politics over population in an election. This is referred to as Gerrymandering and has been going on for over 200 years in this country by the party is in power., Wis-

consin is behind in performing the process of redistricting, and it is another one of those things politicians don't like to talk about because it can be a messy process if the courts have to redraw the lines.

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For years, downtown Green Bay has been seeking the catalyst to make it the true center of the city. Port Plaza Mall eliminated the old downtown many of us remember, and wasted millions of dollars spent by retailers and developers with its ultimate destruction. The Hotel Northland project holds promise if it ever gets finished. The several new apartments and office buildings are nice but do little to attract visitors. There are a number of smaller retailers, bars and restaurants along with city and county offices. Could it be that parking space and meters are the biggest part of the problem? To its credit, the city has built a number of parking garages in recent years. They serve to attract office workers and others who can reserve spaces on a long term basis, or others who can pay for the time they parked as they leave. The newer meters are expensive, with options on how long you want to park without risking an annoying fine. When visiting a city or county office it is often difficult to estimate the time it will take. A recent article disclosed total parking meter fines in Green Bay were about double the regular meter revenue. The questions are: Does the gross meter revenue cover the personnel costs to maintain and police the meters?, Does using

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NEW Meeting Location The Village Grille

The BCTA has moved our monthly meetings to **The Village Grille** at the **corner of Hoffman and East River Drive, Al-louez**. Our new 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 at 12:30 pm.

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parking meter income and fines as a source of revenue have a negative effect on potential visitors to downtown?, and do downtown businesses feel the operation of the meters has a positive or negative effect and are there solutions they could propose? Most cities use parking meters, and we would bet there are other ideas out there to provide parking revenue and encourage business.

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Scientists have warned that an iceberg the size of the State of Delaware is about to break off of the Antarctica Continent. No telling of where it will float to, but it could raise the level of the world's oceans four inches by the time it has melted. Fortunately that may take a while.

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The cost to expand the capacity of the Brown County Jail by 180 inmates has now risen to \$22 Million. In previous years it had been noticed more people were being held in the jail while waiting for trial, but a shortage of personnel in District Attorneys offices throughout the state caused by state budget cuts was creating backlog problems. It's could be a matter of what's most cost efficient. More jail cells, more District Attorney, or do nothing at all while things get worse.

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The people of every other country in the world must be wondering about the government we have, considering all of the things going on in Washington. Our media, still not accepting the results of the Presidential election seems united in giving a negative twist to most everything they report about the new administration, possibly forgetting that many people felt change was in order regardless of their political affiliation. Unfortunately we seem to be sidetracked and bogged down in the Washington Swamp with accusations, investigations, rumors, threats of impeachment, and anything else that serves no other purpose but to tarnish the integrity of our system of government and doing the job for which they were elected. While accusing the Russians of influencing the election may sound like another excuse for having lost, an avenue of dialogue between the countries would seem better most any time than open hostility. How can we expect to get along with the Russians or anyone else when our two main parties constantly sabotage each other and don't even seem to know the meaning of the word compromise?

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You probably read about a St. Louis jury awarding a 67 year old woman \$110 Million against Healthcare Mfg. Johnson and

Johnson (JNJ) claiming she had contacted ovarian cancer from the use of their powder over 40 years. While we sympathize with the lady, and that JNJ may well have been to blame, this sounds like a classic abuse of our legal system. First, JNJ was probably targeted by a personal injury lawyer primarily because they have deep pockets. Their stock and business reputation is one of the best, and is the backbone of many retirement plans supporting millions of retirees. Even though they will likely file for a successful appeal, it is a travesty of justice when a slick lawyer can bring down such a giant. We mention this because one of the outstanding flaws with Obamacare is the absence of provisions limiting the amount on malpractice suits which may result from treatment. Presently, we understand malpractice insurance can cost physicians and other providers up to six figures a year, and is definitely a reason healthcare in general and specifically Obamacare is so expensive. We can agree that a person should be entitled to legal protection but they must assume some responsibility in taking care of themselves.

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It has been a wet spring making it difficult for farmers to plant their crops, and we often have a hot, dry period before harvest time. Somehow things always work themselves out. Just wait and see.

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President Trump set off a firestorm when he withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement.. It

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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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does not necessarily mean that our factories and power plants or those in China or India will return to billowing toxic smoke all over the place. Many if not most of the big polluters in the world have already cleaned up their acts, and the rest know who they are must cope with public opinion if they are a problem. In the U.S. regulations were being imposed that were impractical or impossible to meet. We assume that technology will be developed to satisfy both environmental concerns and the economy but without government interference which we are sure was The President's intent. Two environmental related issues which seem to be entirely overlooked in our concern for clean air are #1: Many of the elemental metals and gases essential to industry are becoming scarce, and #2: What to do with all the waste, garbage, and rubble that is accumulating here and there. Landfills are getting full, while not everything is suitable for recycling. We have all heard of the huge masses of plastic waste, consisting of trillions of cups, straws, Bottles, fishing nets, etc., presumably from Asia. Now this stuff is starting to wash up and accumulate on the beaches of remote islands, causing wildlife problems.

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If things go as planned, effective Jan. 1, 2018, Brown will no longer be one of the handful of Wisconsin Counties NOT Adding .05% sales tax to purchases made by residents and visitors. Some of you may recall that in 1983, we became the first county in the state to vote im-

posing the tax, shortly after the Legislature made it available on an optional basis for "property tax relief". Business people complained that being the only county with the tax would leave them at a competitive disadvantage, the Legislature passed a law which allowed counties to change their minds which we did, and with the exception of the Lambeau Tax of 2001-2015 have gotten along well without it. That was then, and this is now. The term "property tax relief," only refers to the counties portion of your property tax bill, which in most cases is less than 20-25% of the total. However, at least in Wisconsin, counties are responsible for a large portion of the services which we expect and receive from our taxes. This includes county roads and parks, jails, libraries and museums, property and vital record keeping, the court system, and many, many others. The Brown County Taxpayers Association (BCTA) was formed largely in opposition to sales tax expansion and wasteful government spending. Our motto is "Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government." Consider the history of the sales tax in Wisconsin. It was first enacted in 1961 as a temporary tax of 3%, only to apply on sales of so-called luxury items such as automobiles, sporting goods, furniture, restaurant meals, soft drinks, candy and alcohol. It wasn't long before it went from 3 to 4%, and then 5%. The list of items subject to tax was expanded to cover almost everything we buy and the merchants discount for collecting the tax was cut from 2%

to 1/2% to squeeze out every last penny for the state. The sales tax had grown from "temporary" to the states second largest revenue producer, and now they are looking for more ways to pay for highways, prisons, schools, and the DNR. Once a tax is established, it will never go away. In Brown County a number of high profile projects, including the jail, libraries, museum, county roads, the old arena and expo center — all necessary to the quality of life in the community, sit on the drawing boards waiting for funding. While a sales tax can well help pay for these projects, there are negative aspects. We have been told that visitors to the county would pay a good portion of the tax, but the numbers simply do not add up. It takes 200 Million in sales to produce \$1 Million in revenue at .5% We live and shop here the year round. A penny here and a few cents there starts to add up. The extra tax on a \$30,000 automobile would be \$150. In the past we have compared counties that use the county sales tax with those that do not, and have concluded that property taxes were largely as high or higher in counties with the tax than those without, while county indebtedness was also just as high. In addition their residents had the sales tax to pay. in addition to the property tax. We are also told the tax in Brown County would sunset in six years. Mark your calendars for Dec. 31, 2023.

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As of this time, the state budget for coming years has not been fi-

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nalized. No department seems to be completely satisfied with what they get to spend. In particular for highway construction and education interests. The DNR is cutting some of its services and raising user fees at its facilities which they seem to do about every other year. The DOT claims they cannot keep up with construction and maintenance unless more funding is provided. Maybe the problem is frequent cost overruns are catching up with them.

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As usual, summer in Wisconsin is still road construction and repair time. While we don't question the need to make our roads better and safer, we sometimes wonder why it takes so long to complete and inconvenience everyone after the job has started. Are we being told things would go faster if we gave them more money?

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The county board and city council have agreed to proceed on an expo center plan involving sales and room tax revenues. If all goes well, this should be a win-win for the area. What hasn't been made clear is exactly where is the \$93M going? We realize costs these days are high, but if taxpayers are paying for it, and then have to pay to use the facility, who gets the return on our investment? We are even being asked to pay for maintenance, which should come from user fees.

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We realize Obamacare has a wide appeal, but it also has a lot of flaws that will destroy it if sup-

porters expect it to be around for long. It was imposed upon the American people clandestinely without bipartisan support or for that matter, a mandate from the insurance or health care industry although it sets the rules for their operation. From the beginning critics claimed 20-25 million people would be left without insurance. Now that Republicans are trying to rewrite the plan, a different set of critics is warning us that 20-25 million people will be left without insurance. Whether or not these are the same 20-25 million we certainly don't know except that it is obvious that a lot of rhetoric and emotion is being expanded by both Democrats and Republicans. If they would only sit down together, forget about party politics for a few days, and examine all of the differences that have arisen, they might come up with a health care plan that is affordable and acceptable to insurers, employers, providers, the rich, the poor, the young, the elderly, and the U. S. Treasury. Let's not be in such a hurry and do it right this time. Amen.

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The first amendment to the U.S. Constitution established freedom of the press, no doubt one of the greatest liberties we have as a nation. The same Constitution that established the rules of leadership for this nation, and the same press that is often accused as being biased in its reporting of government affairs. Webster's dictionary describes bias as "a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment or prejudice." While bias may be difficult to describe or prove, the fact remains,

there are many ways of slanting an opinion towards the philosophy of the presenter with the bottom line being you can't believe everything you read or hear.

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"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 some of the views and comments expressed in this column may be contrary to that of some of our readers. However, one of our purposes is to encourage debate, and we realize there are two sides to every question. Comments or suggestions are welcome for inclusion in future "TAX TIMES."

Jim Frink - BCTA

**"The American Republic will endure until the day Congress discovers that it can bribe the public with the public's money."
... Alexis de Tocqueville**

The TAX TIMES

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**Meeting Changed to
The Village Grille, Allouez**

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

Thursday - July 20, 2017. BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at the **The Village Grille, Allouez**
Speaker - BC Supervisor Richard Schadewald
Brown County Service Agreement

Thursday - August 20, 2017. BCTA Monthly Meeting.
12:00 at the **The Village Grille, Allouez**

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.

July - Aug 2017



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