



The Great American Garage.

Most of us are lucky enough to have a garage, mostly to keep our cars and stuff from theft and the elements. Also stored in garages are inspirations, aspirations, ideas, and yes, potentially some heinous items and plots. But let's explore the garage as an economy, our economy. To own the simple garage you must be amongst the wealthiest on earth; most of the world's population lives in domiciles smaller and much less safe than your garage. Conditions sufficient to own a garage exists only in a few highly developed countries.

Given this situation it is hardly a miracle or is it that many of the 20th and 21st century's ideas, inventions and businesses have their roots in the simple garage. Most startups need cheap, affordable space so when Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard had a great idea but limited capital, \$538.00 the story goes, like our own economy they required low rent, low taxed space. Following this line of logic, our communities, States and the Nations require low costs, low taxes to thrive and create the products that foster jobs, production, and the stuff that when fairly taxed, foster a robust economy. So when we further tax ourselves, at some point we stifle and choke off the ideas and products required to survive.

As small as some have thought the .05% sales tax to be, these taxes eventually grow and strangle the neck of the very goose that hatched the egg that hatched the egg, etcetera, and etcetera. So when the Community has elected representatives who either empirically or by instinct vote down the tax, they have given the economy a shot in the arm, millions of shots.

So thanks to those folks who vote with their head and not the notion that taxes may somehow fund programs of kindness and good intentions in response to needs or suffering under the notion, "we need to do more." Maybe the response could be "we need to do what we are already doing smarter and better." These two quotes are the logic of a man named William Voegeli, author of *Never Enough: America's Limitless Welfare State*.

Back to the garage; in an article of "Smithsonian" I read about a young man, Palmer Luckey who had invented the Oculus Rift, the first low cost prototype for a virtual reality headset complete with audio. While this sounds like a teenage gamers' nirvana; don't get me wrong, it is. The technology will also be applied into medicine, engineering, who knows the limit. So from a home-schooled kids tinkering in his garage with great vision, Palmer Luckey became a billionaire twice over when FaceBook's Mark Zuckerberg saw his demo at a game show and opened his purse to buy the idea.

The list goes on and on, from Apple's Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, to Google's Sergey Brin and Larry Page, to Disney, Harley-Davidson, Dell, Amazon, Microsoft, Nike, and Schreiber Foods, Bob Bush, whether local folklore or not, to name a few. These ideas and enterprises all came from that American Icon of Ingenuity, the garage.

It begs the question, should we continue down a progressive path to bigger government, since the only way to feed the bureaucratic behemoth is with higher rates on school loans, increased taxes for property and ingenuity sic, medical devices tax and yes, on that garage? We will have no one and nothing to feed that behemoth. And not to oversimplify the notion but it all begins with a .05% here, and another little percent increase there. Because the simple fact is, most folks view taxes as high only when it's on them, not their fellow citizen. For me I want more garages, less taxed and more available to our young citizens, and our new citizens.

Richard Parins — President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
In our 30th Year of Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government.

A Citizen's Guide to State Government.

The 2015-2016 legislative session is officially underway, making it an appropriate time to review the services available to constituents and the many ways you can keep track of state government activity:

Help with a State Agency, (Wisconsin.gov) If you need help navigating a state agency, the first place to call is my office. Either my staff or I will be happy to listen to your concern and will work to find the solution to your issue or problem. If you are interested in more information on a state program, a comprehensive list of state agencies is available online at Wisconsin.gov.

Capitol Tours, tours.Wisconsin.gov Free tours of the State Capitol are offered daily, year round. Tours depart from the ground floor Information Desk Monday through Saturday at 9:00, 10:00, 11:00 am and 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 pm; and Sundays at 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 pm. A 4:00 pm tour is offered Memorial Day through Labor Day. The sixth floor museum and observation deck are open during the summer months. For more information about the tours, visit the State's Capitol Tour web page at tours.Wisconsin.gov. To reserve a tour for groups of 10 or more, call (608) 266-0382 or fill out the online reservation form.



Blue Books, The Wisconsin Blue Book is a useful tool to learn more about our state government both past and present. It's published every two years. Each addition includes the biographies of our elected state officials, information on the three branches of state government, and a copy of the Wisconsin State Constitution, and much more. To request a Blue Book, please e-mail me your name and address or call my Madison office at (608) 266-2418 or (888) 534-0005. You can also view the Blue Book on-line on the Legislative Reference Bureau's homepage at legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb.

Flags, You can purchase a U.S. or Wisconsin flag through my office. The flag may be flown over the Capitol for an additional charge and can be flown for a particular person, event, or organization, and on a specific date. A certificate of recognition is included with each flag.

There are also many ways to participate in keeping track of your state government this session thanks to the following resources:

Wisconsin Legislative Notification Service: notify.legis.wisconsin.gov One of the best tools to stay on top of legislative proposals is to sign up for the legislature's Wisconsin Legislative Notification Service. This makes following the legislative process incredibly easy. Registered users can receive daily or weekly emails when specified legislative activity occurs. For example, users may choose to be notified about every action affecting a specific proposal, bills introduced by a particular legislator, activities of a specific committee, or introductions relating to a particular topic.

Internet Broadcast of Floor Debate. legis.wisconsin.gov

gov/assembly When the Assembly or Senate is in session, citizens can watch and listen to live floor debate using the Legislature's InSession service. The website is available at inesession.legis.wisconsin.gov/assembly. The InSession pages also provide the day's calendar with links from the calendar to bills before the house and to roll call votes as they occur. You can follow along from the comfort of your home or office.

Legislative Documents. docs.legis.wisconsin.gov All legislative documents from the current and past sessions are accessible online. These documents include introduced proposals, statutes, administrative code, clearinghouse rules, committee hearing records and more. For help navigating the site, go to the Legislative Reference Bureau's Research Services page at legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb.

Eye on Lobbying: lobbying.wi.gov You can also keep track of lobbying efforts. Since 1997, the state has maintained an online database of lobbying activities that is available to the public. The database is located online at lobbying.wi.gov.

Your one-stop-shop for all of your questions and concerns can always be my office. I always look forward to hearing from my constituents during the legislative session. If you'd like to schedule a meeting either in Madison or the district, give my office a call. I've included my updated office contact information below. You can also sign up for my weekly legislative e-updates by contacting my office or by going to my legislative webpage at Rep.Steineke.com.

A strong democracy and functioning state government rely on an engaged and knowledgeable constituency which is why I encourage 5th Assembly District residents to take advantage of all of the available resources to stay in tune with your state government.

**Jim Steineke, 5th Assembly District Rep
Assembly Majority Leader**

115 West, State Capitol (608) 266-2418, (888) 534-0005 Toll Free
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

www.RepSteineke.com Email:Rep.Steineke@legis.wi.gov

Our thanks to Rep. Steineke for providing this information.,

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

"America is the only country where a significant proportion of the population believes that professional wrestling is real, but the moon landing was faked."
... David Letterman

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.BCTaxpayers.Org

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JANUARY MEETING NOTES.

Brown County Executive

Streckenbach Speaks to BCTA.

Monthly meeting of the Brown County Taxpayers Association January 15, 2015 at Titledown Brewing Co.

Brown County Executive Troy Streckenbach reported on his first four years in office as he seeks a second four-year term as county executive. He noted that the County tax Levy has been reduced by \$1.3 million and the County debt is down by \$23 million. He is working with the County Board To improve services and solve problems facing the county. One County Board committee is looking for alternatives to a potential \$190 million phosphorus problem.

Mr. Streckenbach stated that the biggest challenge he faces is keeping Brown County competitive. We need to make our skilled workforce even better. The county needs a brain gain, not a brain drain. Community partnerships for economic development will help to keep our young people from leaving the area. Developing the 130 acres at the Mental Health Center site into a Research Technology Park would attract higher technology businesses and jobs. Increasing the tax base makes for a much stronger community long term. Municipalities must cooperate to brand Brown County as a business destination.

Moving products in and out of Brown County requires a robust transportation infrastructure, making it a budget priority. The Airport has 2,500 acres of land. A significant amount of that land could be developed for beneficial purposes, increasing the tax base.



**County Executive
Troy Streckenbach**

With 2.2 million square feet of floor space, facilities management is a major issue for the County. A smaller footprint will reduce costs for taxpayers. Ongoing maintenance costs will be reduced as floor space is reduced.

The Port & Solid Waste Department is now the Port & Resource Recovery Department, reflecting the value of resource recovery in the solid waste stream. Recovery of recyclable materials from the solid waste stream and marketing them effectively offsets the costs of solid waste disposal.

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 19, at the Titledown Brewing "Tap Room." Present plans are for a presentation and discussion on the proposed referendum to finance improvements at area Northeast Wisconsin Technical College facilities. Details on the back page of this TAX TIMES.

Dave Nelson—Secretary

National Debt Update.

As of Feb. 1, 2015, the official U.S. National Debt was \$18,105,097,136.00. That's an increase of about 60 Billion over last month at this time and 700 Billion over last year. It's more than all of us together owe on our houses, cars, and student debt. The really bad news is the Presidents new budget will probably make the hole deeper.

Things That Make Us Wonder.

With the retail price of gasoline at about half of what it was just a couple of years ago, we wonder how the Federal Governments program of heavily subsidizing ethanol producers to produce their product in order to keep prices down and preserve resources fits in to the equation?

While most of us are happy with lower gas prices. We shouldn't just assume they will last forever, or that government will not use it as an excuse to raise taxes sky high.

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We haven't heard much about it in Wisconsin, but one of the more popular ways around the country to raise money and supposedly increase traffic safety is through the use of "scameras," or high speed cameras designed to take identifying photos of motorists running red traffic lights.

Trouble is they may have proved to be too successful, and many communities are actually taking them out. While they saved the expense of having an officer writing a citation with the only expense sending a photo and a red-light violation ticket to the motorist, some communities found that once the money started rolling in, the cash flow could be increased even more by tinkering with the lights to shorten the yellow period.

A recent article in "National Review" claims this has caused outrage in many cities. In addition while possibly eliminating side collisions in the intersections, there was a significant increase in rear end collisions from people slamming their brakes on at the first sign of yellow.

Maybe it was a good idea but might need some improvement.

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Sooner or later something will have be done to stabilize the Social Security Trust Fund. Withdrawals from the fund are scheduled to increase faster than they are being replaced, with no end in sight.

It's probably a dumb idea, but the United States is reported to be paying \$1.2 Billion per day on our \$18 Trillion National Debt, much of it to foreign countries and financiers making a profit from the government. If there is actually any money sitting in the trust fund, why not borrow from the fund and pay them interest?

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The "No Call" lists were originally established, and hailed as a way to eliminate annoying phone calls from interrupting your privacy, and provided stiff fines for violators.

Is it possible that these lists are being used as prospects by politicians and charities insofar as they are purposefully exempt from restrictions? It is a lot easier to say no to someone trying to sell you a vacuum clearer or aluminum siding that a professional boiler room shill working on a commission basis.

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Citing various clauses in contracts could cost the state and taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, Governor Walker recently denied the request for an off-reservation casino near Kenosha. There were many valid arguments



both pro and con with big winners and losers being involved, making it a tough call for the governor.

While we acknowledge and accept the fact that casinos have become a popular form of recreation in Wisconsin, the question remains do we still need more? Obviously there are immense profits to be made from these establishments, but the question remains as to whether government or the tribes that were to be benefited manage to get their intended fair share.

One of the big issues at Kenosha was that competition is unfairly diluting the market. Recall that the original number of casinos allowed in the state was to be limited. Wisconsin once had strict blue laws prohibiting gaming devices and even office pools up to that time. That all changed when Wisconsin decided to get into the lottery business in the late 1950's.

We realize that patronizing casinos is a matter of personal choice. They can also effect the taxes we pay either through profits they pay to the state and municipalities, or welfare expenses related to their existence.

In this case, profits were reported to be going to Florida, courtesy of a Wisconsin taxpayer funded infrastructure investment. Would the state and Kenosha County receive compensation, and how much of the money spent by customers would actually go to the tribes which were allowed casinos as a revenue source to alleviate poverty in the first place?

While new jobs could be created, would they be filled by the Wisconsin unemployed, or migrants from other areas? While we assume the people of Kenosha County have indicated their approval, do they have legitimate concerns of such an immense project in their back yard?

While the prospect of profiting from tourists heading north on I-94 was tempting, Illinois has threatened to build something even bigger on their side of the state line near Waukegan. They also may have second thoughts.

Between the BIA and various Indian tribes, state and county governments, contractors ready to build, the gambling public waiting in line and anti-gambling groups to stop them, along

with an army of attorneys anxious to move we probably have not heard the last of it. It was undoubtedly a tough decision for the Governor, and not expected that everyone will be happy.

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So far the winter has been relatively mild. We hope as a result it will be possible for Brown County, the state, and municipalities to set aside any savings from the reduction in cost of gasoline will be set aside for whatever happens next year.

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Just like that, and with a stroke of his Executive Powers Pen, President Obama established into law rules allowing federal workers six weeks of "advanced" paid sick leave to care for a new child or ill family member. He also implied that state and local governments and even private industry do the same for their employees.

While this is probably a welcome benefit to government employees who have no concerns about cost, most people have been born to working parents who didn't have such benefits and still managed to survive. When circumstances required, there were solutions available without a government mandate or interference.

One major difference between government and private industry is that government doesn't seem to have a bottom line to worry about. Most business's care about retaining their employees with incentives, benefits, and working conditions up to the point they can afford yet still remain competitive. Unfortunately six weeks pay is not one of them. Once such a benefit in granted it is difficult to rescind, While there may be a point in time where paid parental leave will be a common and expected benefit for all, in most cases that time is not now.

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We must congratulate President Obama for making it through his recent SOTU address without breaking his arm patting himself on the back, or wrecking the applause buttons built into his speech prompters..

While we would like to have

had him at least acknowledge we have a National Debt problem, concerns over immigration, world and domestic terrorism, national defense, and a number of other items, he seemed to focus on his domestic policy items and even added a few more for good measure.

Saying "It's the right thing to do", he urged raising the minimum wage, and making paid sick leave mandatory for employers. We note that a number of states have already done so, and that many if not most jobs already surpass suggested benefit requirements.

While we can all agree you can't raise a family on a minimum salary due somewhat to inflation, it is government mandates that contribute to inflation. For many, inflation rises faster than the ability to keep up, and the present administration should take some of responsibility. The rising cost health care alone raises the price of most everything we buy, leaving a bigger burden on the lower income workers.

Perhaps what the President could have said was, "It's the right thing to do, but we simply can't afford to do all these things at this time."

Otherwise, we commend the President in being so upbeat about his accomplishments, and acknowledging he had a different Congress and Senate to work with from the first six years of his administration. He talked about harmony and cooperation with Congress but warned he still has his veto pen handy.

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There are a lot of considerations, both pro and con on the subject of raising the minimum wage, including does it even have to be mandated by the Federal Government in the first place? The best still seems to be encouraging people to clean up their act, get the proper education, and focus on a job they enjoy doing and appreciate. The job market and compensation could take care of itself.

With this radical thought in mind. we can agree with the Presidents proposal to make attendance at community colleges more affordable, but not as an excuse to impose a whole new level of taxes as he suggested.

Community Colleges, or Technical Colleges as referred to in this part

of the country do an extraordinary job of qualifying students for high paying and needed occupational skills, and quite able to manage themselves without federal interference. The cost to students is normally a fraction of a four year college, and students can choose careers to their liking and abilities. They can adjust to meet the needs of the communities where located, work with private industry for direction and assistance, and work with employers to hire graduates.

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The new owners of the Milwaukee Bucks are trying to turn the team around, and want a new \$500 Million Arena to accommodate larger attendance. They have requested state assistance, but is it fair to ask state taxpayers to pay for such a project?

Governor Walker has, however, offered for the state to issue \$250 Million in bonds, to be paid from the state personal income taxes paid from the teams players in coming years.

Somehow or other this just doesn't sound right. While the part about the players state taxes going to the general fund makes sense, a lot can happen before the bonds and all the interest are paid. While the state income taxes on athlete salaries can amount to a lot (even players on visiting teams pro-rate their income as earned in Wisconsin and pay taxes when playing here), a little more explaining is in order on this idea.

* * * * *

Locally, the Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) is proposing a \$66.5 Million referendum for this coming April, to finance improvements at their Green Bay, Marinette, and Sturgeon Bay campuses. They claim changes in the area job market has created demand for skills beyond what they are now able to provide.

They will be presenting facts and figures in the coming months to justify their position.

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In the meantime, the Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District is proceeding with a massive \$149 Million improvement project to keep up with technology and anticipated future

growth needs in the area.

This all has been resulting in considerable and constant increases to our water bills. We can appreciate the necessity, but not the sticker shock Our State Capitol with all the marble and artwork only cost \$7.25 Million by the time it was finished in 1917, and we don't believe inflation has increased quite that much.

Our biggest concern, though, could be if all of the other Great Lakes cities dumping their treated water back to where it comes from are taking the same responsibility, and financial commitment that we are?

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It is reported that overtime pay costs over \$1 Million annually for the Brown County Sheriff Department. In 2013, 18 Sheriff Dept. employees made more than the sheriff.

While it could be a matter of simply hiring more deputies for duties such as jail security, much of the cost comes from following established work rules, and added security resulting from VIP visits by Presidential candidates and others from whom it is difficult to claim reimbursement.

The bottom line is that we all appreciate their commitment and service to us, and Sheriff Gossages management of this vital department.

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Recently a conservative think tank group, The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, issued a study recommending Wisconsin could boost it's economy and competitiveness by cutting income and property taxes and raising sales taxes rates and taxing items currently exempt such as services and groceries.

While this may sound good on paper, there would be winners and losers with the loser being just about all of us. Manufacturing and other business's have long blamed Wisconsin's high states income and property taxes for being a big reason they move away. However, a case by case examination could indicate other reasons including unionization and over regulation.

While historically Wisconsin is often in the top 10 nationally in income and property taxes, they are somewhere in the

middle in income and sales tax burden per capita. We recently rose to 12th highest in the nations tax burden which is good considering we were #4 as recently as 2004 but is still isn't good enough.

While raising sales taxes on the state or county level for any reason is always tempting to some, the fact remains it places a larger burden on the lowest income families which is never considered good fiscal policy, especially at election time. Substituting one tax to replace another usually simply ends up with even more tax. Recall that when the Wisconsin Sales Tax was first initiated in 1962 we were told it was a temporary 3% tax on luxury items, and now it is a monster.

Each state has their own ideas on raising revenue and accordingly have to live with the consequences created. While Wisconsin may not have the best system, and considering you can never please everyone, the mix of taxes and services provided still seems better than most states. So far the best solution seems to be Fiscal Responsibility and honest transparency.

As usual, lots if things to wonder about.

Jim Frink

"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."

"Children must be taught how to think, not what to think." . . . **Margaret Mead**

"Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when the deserve it." . . . **Mark Twain**

"Speak when you are angry, and you will make the best speech you will ever regret." . . . **Ambrose Bierce**

"Sometimes the road less traveled is less traveled for a reason." . . . **Jerry Steinfeld**

The TAX TIME\$

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The TAX TIME\$ - February, 2015

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

Thursday—February 19, 2015. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon.
Scheduled presentation and discussion
on proposed NWTC referendum.

Thursday—March 19, 2015. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon.
Program to be announced.

Thursday—April 16, 2015. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon.
Program to be announced.

**Public officials and candidates for public office are cordially invited
to attend any of our meetings and be recognized.**

Unless otherwise notified, BCTA monthly meetings are held the Third Thursday of each month, 12:00 Noon, at Titledown Brewing Co. Annex, the former Larsen Cannery opposite Titledown Brewing. You may enter from 320 N. Broadway, or from the Titledown Parking lot to the door marked "TAP ROOM" and up the ramp.

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: \$8.00, Payable at meeting. Includes lunch, tax & tip.



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February, 2015

."Knowing what's right doesn't
mean much unless you do what's
right." . . . Theodore Roosevelt

"If you find yourself in a hole, stop
digging." . . . Will Rogers

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**New Members are Always
Welcome. Call 499-7701
Write us at P. O. Box 684
or visit our website**

**www.BCTaxpayers.Org
for Details.**