

Quakes, nukes and collective bargaining

"As you know, nobody plans for a 9.0 earthquake." – Michael Splinter, CEO of Applied Materials on CNBC's Squawkbox

Commentators blame Japan's nuclear plant crisis on the human failure to accept the limits of our ability to predict chaotic forces of nature. But the Japan disaster simply boils down to a business decision as NO doubt, some scientist warned of potentially gigantic quakes, but the cost of planning for this would have made the four crippled nuclear reactors even more unprofitable. As most of us sit inside a 100-mile radius of 2 nuclear plants, I wonder what size quake our plants were built to withstand – metaphorically and literally? How many of our homes are built inside a theoretical millennial flood plain? And even had we known of such a thing, would it have deterred us from building there?

This parallels our expectations of government and how much government we are willing to pay for. I think our current government tact is akin to building structures intended to withstand a 10.0 earthquake or a Biblical flood. It places too much trust and responsibility in outside forces. Can we trust social engineers to know what is required to withstand a quake no one has ever felt, only imagined? Or a flood that no one has seen since Noah's wooden tub was left high and dry on some mountain top in Western Asia?

Gee, while we're at it, why don't plan for an invasion from outer space?! Oh yeah, our space program was defunded and mothballed in some kids science exhibit. Now that defunding is the classic Emperor's lack of bodily cover, only this time the Nation's defenses are being left naked from the upper atmosphere. But we can always hitch a ride with Russian or Chinese equipment, none of which lands on wheels just goes kerplunk in the Mongolian desert somewhere

Are my analogies confuzzling? I moved recently and must have misplaced my rationality. But not! Risk and reward capitalism must be our model. We must bear more risk of our decisions to reap the rewards of Liberty, and we must stop using government to hedge our risk. I don't want a hedge fund government, do you? County road bonds will begin to look like collateralized debt obligations amortized to 30 years. Come on; let's live within our means, people.

Which brings me naturally to the curl of the wave, where Wisconsin is hanging ten on collective bargaining? You've probably heard Labor's shouts about collective bargaining "rights." Truth be told there are no such rights. Collective bargaining is legal in Wisconsin, yes, but so is sex with a 17 year-old. Does that make it my "right" to have sex with a 17 year-old? Ask my wife and kids. It's perfectly legal for me to keep things I find on the street. Is it my "right" to keep anything I find? Ask my wife and kids?

Collective bargaining is a privilege granted to organized labor. Why? Frankly, I don't remember, do you? It is certainly not in the 1858 Wisconsin Constitution – the original repository of rights. And it was not passed by 2 consecutive legislatures and approved in a statewide referendum – as required to be added to said repository.

Of course there is the US Constitution's 1st Amendment freedom of speech. So, you will probably continue to hear public workers complaining about Gov. Walker taking away what they are perfectly free to call their right. Just remember that there is no such a thing. As last I heard public workers do have protections afforded under the Civil Service system that granted, likely requires updating, but none the less, worker protection is intact.

"Just the facts, Ma'am" said Detective Jack Webb-Per the July 2009 U.S. Census figures the population of Wisconsin was 5,654,774 and during that period Wisconsin employed 214,506 "full-time equivalent" state & local employees (not including Federal, contractors or State retired workers in part supported by taxpayers.) Further calculations reveal these 3.79% of the general population receive approximately 26.36% of the Wisconsin State Budget, in the form of salary and benefits. Herein may be the basis for President Franklin Roosevelt's commentary....."The process of collective bargaining, as usually understood, cannot be transplanted into the public service," Roosevelt wrote in 1937 to the National Federation of Federal Employees. Yes, public workers may demand fair treatment, wrote Roosevelt. But, he wrote, "I want to emphasize my conviction that militant tactics have no place" in the public sector....as quoted from an article in the Daily Kos, 2/21/2011.

Now, if you'll pardon me, I must return to searching for my lost rationality. I hope to be more literal next month.

Richard Parins — President

The BROWN COUNTY TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION
In our 26th Year of Promoting Fiscal Responsibility in Government.

In Defense of Governor Walker and Wisconsin Taxpayers.

Across Wisconsin tens of thousands of people are out of a job and broke. They know what it's like to have an unhappy creditor say, "Well, I'm willing to accept partial payment," and have to reply, "I'm sorry, but I really don't have any money to pay you at all."

Many drove themselves to financial ruin by running up credit cards, spending way more than they were taking in. Eventually the cards get maxed out and even the most predatory credit vultures refuse to extend the limit or issue just one more card.

And so they understand completely when Gov. Scott Walker says, "We can't bargain in good faith. We have nothing to give."

For years, through Republican and Democratic administration alike, the state of Wisconsin has been running up credit cards. Govs. Tommy Thompson and Scott McCallum paid the bills by budgeting to write the checks in the next fiscal year – or, in the case of the Big Tobacco settlement, using a one-time windfall to pay delay the inevitable. Gov. Jim Doyle found himself raiding funds intended for one purpose to pay the bills on another – and in the case of the physicians' malpractice insurance fund, he even used money that wasn't legally the state's to spend.

All this was done with the complicity and help of the state Legislature, no matter which party was in charge. Through it all politicians would run for office with a solemn pledge that they would make the hard choices. The gap between spending and revenue just kept climbing, exacerbated by the deepest recession in decades.

Somehow they never got around to making those choices. And for the past weeks in Madison, we see why: We see what happens when politicians actually do make hard choices.

What was Walker's choice? He entered office with a budget deficit – a credit card bill, if you will – of somewhere between \$3.1 billion and \$3.6 billion, depending on whose math you accept, including a \$137 million gap just for the next five months. The state of Wisconsin is broke.

The choices were these: Lay off thousands of state workers, adding to the already unacceptable numbers of unemployed citizens of Wisconsin. Or ask state workers to contribute to their own well-being by paying more for their pension and health insurance than they have been.

The latter sounds less onerous, but consider further: Many of those state workers had been working without a contract since July 2009, unable to reach agreement with the far more compliant Doyle. After the Republican election victory in November, Doyle and the unions hurriedly sat down and banged out settlements with some concessions on pensions and health insurance, knowing that the newly elected governor and Legislature would ask for more. Those settlements failed.

Imagine being placed in charge of a multibillion-dollar enterprise that is broke – you have no new money to offer unless you find a way to raise taxes in the middle of a recession. You have to close a \$137 million budget gap now, with a \$3 billion-plus deficit looming in a few months.

You need public employees to pay more toward their own retirement and health care. Unions representing those employees have only reluctantly made concessions that are not sufficient after 18 months of resisting a settlement with their friend, the outgoing gov-

ernor, and they have spent millions and millions of dollars over the past eight years fighting you, first as Milwaukee county executive and then as gubernatorial candidate.

But again, here are your choices: Lay thousands of them off, or force the pension and insurance changes on them – understanding that they have fought those changes tooth and nail in the past and you have neither time for a fight nor any money to negotiate with.

The union bosses were going to assault Walker in either case, so the governor picked the hard choice that would save public jobs and keep people working: To accomplish that, he proposed stripping the unions of the ability to further obstruct necessary increases in their pension and insurance premiums.

You have seen the results: Thousands of teachers abandoning their classrooms, Democratic senators abandoning their posts, and public employees surrounding and packing the Capitol in what they hope will be an intimidating show of force.

But the state is still bankrupt. The bills are still due. And Walker still has no money to bargain with. Hard choices have to be made. Walker made one. He has shown more courage than his political adversaries so far.

Cato 30 – BCTA

National Debt Update.

As of April Fools Day, the United States National Debt had reached a total of **\$14,268,250,432,191**, give or take a few million in loose change. This is about \$80 Billion more than the beginning of March, and shows no sign of slowing down.

None the less the present limits established by Congress just a few short months ago was \$14.3 Trillion, which was the mythical point at which the country would end the practice of spending money faster than we were taking it in, and accordingly, end the practice of borrowing money from places like China to pay our bills.

Compare it to a chain smoker who vows the third time he will kick the habit starting tomorrow. It just doesn't happen but keeps getting worse and worse until it ends in forewarned disaster.

President Obama and Congress keep sparring over a proposed budget for the country, but neither side really bites the bullet. What the President is willing to cut doesn't even equal one day of government spending and congressional proposals aren't much better. While the President has called critics of raising the National Debt as "*ruled by insanity*," that is probably exactly what will happen.

One solution could be an across the board cut in government spending. At least 10%. Most agencies should be able to cut waste and operate more efficiently with minimal reductions of services or benefits. Next step would be for government to set examples for all to follow. Audit departments to reduce personnel and duplicate services. The President could set an example by making fewer trips with his 747. Rumor has it that Michelle has about 20 people on her personal staff while previous first ladies managed with 2 or 3.

Just an example but it all adds up. Jim Frink – BCTA

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.

Gilbert & Sullivan Discover Mad Town.

The saga of Gov. Walkers and the Legislatures attempts to balance the State Budget and the organized efforts to disrupt the process has taken some strange turns which unfortunately have often made the affair more of a comic opera rather than the serious and perhaps tragic event for Wisconsin that it actually has become. Gilbert and Sullivan couldn't have picked a better plot or cast.

The chorus could consist of the army of protesters along with their signs, costumes and drums. They would add their collective voices at every crucial moment as the plot unfolds. Other characters with key roles in no particular order would be the governor, legislators, news reporters and cameramen, union leaders, school teachers, college students, security police, Judge Sumi, Sec. of State LaFollette and the ghosts of common sense, decency and respect.

Act I, would feature the departure of 14 Democratic Senators to establish diplomatic immunity in Illinois. Probably a first in American politics and setting guidelines for a technique that will be repeated by legislative bodies as similar situations arise. A highlight would be their triumphant return, while they receive the same adoration as the Chilean miners. If used in Washington last year the country may have avoided Obamacare, and this could all be set to music. As the story develops, TV crews and reporters choreograph and record every detail to keep the tempo going.

The storming and triumphant takeover of the *Bastille*, formerly known as the Wisconsin State Capitol, by brave protesters could be glorified with tales of individual hardships suffered due to the lack of sufficient toilet and shower facilities or finding comfortable places to sleep on the cold marble floors. This could all be blamed on the thoughtlessness of the governor and his staff. Fortunately pizza delivery was available and everyone survived the ordeal.

As the plot proceeds Judge Sumi could sing an aria or two explaining the rationale behind her injunction to the new law but by that time much of the chorus will have left to either go back to the University or their day jobs around the state and the rest of the nation.

Obviously this could go on and on and perhaps actually will as new delaying tactics are designed and implemented by the participants. Most of us have heard enough already. No doubt there will be more lawyers, judges and court hearings involved to redo, undo, clarify and legalize this whole affair before it is put to rest.

Even if it were put to music, could there be a happy ending? Better yet it should be written as a modern day tragedy for the people of Wisconsin



Jim Frink - BCTA

March Meeting Notes. Green Bay School Superintendent Addresses BCTA.

Brown County Taxpayers Association monthly meeting March 17, 2011 held at Tiletown Brewing

Dr. Gregory Maass, outgoing Green Bay Superintendent of Schools, shared his perspective of current issues in school funding in its Wisconsin. He is concerned that the situation in Madison is volatile. He stated that the financial issues must be resolved. He believes that the collective bargaining issues could be handled locally. Productive dialogue is essential to resolving the current disagreements.

Dr. Maass explained that the recently approved contract extension proposal came from the School Board. The school district will save \$11 million from the concessions. The proposal suspended many workplace rules, with anticipated savings of another \$5 million, for a total savings of \$16 million. After these savings, the school district's budget shortfall for next year is reduced to \$3 million, a more workable number. He noted that Massachusetts public employees pay 100 percent of their retirement costs and 20 percent of their health insurance costs.

The Green Bay School District is self-funded for health insurance, so does not purchase health insurance from the WEAC Trust.

Dr. Maass explained the Emeritus Program for the Green Bay School District. A teacher who is 55 years old and has 15 years of service in the district is eligible for the program. The teacher is required to work 30 days over a three year period in order to collect one third of a years pay for each of the three years. The new contract will require teachers in the program to work as substitute teachers for their 30 days of service, saving the district the cost of substitute teachers for those days. The Emeritus Program will be eliminated for new hires.

No use of cell phones by students is permitted on school grounds in the Green Bay School District. Advocacy in classrooms is not allowed.

The Green Bay School District will have K-12 International Baccalaureate programs. West High School, Franklin Middle School, and Chappell Elementary School will be the schools involved. A John Dewey charter school is being set up.

County/Municipal: The Brown County Board has approved seven employee labor contracts through December, 2011.

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for April 21.

Dave Nelson - Secretary

"For most folks, no news is good news; for the press, good news is not news." . . . Gloria Borger

"The great virtue of a free market system is that it does not care what their religion is; it only cares whether they can produce something you want to buy. It is the most effective system we have discovered to enable people who hate one another to deal with one another and help one another." . . . Milton Friedman

"The difference between a democracy and a dictatorship is that in a democracy you vote first and take orders later; in a dictatorship you don't have to waste your time voting." . . . Charles Bukowski

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A Curriculum for AB 172.

Including The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.

On Dec. 10, 2009, the then Gov. Doyle signed into law AB 172, referred to as the *labor history in the schools bill*. This law amended Section 118.01 (2) (3) 6 of the State Statutes which relates to public schools teaching requirements to read, "Knowledge of state, national, and world history, including knowledge of the history of organized labor in America and the collective bargaining process." The bill was originally introduced by Sen. Dave Hansen, and it was noted at the signing ceremony that Wisconsin was probably the only state in the nation to have such a requirement.

However, once the law was in the books, we have not heard or read of any actions by the State Superintendent of Schools, or local school officials to clarify exactly what would be taught, by whom and to what grades or to what extent, or if it would necessitate removing other items of required learning from school schedules.

As with any school subject, it should be taught objectively pointing out pros and cons, including benefits to the workers, citizens and economy of the state and country; along with any possible drawbacks or controversy which may result.

The Good and The Bad. For example: Positive benefits are that through the years, collective bargaining has been a factor in providing working people 40 hour work weeks with weekends off. Unheard of before 1900. Workers wages have risen steadily through the years. Child labor and workplace safety laws have been enacted. Health insurance benefits are now almost universal. Vacations, retirement benefits, sick leave and other benefits have become common for most of the countries working people. Contract provisions even provide for arbitrating workplace grievances and annoyances which may arise. Union activity can claim credit for many of these improvements to working conditions benefiting union and non-union workers alike. Samuel Gompers, credited with founding the American Federation of Labor would indeed be proud of this legacy.

Included should be that through the years much legislation has been passed on the state and national levels to protect both unions and workers rights. Generally new laws have been accepted by employers as a necessary part of doing business, and establishing an avenue of communication between management and employees.

This includes both the private sector consisting of privately held business's or corporations, and public employee unions representing teachers, police, firemen and the many others depending on state, local, or national taxpayer dollars for their support.

In both cases, annual contracts are part of doing business, and usually called for wage increases, improved insurance and pension benefits, and clarifications and alterations to work rules over and above what management had already offered.

In the private sector, if management doesn't agree with union demands they can either close their doors or the union could call a strike, pending some kind of agreement. While negotiating a contract, the employees union is on one side of the table, and management who pays the bills and has the responsibility for balancing the books sits on the other. As long as management can realize a profit for shareholders and somehow remain competitive agreements could eventually be reached. In both cases the cost of deducting union dues from workers paychecks and submitting them to their union headquarters for whatever purpose is borne by the employer.

Through the years, the cost of health insurance has risen dramatically in excess of inflation, and retirement benefits became more of a burden than many employers anticipated. Union demands foreign competition, high taxes and burdensome regulations have all contributed to Wisconsin's negative business climate.

A major differences between the private and public sectors should be noted. While public sector demands for wages and benefits have been resolved through the years, and in most cases compare favorably or even ahead of the private sector, the term "collective bargaining" still seems to be a problem. Work rules, job descriptions and responsibilities, have been stretched far beyond what taxpayers can afford or control.

Contract language has allowed some public employees to earn huge salaries due to their job description, creating situations costing taxpayers, unnecessary expense and frustration. We hear of bus drivers making \$160,000 annually or the teacher who retires but still makes his annual salary be working 30 days over a three year period. The new Green Bay School Contract contains 80 pages of detailed "Collective Bargaining" rules to be adhered to by all parties and we assume this is a typical contract.

The Ugly. If the mandates of AB 172 are followed, they should include more on the relationships between public employees unions and their taxpayer employers. Most taxpayers also consider themselves the middle class so we are all in the same boat. The term "*fairness*" would include responsible management of our tax dollars.

Union dues paid by members go to various purposes, including political activity. Historically they support political candidates who can potentially benefit them as union members and agenda the most. Refer to www/WISDC.org, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign which provides a complete and easy to use database of political campaign contributors by recipient including corporate, individual, and PACS. You can draw your own conclusions as to why contributions are made to specific candidates or parties without being told. Union sponsored advertising supports legislators, the judiciary, and local officials determined helpful to their agenda.

"So what?" you may ask, we all can make campaign contributions to the candidates of our choice and to whom we believe best qualified to represent our interests. True, but in the cases of public employees their union dues come from everybody's pockets regardless of their political beliefs. Does that fit the definition of fairness?

The text could possibly go on to explain it is a matter of power, and doing whatever deemed necessary to obtain it. This includes public demonstrations to show strength, and even publicized boycotts of business establishments that disagree. Unions through their dues are able to spend huge large amounts to sway voters. If they can't think of anything good to say about their own candidates they will simply run negative ads against his or her opponent.

Are our tax dollars indirectly supporting partisan advertising. It is no secret politicians will favor those who pay to put them in office. The question is, who's interests are being represented if union representatives and government negotiators they have bought during the election process both sit on the same side of the table?

Wisconsin spends more money than it takes in and is literally broke. The economy is still weak, and raising taxes or increasing debt is not an option, including the "middle class." It is time to get serious and work together. That's what is fair and that's democracy in action.

BCTA - JF

Do Elections Matter?

There are many explanations for the battle in Madison but most miss the point.

The real issue in Madison right now is whether you can be denied the fundamental human right of representative government whenever the left dislikes the way you vote. Ask yourself if you are currently receiving the benefit of representative government, given that a minority of members in one house has shut down the Legislature.

People may argue whether Senate Democrats were making an absurd, infantile spectacle of themselves by hiding out in Illinois. That overlooks their deliberate sabotage preventing the legislative body of which they are elected members from conducting its legitimate business.

What's happening in Madison is a test. It's a final exam, and the penalty for failure is severe and long-lasting. What's being tested is whether elections count.

Barack Obama used to say "elections have consequences" when he really meant "shut up." That was based on the smug presumption that he and his followers don't lose elections, but then they lost big so they made up new rules. Now, Democrats' behavior says elections don't matter. They believe if they can put enough raw muscle on the street to interfere with elected representatives performing their duties, they can defy the will of the people. They can go on doing what they want to do, taking what they want from taxpayers, and to Hell with what the voters said in an election not yet four months old.

What's being tested in Madison right now needs to echo across the country, because what's being tested is the question whether representative government still exists here, or whether elections count only when Democrats win. If Wisconsin flunks this test, nobody can safely assume other states, or the nation, will pass it.

WISCONSIN CLUB FOR GROWTH

Visit <http://wicfg.org> for more information.

"Education is when you read the fine print. Experience is what you get if you don't." . . . **Pete Seeger**

"A House divided itself cannot stand." . . . **Abraham Lincoln**

"In times like these, it helps to recall that there have always been times like these." . . . **Paul Harvey**

Congressman Ribble Introduces Small Business Formation Act,

Eighth District Congressman Reid Ribble has introduced HR 1281, labeled "*The Restoring Economic Certainty Act of 2011.*"

The goal of the bill is to provide confidence to small business, and calls for Congress to place a 24 month moratorium on most new regulatory bills promulgated by government agencies, and give small business the ability to move ahead and create new jobs. Exceptions would be allowed for emergency or disaster rules.

The bill has 13 co-sponsors.

State Tax Collections Up.

The Dept. of Revenue has announced that total tax collections from all sources were up 4.5% in December over the previous year.

Lets hope this will be a trend and that the economy continues to improve. One reason for the states \$3 Billion deficit is that budgets in recent years allowed for spending increases based on the assumption that revenue collections would increase accordingly. It was later discovered that this is not always the case.

Fair Taxation Information.

We have been advised that a group promoting the "Fair Tax" as a method of government financing will have an informational meeting at 6:30 P.M., Wednesday, April 13, at Titledown Brewing. If interested, you can call 920-436-4777 or 562-4222 for information. This is not a BCTA sponsored event.

Budget Heads into Next Phases of Process

The Wisconsin State Legislature has moved to the next phase in the budget process with the Joint Committee on Finance holding agency budget briefings. The purpose of these briefings is for the committee to hear the needs and concerns from the agencies directly. It also gives the committee an opportunity to ask specific questions of the agencies in order to get a better understanding of their needs and the needs of constituents affected by their programs.

First we spent three days listening to testimony from many different agencies on topics including education, revenue, tourism, corrections, and children and families. We are scheduled to continue these briefings at the beginning of next week on topics relating to agriculture, natural resources, health services, commerce, and transportation.

Next we will also begin the public hearings. We will be traveling across the state for these public hearings starting in Stevens Point, Minong, Milwaukee, and Arcadia.

During each biennial budget, the Joint Committee on Finance picks several locations throughout the state to hold public hearings. Although we don't reach every community throughout the process, our office is always open to hearing your thoughts, questions, or concerns. Please feel free to contact my office directly or email the "Budget Comments" email at budgetcomments@legis.wisconsin.gov.

Rep. John Nygren

BCTA Holds County Executive Candidate Forum.

On March 25, the Brown County Taxpayers Association conducted a public forum for the two candidates for four year terms to replace Tom Hinz who will be retiring. Candidate Andy Nicholson cited his experience of serving 9 years on the Brown County Board of Supervisors, during which time he was on several committees and was familiar with the workings of county departments. Candidate Troy Streckenbach is a small business owner, and stressed the need for better management of the counties operations.

Questions they were asked included: How would you deal tieh the upcoming County budget shortfall? Would you support enacting a .5% County sales tax, either now or when the Lambeau Tax expires? How will you handle labor contracts? Your thoughts on the County radio replacement? How would you deal with the Counties growing debt balance?

Both candidates indicated they would work to create a more efficient operation and would not increases taxes.

Things That Make Us Wonder.

The devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan has probably caused 100 or even 1,000 times the damage caused in New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The destruction and human grief suffered is beyond our imagination.

While Katrina was marked by looting, arson, and people expecting government handouts we note that so far the Japanese people have been calmly working together in efforts to sort out the damage and access the future.

We are sure that any assistance that American people and relief agencies provide will be well received and appreciated.

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Has any state capitol building been taken over and occupied by protesters before in this country? You can have your own opinion as to whether it was right or wrong, but there can be no excuse for causing Millions in damage to our capitol. In addition someone will have to pay an estimated \$3 Million for extra police protection to make sure that no one got hurt during the ruckus.

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We realize that there are a lot of factors effecting the price of gasoline, but wonder if the recent dramatic increase was caused by news reports that "it may go up" was more of a factor than actual supply and demand.

Remember last summer when production in the Gulf of Mexico was curtailed and which supplies much of our domestic needs, the price at the pump actually went down.

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Imagine being the CEO of a large corporation doing business in Wisconsin and receiving a letter signed by the heads of the Wisconsin Police and Fire Fighters unions and leading Teachers unions asking you to publicly oppose plans to restrict collective bargaining for public employees.

"Failure to agree will result with public and formal boycotts of the goods and services provided by the recipients company. In addition, recipients were requested to furnish a list of trade and

political organizations they support and contributions they make that "impact the political process."

Such a letter was sent on Mar. 11, to over 160 Wisconsin business's and organizations including Walmart, Banks, Manufactures, various PAC's. and even went so far so to claim that charities will suffer as a result.

We can understand public employees unions frustrations with the Governor's budget proposals but hope police, fire fighters, and teachers will remember what they are here for and who is paying for their salaries and benefits. Hopefully amicable agreements can be resolved without anyone resorting to making blunt threats.

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If Governor Walker wanted to get rich, he picked the wrong profession. His salary is listed as \$137,092, compared to \$397,721 for the president of the NEA, \$428,284 for the president of the AFT and \$479,328 for the president of AFSCME. All of the jobs no doubt have additional benefits.

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The Associated Press has estimated the economic damage caused by the disastrous earthquakes and tsunami in Japan will exceed \$300 Billion in U. S. Dollars. It may be a while before we know the damage from their nuclear plants.

By coincidence, isn't this about the same amount the U. S. "in ted" the last couple of years in bailouts, stimulus plans, unemployment and various give-away programs like "Cash for Clunkers."

Fortunately we have not suffered any earthquakes or tsunamis but still have a few bills left over from Hurricane Katrina.

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All Congressmen apparently have the option of giving their staffs year end cash bonuses out of the federal pot.

Former Wisconsin Representative David Obey gave his 19 employee staff bonuses totaling \$142,000 at the end of 2010, one of the highest totals in Congress. While this may have been somehow justified, Obey was Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, which may explain

why the federal government seems to have such a casual attitude about spending taxpayer money.

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CBS news ran a segment recently that actually made sense as far as improving our economy is concerned.

They claimed that if every American Citizen spent just \$64 each year by buying American made goods, including food products rather than imports, it could create 200,000 more jobs in this country.

Actually it makes sense. If every U.S. citizen transferred \$64 of his annual spending from foreign to domestic products each year, it shouldn't cost him a cent, but would amount to over \$20 Billion nationally. This could put a lot of people back to work, and accomplish more than all of the wasteful stimulus packages we are paying for. What would it be with \$500.00? Pres. Obama and Congress, do you hear us?

Most everything you buy is labeled and it's just a matter of checking labels for "Made in the U.S.A." They don't always necessarily cost more.

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In order to help save the planet, the government has mandated that we no longer use incandescent light bulbs, but convert to the compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) starting with the 100W bulbs next January.

Aside from costing somewhat more, other problem are that the CFL's are dangerous to dispose of, take more energy to start so may not always be cost efficient if turned on/off frequently. At present every single one is produced in China, which could make this a dark country if the supply line is ever cut.

While we take inexpensive and abundant electricity for granted, public utilities operate to make a profit based on cost and consumption. While cutting electrical use and the factors producing it are worthy goals, perhaps rewarding industry for reducing usage with better technology, and somehow finding better ways to light up football and baseball stadiums for night games could at least illustrate how big the problem is.

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Perhaps you didn't even notice it, but NASA reported the recent Japa-

nese earthquake moved the earth 6.5 inches off of it's axis and shortened each day by just over one-millionth of a second. It's comforting to know that someone is keeping track.

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Every once in a while there is a "million man rally" in Washington by people from all over the country either demanding something they don't have or protesting something they don't like. Civil rights and war protests come to mind.

In the 200 years since construction of the U. S. Capitol building began, we have never heard or read of it being taken over and occupied by a crowd of raucous demonstrators for a sleep-in such as we saw at the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison recently. It was well choreographed and well documented on the national and world news. Fortunately there were no serious incidents.

Perhaps it is not so much a question of which side presented the most convincing argument or what will happen in the months to come. Wisconsin is trying desperately to get its fiscal house in order, rebuild and attract new business, and admittedly is off to a questionable start.

What was the impression of people around the country of our government when elected representatives exile themselves to another state to avoid debate, and public employees demonstrate for days on end against their employers?

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One of the first items of business the new Brown County executive will have to attend to will be negotiating and finalizing the contract for the county's new narrow band emergency radio system. This is one of those things mandated by the Federal Government with no clear plan of how to go about it or paying for it as long as it is in force by Jan. 1, 2013. While this will probably be an improvement over the present systems it will be expensive. The cost was originally estimated at over \$20 million but has been reduced somewhat. Bonding authority for \$12 Million has already been approved.

Another project which may be a budgeting challenge will be remodeling of the S & L site for use by the County Sheriff. This is the type of project where costs keep going up as participants keep adding new enhancements.

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One of the 14 Senators who went to Illinois to block passage of Gov. Walker's budget bill is now proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to prevent this type of procedure in the future.

Sen. Tim Cullen has drafted removing the requirement that a quorum of 20 Senators be present to vote on any budget bill that spends money.

Even if this amendment made it through the bureaucratic procedure and became law it probably wouldn't make much difference.

It seems that in recent years representatives from both parties and in both Washington and Madison have become very creative in working their ways around legally established procedures. Need we say more?

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The union representing the Green Bay Board of Education teachers has announced it is urging it's members to boycott businesses that don't support unions and suggesting to identify themselves if they do.

While this may or may not be effective to their cause, most people shop with their pocketbooks and with dealers who have what they want.

* * * * *

The Wisconsin DOT has announced plans to cancel plans for 4-2 lane roundabouts at the Lombardi Ave. and Oneida St interchanges with Highway 41, and upgrade the conventional stop lights as at present. This portion of the work was scheduled to start in 2012, and is part of an ongoing project lasting several years.

While not too many people seemed to favor the roundabouts in the first place, what is hard to understand is the DOT's claim that it will cost \$1.6 million MORE to install new traffic lights than roundabouts. The most important thing is to improve 41 to three lanes through the entire corridor allowing more room to merge, carry more traffic, and exit. If anybody really wants to see more roundabouts, they have at least 12 planned for remaining intersections in the Green Bay area. Some will carry even 3 lanes of traffic..

* * * * *

When a Wisconsin circuit court judge can issue a binding restraining order to stop implementation of a law passed by the Legislature and Governor of the State, it makes one wonder why we need all those people in Madison in the first place. The judge included. While open meeting violations and procedure may be the immediate question, a partisan judge may open the door to conflict of interest violations .

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Time passes and still so signs of settling the impasse between the NFL payers and owners on how to divide all the money the league takes in each year. Las Vegas is getting antsy.

Technically, shouldn't some of the money go to the municipalities and taxpayers who have provided all the flashy new stadiums with tax dollars.

The answer will be look at all the business and prestige these teams bring to their home communities just by their mere presence. Yes, we agree but while nobody makes anything while the owners and players squabble over details on how to split the money taxpayers keep paying for the stadiums

As usual, lots if things to wonder about.

Jim Frink

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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 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."

"If you put the federal government in charge of the Sahara Desert, in five years there would be a shortage of sand." . . . Milton Friedman

"An economist is an expert who will know tomorrow what the things he predicted yesterday didn't happen Today." . . . Laurence J. Peter

The TAX TIMES

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Things That Make Us Wonder.
and more.**

The TAX TIMES - April, 2011

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

**Tuesday - April 5, 2011. Election day. Green Bay Mayor, Brown County Executive, State Supreme Court, Local Supervisors.
DID YOU VOTE ?**

**Thursday – April 21, 2011. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon.
Titledown Brewing Co. Program, Current events, Reports.**

**Thursday – May 10, 2011. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon.
Titledown Brewing Co. Program, Current events, Reports.**

**Thursday – June 16, 2011. BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon.
Titledown Brewing Co. Program, Current events, Reports.**

Unless otherwise notified, BCTA monthly meetings are held the Third Thursday of each month, 12:00 Noon, at Titledown Brewing Co., 200 Dousman St.

Meetings are open to the public.

BCTA Members, their guests and other interested parties are cordially invited to attend and participate in our open discussions.

COST: \$8.00, Payable at meeting. Includes lunch, tax & tip.
Call Tom Sladek – 499-7701 for information or to leave message.

**April,
2011**



Don't leave your mind so open that your brain falls out."

. . . William F. Bennett

"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

. . . Abraham Lincoln

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.**