



Carrying an Unending Burden?

Of course I speak of Taxes. We hear of the federal budget and the fighting in Washington over deficit spending and "giveaway's". We hear of the Wisconsin state budget and the proposals by our Governor Walker. Then there are the local taxes.

At the local level it is the County Budget that gets the most attention. Our supervisors fight it out in the press with the good and the bad. It is also the County that sends out that nice holiday letter, our property tax bills. While many complain of taxes, they generally blame the county taxes.

But it does not end there - we have the cities, villages and towns taxing us. We have our local school districts with taxing authority. The technical schools are taxing our property. Those all add up. Then there are some hidden taxes/fees, Green Bay Metro Sewer District (NEW Water)(with little conservative oversight) and the TID districts that redirect property tax revenue for pet projects.

Most people pay taxes. A nickel here a dime there, pretty soon it adds up to real money.

	<u>Towns</u>	<u>Villages</u>	<u>Cities</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
County Tax Levies	\$14,136,053	\$33,988,028	\$32,734,297	\$ 80,858,408
City, Village, Town Taxes	8,359,306	34,679,334	63,001,782	106,040,422
School Tax Levies	30,820,881	71,836,058	75,619,276	178,276,214
Technical School Levies	5,007,576	12,257,129	12,104,472	29,369,177
Other Taxes	959,610	7,471,049	7,620,816	16,051,475
Totals	\$59,283,456	160,231,598	191,080,642	\$410,595,696

Source: Wis DOR, 2013

For example the above table shows that Brown County collects for itself \$80,858,408 in property taxes.

\$410 Million is collected each and every year from property taxes in Brown County. This does not include income taxes, corporate taxes, sales tax, estate tax, and gas tax. It also does not include hidden taxes/fees like GBMSD R2E2 project of \$149 Million. Paid for by annual 9-10% rate hikes for 5 years on your water bill.

OK it gets a bit overwhelming. Most municipal budgets are done in the summer/fall, except for schools they are done early spring. We also need to keep watch when non-budgeted projects come up though out the year. NWTC has a \$66.5 million referendum to spend above their budget amount. De Pere and Pulaski Schools are pushing through referendums. That is all laid on the backs of taxpayers.

Mostly doom and gloom, but there is a bright spot. The Brown County's 1/2 percent Stadium District Tax will come to an end this year after collection of over \$300 Million. However, true to form, now there are entities in Brown County pushing very hard to create a new 1/2 percent sales tax. That would be about another \$24 Million a year on top of the current \$410 Million in property taxes. The first attempt was thankfully shut down by 25-1 vote of the Brown County Board of Supervisors. More attempts are being planned.

As a watch dog on all of our taxes, the Brown County Taxpayers' Association - carefully dissects and analyzes the underlying facts and numbers behind our ever-increasing tax burden. There have been, and probably will continue to be, erroneous and misleading representations, facts, and assumptions foisted upon an unsuspecting public. We'll continue to do our best to ferret through the (intended) mess.

We will finally feel some relief of that burden. Please vote to cancel any future attempts at a Brown County sales tax.

Brian K. Verheyden - Director

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

March Meeting Notes.

Brown County Executive Candidates Debate.

Notes from Brown County Taxpayers Association meeting Thursday, March 19, 2015 at Titledown Brewing Annex.

Brown County Executive Troy Streckenbach debated his challenger, Tim Nowak. County Executive Streckenbach stated that he made four promises when he ran for office four years ago. He promised to reduce or freeze property taxes, cut spending, reduce debt, and create 4,000 jobs. He noted that property taxes are now lower than when he took office, the property tax Levy has not increased for four years, the County's debt has been reduced by \$23 million, and 5,000 jobs have been created in Brown County. He also noted that he owns and successfully operates several small businesses. He believes in using business principles to operate government.

Tim Nowak explained that he has been a full-time public safety worker for 10 years. He is also a small business owner. He believes that the County should be run as a service, not like a business. He believes that a lean government is not necessarily an effective government.

Responding to questions provided by the audience, the most significant difference in the candidates' positions on issues was replacing the Stadium District 0.5 percent sales tax when it ends with a 0.5 percent Brown County sales tax. Mr. Streckenbach was firmly opposed to the idea of a Brown County sales tax. Mr. Nowak supports the idea of a Brown County sales tax to support the County budget in a positive way.

Both candidates opposed the idea of county-wide property assessments to replace property assessments now being performed by the municipalities. They agreed that options for shared services should be considered wherever possible.

In concluding comments, Troy Streckenbach by stated that he will focus on growing the County's economic base and improving the infrastructure. Tim Nowak restated his idea of running government as a service, not as a business, and being a good boss to County employees.

The candidates' websites are:

Nowak: <http://www.votetimnowak.com/>

Streckenbach: <http://www.troyforwi.com/index.html>

The next BCTA meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 16, at the Titledown Annex. Also, everyone was reminded to vote on April 7. This important election includes the Brown County Executive, Green Bay Mayor, other local and state races including a State Supreme Court Justice and various referendums. Details on the back page of this TAX TIMES.

Dave Nelson—Secretary

“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”
... Margaret Mead

“Political correctness is a doctrine, fostered by a delusional, illogical minority, and prospered by mainstream media which holds forth the premise that it is entirely possible to pick up a turd by the clean end.”
... Winning definition of expression in a college contest.

“America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedom, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.”
... Abraham Lincoln

National Debt Update

How much is a Trillion?

As of the end of March, the U. S. National debt had reached a total of \$18,170,237,811,819.00. At the rate it is growing, in about 4 months it will officially have doubled during the Obama administration. At this rate it will not be long before Congress will be asked to increase the National Debt limit again, and we all know how that always ends up.

Here are some other interesting numbers garnered up from U S Debt.Org the last day of March. The U S population had reached 320,595,711 (how do they actually know this?), there are 117,888,190 income tax payers, the entire work force has 148,547,740 people, 14,854,775 belong to unions, there are 23,825,359 government employees, and 10,915,817 disabled Americans. While there is probably no significance to numbers like these, the government treats them like the National Debt, just another number to look at. The question is how many people does it take to add them up and why bother in the first place?

A trillion dollars is an unimaginable amount of money, and we doubt even our representatives in Washington can put it in context, To most people the word million represents the gateway to immense wealth, and billion and trillion are unknowns.

There have been several good visual examples and someone sent me the following instructions for saving a trillion. If you started to save a trillion dollars at the rate of a dollar per second, how long would it take?

First you would accumulate \$60 dollars for each second in a minute. The sixty minutes in an hour would amount to \$3,600, and the 24 hours in a day would total \$86,400. That's already more than the average annual salary. Keep going.

A 365 day year would bring your savings to a grand total of \$31,536,000., and now we're starting to get somewhere.

However, we have to consider that a trillion is a million times a million. Adjusted for a leap year day every 4 years, it would take a total of 3,168 years and 292 days to accumulate your first trillion.

Don't even ask how much it would cost to borrow a trillion dollars today, and pay it off in 3,168 years @ 5%.

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.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

WW.BCTAxpayers.com

Like us on



BROWN COUNTY
Taxpayers Association

Things That Make Us Wonder.

Now that Wisconsin has approved a "Right to Work" law, it will be interesting to see if it will encourage business development as proponents indicate or be a step backwards as its detractors indicate. Our job growth rate now ranks a dismal 40th in the nation which leaves room for improvement.

We can appreciate it may take some time for the dust to settle but if given a chance to work should both encourage new business development and still allow unionized trades to provide their skilled services. One University poll claimed it was favored by a 2-1 margin of state voters.

* * * * *

Our government watchdog agencies are always on the lookout for ways to improve our lives. An item from the *Budget and Tax News* claims that the Dept. of Energy is proposing new rules to make dishwashers more efficient, which could save homeowners as much as 68 gallons of water per year and .56 cents annually in electricity while costing manufacturers \$200 Million to comply.

We also read they are tinkering with the idea of putting individual water meters in hotel rooms to check and charge guests using more than their share of shower water.

We are fortunate in having an ample supply of water in this part of the country, but it seems it would be a matter for water utilities address what is considered usage for their locality by checking their meter readings.

* * * * *

Wisconsin currently has a cigarette tax of \$3.53 a pack, one of the highest in the country. While this has been touted as discouraging the smoking habit, it does provides nice chunk of revenue for state purposes.

One problem with the higher taxes is that smokers find ways to smuggle in cigarettes from other states with lower taxes, either by the carton for personal use or a truckload to share with friends.

The *Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance* cites a report that 31.3% of Ciga-

rettes consumed in the state are smuggled in from elsewhere. While this may be regarded as saving a consumer some money it is also considered illegal and difficult to police.

Once they get the illegal cigarette smuggling problem solved perhaps we can get after the drug trade causing so many greater problems.

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The 2015-16 Wisconsin Bi-Annual State Budget, (*as well as most other governmental budgets*), is a complex piece of work that seems deliberately designed to confuse rather than guide.

With its 600 plus pages it attempts to outline how about \$40 Billion is to be raised and dispersed annually by the various state agencies for their purposes with all good intents in mind. It is obvious you will never make everybody happy. While the party in power usually and rightfully has it's own agenda to follow, all of the states citizens and obligations to them must be considered.

This includes maintaining existing state agencies which include core services such as education, transportation, health and safety, welfare, and a long list of others added through the years as being necessary.

We are led to believe that in the state, various agency requests are to be scrutinized and prioritized due to budget limitations. Foolishness and inflation have already taken their toll, and options for additional funding are somewhat limited.

My guess would be that if you took 50 Democrats and 50 Republicans and asked them all to prepare a mock budget on their own, prioritizing at their discretion where to make cuts and where to add spending you would come up with 100 completely different scenarios. All based on what they thought was important and necessary.

We can acknowledge that the budget as submitted, even after all of the public hearings, state agencies, Legislature and Governor have weighed in. Some of the agencies seem never satisfied and possibly out of step with other demands for taxpayer support.

We are sure that provisions can be made for any true and valid

need not provided for in the state budget if the need arises, but all of the public whining observed in the media recently seems more a result of partisan politicking than a matter of what is needed in the state of Wisconsin.

* * * * *

While many of the adjustments in the proposed budget concern fiscal cuts which the various agencies will have to deal with, we acknowledge that some of the policy changes are causing some confusion and interruptions in necessary services while not really saving money.

One is a proposal to eliminate the local governing boards which oversee the Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRC) located throughout the state, and combine them with the Dept. of Health under centralized state control. This could have a very negative effect on Brown County where the percentage of population over age 65 is growing rapidly.

It is not clear just how this would work, or the effect on services offered. Each county in the state has its own unique demographics. Through the years the number of state and federal agencies providing aid has expanded with many expensive and unnecessary duplications.

One function of ADRC was referring clients to the proper resource, be it meals on wheels, financial, or medical providers. Often these referrals are to private or charitable agencies and not at taxpayer expense. It is greatly feared the level of service would diminish and even cost more if through a central source.

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Citing possible or imagined environmental damage, President Obama vetoed the bill to allow construction of the Keystone Pipeline to carry crude oil from Canada to refineries located in the south. It was claimed that this project would have employed 42,000 workers during construction at private expense as well as reduce our costs and dependence on foreign oil.

Whatever the rationale or outcome of this, *National Review* concluded that since the failure of initiatives to pass the Kyoto Treaty or car-



bon taxes, there has a demonization from the administration against any effort to produce, transport, refine, or ship oil, coal or gas in the United States. While this may or not be true, it seems we are going in different directions.

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Selling naming rights to some of our state parks appears to be the latest brainstorm to help defray the costs of staffing and maintaining these attractions. This method has been somewhat successfully used for years as a vehicle to finance sports venues. We acknowledge our state parks are a treasure that must be preserved, but are becoming more expensive to maintain along with their popularity.

Further complicating the situation is the shortage of funds allocated to the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund which was used to purchase vacant land by the state to be preserved for conservation and recreational purposes.

No doubt there may be a limit to the amount people are willing to pay in order to drive through, picnic, or even camp in a public owned park. The solution might have to be a combination of selective fee increases, cutting personnel costs and perhaps selling advertising and naming rights to certain structures and attractions at the parks similar to what the Packers have done at Lambeau Field without renaming the whole thing.

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There are pros and cons to raising speed limits to 70 MPH, even though that seems to be the accepted speed on most of our highways now.

Most of the cons come from driving too fast for conditions, especially during inclement weather, and a lack of courtesy and common sense. These are obvious when going through the labyrinth of orange barrels and lane changes known as the 41 corridor.

While lower speed limits were initiated as a means to conserve energy, that no longer seems to apply. The state needs gas tax revenue! On the pro side, highway improvements have made highways safer as long as people don't insist on demonstrating skills they learn from watching NASCAR.

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The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), has announced it will re-examine the 1959 airplane crash involving Buddy Holly and other entertainers.

What they will learn after 56 years remains to be seen. Have they figured out all of the details of the 1935 crash killing Will Rogers or what really happened to Amelia Earhart in 1937 yet?

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The 2015 Presidential election is still 20 months away, but starting to dominate the headlines. The pollsters are going wild picking favorites to get the money coming in.

Viable candidates and wannabes are getting all the exposure they can while lining up cash and support in the hopes the troops will rally behind them. With partisan politics being what they are, this promises to be a very important, expensive, and contentious campaign.

Unfortunately political strategy these days seems to require accepting contributions from any deep pocket while openly criticizing opponents for taking special interest bribes which is exactly the same thing.

At this point it is important to remember the person elected will have a great deal of responsibility placed on their shoulders and will require leadership as well as sensible decision making ability. He/she must be able to negotiate with both sides of the aisle and foreign countries, both friendly and unfriendly. The right to vote for our President is one of the greatest privileges our citizens have, and should be treated as such.

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So far this winter, expenses for snow removal must be way, way below budget. We assume all the municipalities benefitting put it in their piggy bank for use next winter rather than spend it elsewhere and running short the middle of next January.

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Despite the fuss created by the recent U. S. Supreme Court decision to allow photo identification in order to vote is not unique to Wisconsin. More than 30 other states already

require some degree of personal identification when voting, and more are sure to follow.

We can agree it is annoying to produce identification when voting, but not as annoying to hear of voting fraud and all the excuses for not being able to obtain identification from those able to take advantage of every government benefit available.

Could the media do a better job of serving the public if they would focus more on explaining the importance of voting and encouraging people to get out and vote rather than constantly reporting about poor voter turnouts, and echoing the complaints of those who just want to complain?

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"Common Core," is an innocent sounding name for the program, but to many it represents a Federal Government takeover of our education system. Nobody disagrees with the promise of better communication or math skills for everyone as it promises, but we have learned in the past that one size doesn't always fit all.

Most people throughout the country, including Wisconsin, seem reasonably satisfied with their school systems, they may be rightfully suspicious of mandates from a source often noted for re-writing history and using social engineering in their textbooks as a teaching tool regardless of the subject being taught.

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Kraft Foods and H. J. Heinz have announced a merger to become the fifth largest food company in the world. In previous years, both companies have acquired other well known brands becoming part of the merger.

While shareholders of the companies may celebrate, will this be good news for consumer shoppers? It may prove difficult for competitors to survive against such a giant controlling so many product lines.

While the two companies have promised a more "consumer focused company," we are suspicious that increasing profit will be the bottom line.

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Article 2, Section 3, of the U. S. Constitution mandates "The President

should take care that the laws be faithfully executed.” We assume this provision was inserted in the document with the assumption there was a law already in place. For example, Is there a law allowing the President to grant whole-sale amnesty to millions of illegal aliens at his discretion?

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As we understand, “executive power” has always been a privilege tool for the convenience of the President to handle minor tasks without having to go through Congress or other Federal agencies. No problem.

President Obama, however has stretched this privilege to a new and often expensive level. An example is last December when he all civilian federal employees a 1% raise without telling Congress how much it would cost.

* * * * *

We are fortunate to live in a part of the country where an ample supply of fresh water is generally available, with public health officials constantly checking. Anyone who has a sample from a private well checked is aware of all the trace elements which may be present in your drinking water.

Now we read that plastic “microbeads” too small to be filtered out are showing up in Great Lakes water. This means we are probably all drinking them. They started showing up in 2012, and are believed to come from items like tooth paste and cleaners. They go right through water treatment plants. They may or not be harmless with the danger being is that they can attract toxic chemicals found in the water.

It was not clear whether these beads are deliberately added to products or are a byproduct of waste treatment but we understand action is being taken by manufacturers to substitute other products in toothpaste. If it isn’t one thing to worry about it’s another.

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The Milwaukee County John Doe saga has an been ongoing side-show for several years with no results except keeping their District Attorney staff and a few private attorneys busy at taxpayer expense.

One way or another, it seems to be a part of politics more than betraying

the public trust and we will likely be exposed to a lot of alleged wrongdoings to become “alarmed” of between now and November 2016.

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Federal Reserve Chief Janet Yellen says she is in no hurry to raise interest rates, which can be good or bad news. Unemployment is way down, below 5% which is good for the economy, Interest rates are low which can encourage borrowing for business expansion. However low interest rates do not encourage people to save money, which can be either good or bad depending on ones money management habits,

It could also be good or bad for the Federal government depending on whether they just want things to look good by artificially encouraging spending or don’t really care about where the National Debt goes as higher interest rates will only increase what we already owe to the rest of the world.

* * * * *

A proposal in the new State Budget calls for the states counties to assume property value assessment duties now the responsibility of municipalities, It also calls for annual property reassessments at 100% of property value.

While this could impose a considerable cost burden on counties for compliance and fighting valuation appeals, there would be no additional state funding provided perhaps making it the Grandfather of unfunded mandates.

So far the Wisconsin Association of Assessing Officers, and a large number of counties have publicly objected to the plan,

There is probably no method of valuing private property for taxation purposes that will make everyone happy. What we have seems to work fairly well, and there are ample appeal processes available. Don’t try to fix what is not broken.

* * * * *

Recall that in September of 2000, Brown County voters narrowly approved a referendum which simply

asked, “Shall a sales and a use tax be imposed at the rate of 0.5% in Brown County for purposes related to football stadium facilities in the Professional Football Stadium District?”

We cannot deny that the passage of this referendum and ultimate Lambeau Field improvements have been positive for the Packers, and just about everything else connected with Green Bay and the entire State of Wisconsin. We all love them!

While the wording on the referendum was not overly specific, we recall there was a shortfall of \$160 Million to be bonded plus a reserve to be established for future maintenance in an unspecified amount. The question may be that about \$300 Million has been collected from all of us as a result of the tax, with no real public accounting made in the meantime.

We realize the Packers have a right to keep their finances confidential but the spending of tax money is usually a public concern.

Question #2 of the 2000 referendum asked, “Shall excess funds from the 0.5% Sales Tax and Use Tax be used for property tax relief purposes in Brown County?”

Recall this referendum was defeated by a wide margin.

As usual, lots of 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.”

“Be thankful we’re not getting all of the government we’re paying for”
... Will Rogers

“Spending your way out of debt is like drinking your way out of alcoholism.”
... Jay Leno

The TAX TIME\$

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The TAX TIME\$ - April, 2015

BCTA Meeting and Events Schedule – MARK YOUR CALENDARS.

Tuesday - April 7, 2015. General Elections. Brown County Executive, Green Bay Mayor, State Officials and Referendums.
DID YOU VOTE ?

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

Thursday - May 21, 2015, BCTA Monthly Meeting, 12:00 Noon.
Program to be announced.

Thursday - June 18, 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 Tiletown Brewing Co. Annex, "TAP ROOM."

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, 
 2015

"War has rules, mud wrestling has rules, but politics has no rules."
... Ross Perot

"I have never figured out why a Republican contributor is a fat cat and a Democratic contributor of the same amount is a 'public-spirited philanthropist.' ... Ronald Reagan

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New Members are Always
Welcome. Call 499-7701
Write us at P. O. Box 684
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www.BCTaxpayers.Org
for Details.