

FAIR - AND - ADEQUATE

close tax loopholes

protect public structures

control property taxes

The Institute for Wisconsin's Future newsletter on tax policy

Wisconsin citizens want strong communities, reasonable taxes and a revenue system in which all individuals, businesses and organizations pay a fair share. This monthly email newsletter covers current research, community organizing and political activity to support a fair tax system which adequately funds services for the common good.

Fire safety faces financial challenges across the state

Most people would agree that well staffed fire departments with up-to-date equipment are crucial to public safety and personal security. However, state aid for communities is not keeping pace with the cost of operations. As a result, some communities cut staff, close stations and postpone needed equipment repairs and purchasing. Other communities raise property taxes or charge people who call for emergency help. Neither would be necessary if the state had enough revenue to provide all local governments with adequate funding for all necessary services.



Plan to trim crews angers firefighters

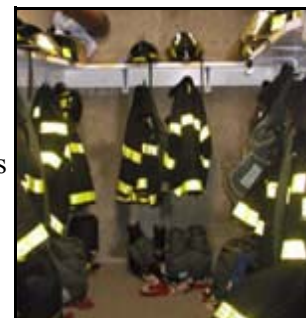
Firefighters accounted for more than half of the 100-plus people who packed the Milwaukee Common Council chambers for the city's annual budget hearing. They were united in their opposition to Mayor Tom Barrett's recommendation to reduce crews from five firefighters to four on three ladder companies and one engine company. Firefighter Kyle Dannies warned that the change could cost lives. <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=674913>

Milton fire chief calls for major spending jump

Fire Chief Loren Lippincott from the town of Milton proposed a 46% increase in spending for fire safety and emergency services. The money will be used to retain volunteers and prepare for the future. Since there is a tax increase limit of 2%, the proposal must go to referendum. The Fire and EMS system needs an additional \$240,000 to cover volunteer pay, vehicle replacement and to bring the sleeping quarters for out-of-town volunteers up to code. Bryan Meyer, Milton town chairman, says he sees the reasoning behind the budget but he doesn't know where the money will come from. "I have more of a concern about finding the dollars than justifying the proposed expenditures," he said. <http://www.gazetteextra.com/miltonfirespending092607.asp>

Town needs grant for fire equipment

Fireman's Fund employees were amazed at the needs of the Wascott Volunteer Fire Department after touring the fire station in Wascott, Wis. The department, which operates on a \$20,000 budget, uses equipment that is passed down from other departments and is more than two decades old. They nominated the fire department for a \$20,655 grant to purchase new turnout gear and communications radios for the firefighters. <http://www.firemansfund.com/servlet/dcms?c=heritage&rkey=325>



Fire Turnout Gear

Tight budgets lead to fire call fees

Charging residents a fee of \$500 if a firetruck has to respond to their property - something being considered in Lisbon - is a rare practice in this part of the state but not unusual in towns in northern Wisconsin. It could start spreading like wildfire, though, as municipalities here and elsewhere try to deal with budget constraints, some officials say. In Lisbon in Waukesha County, Town Chairman Michael Reed's proposal to charge \$400 to \$500 each time a firetruck responds is drawing heated opposition, including from the town's fire chief. <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=674522>

Appleton raises property taxes 5% - no new services

Mayor Tim Hanna distributed his proposed 2008 budget with a 5 percent increase in overall property tax collections. Most of the increase helps pay for a new police station. "We're not adding new programs or services," Hanna said. The budget focuses on dealing with double-digit jumps in the city's self-funded health care program, motor fuel costs and utility expenses. "If we are going to maintain our service at the levels we have and the levels our citizens expect from us there's not much room to make a lot of changes," Hanna said. Hanna said state shared revenues are expected to remain flat. Hanna said gasoline prices are budgeted to increase 22 cents per gallon through 2008, a 12 percent increase for electric service and an 8 percent increase for natural gas. "We've not cut back on infrastructure spending. It's an easy place to cut because it doesn't have an immediate impact on people, but for every year you do that it gets that much more difficult to keep up," Hanna said. <http://www.postcrescent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071004/APC0101/710040656/1979>

Business group endorses state hospital tax plan

Pro- tax advice for Assembly Leader Huebsch...

The Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC), one of the state's most powerful business associations, announced today its support for a proposed tax on hospitals to achieve the goal of providing access to affordable health care for Wisconsin ... The Wisconsin Hospital Association has dropped its opposition to the new tax.

The GMC endorsement adds to the growing pressures on Assembly Speaker Mike Huebsch (R-West Salem) and some of the other Republicans in the state budget impasse. Gov. Jim Doyle said this week that "extreme Republicans" were caving in to "too much right-wing pressure" and refusing to compromise on a budget. Wisconsin is the only state in the nation without a new budget plan this year. <http://www.biztimes.com/daily/2007/10/12/qmc-endorses-state-hospital-tax-pl>



Wisconsin business leaders support full funding for University of Wisconsin system

CEOs and leaders from 32 business organizations signed a letter to the Legislative Budget Conference Committee urging them to fully fund the University of Wisconsin system. The letter states that "*even the most efficient businesses must plan for growth in operating expenses, such as utility bills, health benefits, facilities maintenance, and other fixed costs. The UW System budget endorsed by the bipartisan Joint Committee on Finance funds these and other 'cost-to-continue' items, while providing about \$30 million for the Growth Agenda. The Assembly budget falls \$120 million short in funding... This would necessitate broad cuts at UW campuses and would paralyze the Growth Agenda. The net effect would be a smaller, less accessible, less affordable, less responsive public university which is less prepared to support Wisconsin businesses. That is not the right direction for our state. Fiscal responsibility is important. Prudent investments in Wisconsin's future are part of that responsibility.*" Signers include Gale Klappa, President and CEO of WE Energies; Dave Anderson, President of American Family Insurance; as well as bank presidents from Whitewater, River Falls, Eau Claire and Menomonie.

<http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/chancellor/budget/Business%20letter%20to%20legislators.pdf>

Former U.S. President Presses Milwaukee Official to Hear Citizens' Voice on Budget

Former United States President Thomas Jefferson (channeled through Marquette drama student Joe Picchetti) stopped in Milwaukee County on September 22 to chide County Executive Scott Walker for stopping an advisory referendum on local tax decisions. Milwaukee County has faced annual cuts in funding for key public services. This summer, the County Board voted to ask County residents whether they favored a one penny sales tax to:

- * prevent higher fares and reduced bus routes,
- * protect park maintenance,
- * maintain aid for the arts and culture
- * increase public safety resources
- * reduce property taxes.

The referendum was just advisory -- a test of public opinion on the sales tax. An actual sales tax increase would require state legislative approval. However, County Executive Scott Walker did not feel this token level of democratic participation was acceptable. He vetoed the Board decision foreclosing citizen input on the plan.

Jefferson was adamant in his opposition to Walker's veto and stated, "I don't want to tell Mr. Walker how to run this county, but apparently, somebody needs to. **Government being founded on opinion, the opinion of the public ... ought to be respected.**" The voters and taxpayers of Milwaukee County are perfectly able to decide for themselves if they want a sales tax increase to support their parks, their buses, and their police services and give them property tax relief. It's simple, Mr. Walker, this decision should be up to the public, not to you."



National Anti-Government Spokesman Attacks Assembly Leader Huebsch for Cigarette Tax Agreement

Grover Norquist -- famous for his goal to "shrink government until it can be drowned in the bathtub" -- entered the Wisconsin budget struggle with advice against a cigarette tax to fund children's health care. His irritated letter to Republican Assembly leader Mike Huebsch says "Rather than the quick fix of a tobacco tax hike, I encourage you to reform using exclusively the revenue taxpayers have already overpaid into government coffers...Even beyond the significant damage to small businesses and the overall state economy, funding children's health care programs with a diminishing revenue source is an irresponsible move."

<http://onmilwaukee.com/politics/articles/hissom100507.html?12903>

