

La Crosse Wisconsin Voter

No. 79 League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area Newsletter Dec. 04-Jan. 05

THE PRESIDENT'S PODIUM

Dear La Crosse Area League Members,

Election fatigue? As a mental health therapist, I may request that it be added to our *Diagnostic Statistical Manual*. The emotions are still running high with the electorate, which has some advantages. Education on the issues that League is studying, will study or has studied will have more impact if people are more engaged or enraged. Let us hope the election fatigue does not turn into apathy. Did I let a negative thought into this article? League members are the opposite of apathetic, we may get tired once in awhile, but rebound we do!

The newsletter will be a combined December/January newsletter but that does not mean we have less going on. We are looking forward to more discussions on TABOR in December. As this issue evolves, we will be needed to put on forums so the public can understand what it will mean in their lives, if it moves forward.

I will not be forwarding e-mail from our State League Office, as you will be able to get direct action alerts from the state office. In the past, I have forwarded them on and the plan was that Nancy Hill would be forwarding them as new legislation needs action but now we will have a direct route which is much more efficient. Your e-mail will be sent as a group so when you get an e-mail from our state office, it will be an action alert. They are also going to be grouping the e-mails into areas so if there is an action alert for this area, with a particular legislator, we will get the information and the request. Andrea Kaminski is our new Executive Director, but the request for the e-mails came from the Legislative Committee for our State League. If you do not want to receive these alerts, please contact me or notify our state office.

If you come to our programs, you will not be disappointed. Bring potential new members so they can see League in action.

League-ally Yours,

Kay Adams
President of League of Women Voters-La Crosse Area

TABOR, PART TWO

Our December general membership meeting will be a continuation of last month's Taxpayer's Bill of Rights discussion with Prof. Joe Heim, UW-La Crosse.

Many polls show that voters in key legislative districts in Wisconsin say high taxes is their number one concern, and they support limits on taxes and government spending. This debate over spending limits will dominate the next legislative session the same way it dominated the recent elections. Thus, an important balance must be found between taxes people can afford and services people want. It is therefore critically important that we understand the background of this complex debate and remain attentive as the legislation makes its way to voters.



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Last month's meeting involved lots of lively discussion that had to be cut short due to time restraints. Please plan on attending December's meeting with your ideas, concerns, and questions. If there is a particular issue you would like Prof. Heim to discuss, contact Roxanne Reynolds before the meeting, and she will pass your topic on to him.

Thursday, December 16th
Doc Powell's
Buffet Lunch : 11:30 am and TABOR : Noon to 1:00pm

Reservations: Roxanne at 526-5871 or roxannereynolds@centurytel.net

JANUARY GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Mark your calendar for our January "Meet the Candidate" luncheon.

The important mayoral primary election for the City of La Crosse will be taking place on February 15, 2005. League of Women Voters would like to create an opportunity for you and your guests to meet and discuss the issues with the candidates for this important office.

The lunch will take place at Forest Hills Golf Course restaurant, 600 Losey Blvd N. La Crosse on January 27th, 2005. The buffet lunch consists of a selection of cold sandwiches, potato salad, chips, assorted cheeses, pickles and cream of portabella mushroom soup. Cost will be \$10.00 per person (tax and gratuity included). Lunch will be served at 11:30 am.

Please contact Roxanne at 526-5871 or roxannereynolds@centurytel.net with your reservations as soon as possible. Invite your friends! We have plenty of room and ample parking for guests. We are hoping for a very large turn out for this event. The position of Mayor of La Crosse is an office that has great influence over the health and welfare of the entire county.

Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR): Part I Summary

By Maureen Kinney

Professor Joe Heim, UW-La Crosse, spoke to LWV members on November 17 about TABOR. The December meeting will also be on TABOR. I'll try and summarize his talk which was very interesting and detailed.

Prof. Heim indicated that we are in the current situation, where TABOR is being considered, because the Wisconsin legislature has been unable to control its own spending. State spending has been increasing faster than the rate of inflation. Wisconsin is in the top five to fifteen states for taxes raised per capita, depending upon the income declined, and it has not been made up. Wisconsin has in large part due to the fact that Wisconsin also has one of the highest percentages of women in the workforce.

Prof. Heim indicated there were a number of reasons why we were spending so much including that the power of special interest groups has gotten much greater in Wisconsin. We have a lot of lobbyists, the re-election campaigns have gotten extremely expensive, and Wisconsin has had a lengthy culture of spending. Our state provides us with a high level of service and that is what our population expects. All of us favor paying less taxes, but not loss of services.

This is not the first time that spending limits have been considered. In the 1980s, there were both levy limits and cost controls for local governments and schools. When the state took over 2/3 of the school funding, the state imposed special spending controls on the schools to ensure that the schools did not continue to both raise taxes and receive the state money.

The image shows a Wisconsin income tax form for the year 2004. The form is tilted and contains the following text:

- 1 Wisconsin income tax**
- Complete form using **BLACK INK**
- For the year Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2004, or other tax year beginning _____, 2004 ending _____
- You must fill in your social security number _____
- You must fill in spouse's social security number _____
- State election campaign fund**
- If you want \$1 to go to the State Election Campaign Fund, check box(es).
- You Your spouse
- You Your spouse
- Checking the box(es) will not change _____
- Tax district** Check proper box and fill in name of city, village, or town, and _____
- Filing status** Check box
- Single
- Your legal last name _____
- If a joint return, spouse's legal last name _____
- Home address (number and street) _____
- City or post office _____
- State _____ Zip code _____
- Legal first name and middle initial _____
- Spouse's legal first name and middle initial _____

Prof. Heim noted that the Democratic governor and the Republican legislature have not figured out how to work together. Governor Doyle has never served in a legislature and most Republican legislators have never worked with a Democratic governor. He indicated that the budgetary process has not gone smoothly.

TABOR is a constitutional amendment. To amend the state Constitution, the same proposal has to go through two sessions of the legislature and then be approved by the voters. He said one reason the Republicans are pushing for a constitutional amendment is that this process avoids the governor's veto. There are other options, which could be passed by statute but would then be subject to a governor's veto. Other options would require the governor and the legislature to cooperate.

Prof. Heim stated that in looking at TABOR-type legislation, one has to consider whether it should be done by constitutional amendment (once it is the Constitution, it is difficult to get back out again) or statute, which is more easily modifiable. Also, should TABOR cover just state spending or also local spending? Prof. Heim noted that a good portion of the local spending, i.e. school districts, is already subject to spending controls. He also noted that one could argue that there is a bit of arrogance on the part of the legislators who are having trouble keeping their own spending under control to then turn around and tell the local units of government what to do. Prof. Heim said that Wisconsin citizens have the most trust in their local representatives.

TABOR is not a spending freeze; it places limits on growth. The spending growth would be linked to some type of indicator such as the rate of inflation, an increase in personal income or an increase in family income growth in the state, etc. The Senate and the Assembly were not in agreement on what index should be used.

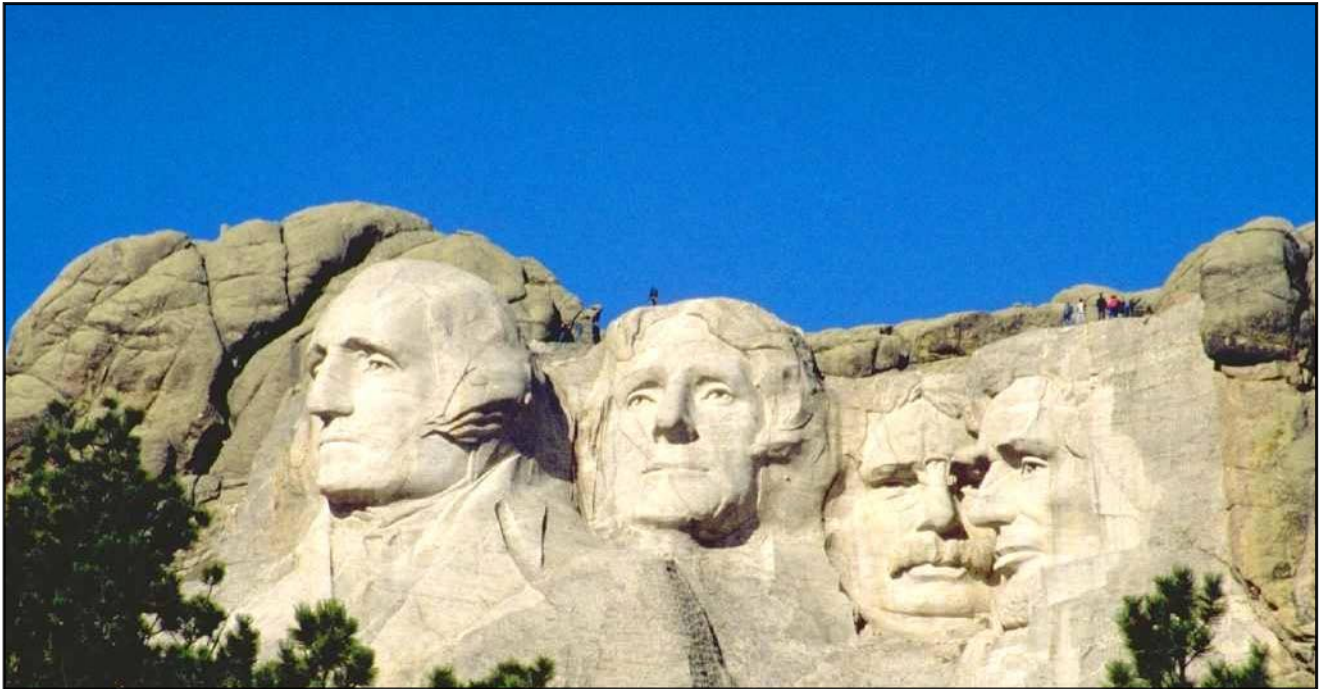
There is also a very important issue as to what types of spending should be covered by TABOR. The Assembly and the Senate have not been able to agree. Prof. Heim used as an example whether program revenues should be counted as income for purposes of capping spending. For example, if a campus within the University System has significant funds coming in by way of grants and gifts: should that be considered as income to the university for purposes of capping their income? If the university would go out and get some significant grants for medical research, or receive significant gifts from alumni, even if those grants/gifts were targeted for special purposes, under the Assembly proposal, those monies would be counted as income for the university, as a part of the cap, and therefore, the university would receive less state money. The ability of a University of Wisconsin campus to receive gifts and grants would dry up if the grant and gift givers knew that the effect of the money received from their program would only decrease what the state provided to the university. One can make similar arguments about program fees for the Department of Transportation, motor vehicle licenses or DNR, park fees, hunting fees, etc.

Some versions of the legislation have allowed for local referenda to exceed the spending limits and others do not. There is also an issue about surpluses and deficits. In a good year, if incomes rise greatly, there could be excess tax income and therefore more money available. Does that money go into a rainy day fund? If there is a deficit because incomes drop, lost jobs, etc. what happens then?

Prof. Heim noted that under TABOR, the state legislature is really saying that the legislators cannot control themselves so they need some kind of special statute to put controls on the legislature. He noted that seems to be a strange admission. Right now, about 65% to 70% of all money collected by the state comes back to the local level by way of schools or other local government units. The state feels it is not getting credit for the money that it does send back. The big five as far as spending at the state level are education (K-12), the corrections department, healthcare, shared revenue and the University System. Over the past two years in the budget, the University System actually took a large hit, an actual reduction in their monies from the state. The other four areas of spending got smaller gains than they wanted, but they did not have real dollar cuts. Prof. Heim indicated that there can be some very devastating effects on the University and higher education under certain proposals. There is even some discussion of having the University of Wisconsin at Madison become a private university. The University does not get all that much from the state and could probably raise that amount through drastically increasing the tuition, comparable to what other private colleges charge. He noted that going to college is already becoming somewhat of an elite commodity, that a university education is being priced out of range for lower income individuals and families.

Prof. Heim also noted that Wisconsin actually has fewer state employees per capita than is the state average across the nation. It is a myth that we have lots of state employees.

Don't forget to come to TABOR II on Dec. 16.



LEAGUE CONTACT INFORMATION

League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area:
<http://www.lwvlacrosse.org/>

La Crosse Area League Phone: 791-1191

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League of Women Voters (National): <http://www.lwv.org/>

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Assembly District 94 Rep. Michael Huebsch
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Assembly District 95 Rep. Jennifer Shilling
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La Crosse County web site (information on Board of Supervisors and Committees):
<http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/Default.htm>
State Legislative Hotline:
(800) 362-9472

Wisconsin State Legislature (including Wisconsin Blue Book): <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>

To check on the voting record of elected officials, go to:

Project Vote Smart
<http://www.vote-smart.org/>

League of Women Voters
DemocracyNet: <http://www.DNet.org/>



SEND CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING *LA CROSSE WISCONSIN VOTER* TO THE EDITOR AT ANITALARRY@CENTURYTEL.NET

COMING IN 2005: JUNE 3-4, LWV STATE CONVENTION, JANESVILLE

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER, 2004 - JANUARY 2005
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE LA CROSSE AREA

*TABOR: Second Program with Joe Heim
Doc Powell's, 200 Main St.*

Thurs... Dec. 16 at noon (Lunch 11:30 a.m)

*Board Meeting
Doc Powell's, 200 Main St.*

Wed., Jan. 12 at noon

Meet the Candidates Lunch.

Thurs., Jan. 27 at noon (Lunch 11:30 a.m.)

Forest Hills Golf Course Restaurant, 600 Cosey Blvd N

PRIMARY ELECTION

TUES., FEB. 15

Note: Board meeting times/location are subject to change; refer to agenda or contact LWV President.



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