

June 20, 2007

What is it about money that conservatives don't understand?

[Bob Dohnal](#), of the *Wisconsin Conservative Digest* rails against Gov. Doyle's proposed increase in gas taxes, and he is absolutely right... but for the wrong reason. Dohnal would have us believe that this tax, like all others, hurts Wisconsin's business climate. And while it certainly doesn't help, the more significant reason to oppose it is that it is regressive taxation that hurts lower income families disproportionately. But conservatives don't think that way.

This and all other corporate taxes are added to the product prices and the consumers reimburse the companies at the cash register. Thus we really should eliminate all corporate taxes -- at least for those whose CEOs pay Wisconsin taxes -- and increase the progressive tax rate on not just wages but on all other income as well. This will offset the lost corporate tax revenues and block the gamesmanship when CEOs take \$1 per year in salary and millions more in nontaxable benefits. THAT will bring corporations and jobs to Wisconsin.

But let's get a few things straight. The state budget deficit -- and the need for any tax increase at all -- comes from years of Republican control of the state legislature and the open pockets of ex-Governor Tommy Thompson. Many laws were passed that even today transfer taxpayer assets to the special interests that wrote big campaign checks. Is it any surprise that taxes must now be increased to make up for the state subsidies given to these fat cats?

What has really driven the state's high tax status is our corrupt pay-to-play political system, not liberal spending habits.

The Democrats aren't any better, proving that the so-called "tax crisis" is bipartisan corruption rather than political ideology.

As a lifelong center-right Republican (though admittedly not a very good one lately), I cringe when people who claim to be "compassionate" always vote against doing the right thing if low-income people benefit in the process.

Yes, some people have zero ambition and should be made to work for their welfare check. But most others just don't have the wherewithal to move into high-paying positions, and even if they did those jobs are now being outsourced to other countries.

Still others don't have it in them to dig at every financial opportunity knowing that someone else is going to be hurt in the process. They believe in capitalism, but not the dog-eat-dog world of corporate and executive greed. Already the top 1% of wealthy Americans own more assets than the bottom 95%. Just how much is "enough?" Exactly what are they going to buy with \$10 million or \$100 million per year that they can't buy with \$1 million per year?

It can get worse and it will. But these rich folks and politicians had best consider what will happen when the wealthy finally own all of the assets and the lower classes own none. They should look south to Mexico, which is virtually owned by a half dozen families.

Importantly, the Right has it wrong on health care. We are already paying for a single-payer system, we just aren't getting it. For the same amount of money we are spending today to cover 85% of the population, we could provide full coverage to 100% of Wisconsinites.

It never ceases to amaze me, the amount of energy that can go into a project just to avoid doing the right thing. The best, simplest, least costly, most effective thing we could do is expand what has been working so well for years, Medicare. You get sick, you get care, and the caregiver gets paid. Guaranteed. Nothing could be simpler. And when you fold in the young and healthy with the old geezers like me, the average cost is less than we spend today.

A Medicare-for-all system, like the Miller-Benedict Health Security Act (SB51/AB94), would be a boon for Wisconsin businesses and the state's economy. And also to the tens of thousands who have no insurance at all and are tilting toward medical bankruptcy.

Instead of costing employers 15% of wages for insurance premiums, they'd pay a 3.3% single-payer health tax on wages. Employees would pay another 3.3% that would eliminate deductibles and co-pays and expand coverage to include limited vision and dental. The additional costs would be more than offset by the elimination of the 31% of wasted bureaucracy imposed on patients, doctors and hospitals to support an insurance industry that adds absolutely nothing to direct patient care.

But follow the money and you'll find that the politicians don't like this system.... because their insurance company contributors don't like the system. This has absolutely nothing to do with doing the right thing for the public -- it has only to do with collecting big campaign checks so getting re-elected is made easier. These politicians should be ashamed.

Here are some basic decisions we must make:

- The businesses that are being clobbered by the insurance industry must demand passage of the Miller-Benedict Health Security Act. But unfortunately, they must also send larger amounts of political cash to get their representative's attention away from the insurance industry. That's just the way it is in a moneyed political system. Get used to it.
- Businesses must also demand that their associations eliminate their conflicts of interest or sit the healthcare issue out. Many associations not only are siding with their insurance and healthcare members, against their other members, they are also selling insurance policies to their members. Why would they want to lose that income?

- State legislators are paid to spend state money by their contributors, and taxes rise as a result. Conservatives must ask themselves whether this corrupt political system is really worth the costs. Is private money the way they want the government to be run? If they answer yes, they must quit complaining about the resulting spending and deficits. They can't have it both ways.

- And the voters? They must force a complete turnover in 2008 and demand that our pay-to-play system be eliminated. Not reformed.... totally eliminated! And those politicians blocking it must be removed.

-- Lohman is from Colgate and is a founding member of the Business Coalition for Single-payer Healthcare (www.BusinessCoalition.net). He authored "Politicians - Owned and Operated by Corporate America" and can be reached at jlohman@execpc.com.