

# More bore

*TABOR backers try to force plan on others*

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By DENNIS A. SHOOK - Freeman Staff

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If you were lucky you received an allowance from your parents when you were a kid.

If you were unlucky they told you what you had to do with it. And it somehow never seemed to be enough to cover everything they insisted you do with that seemingly paltry sum.

In some cases, you also gave them most of the money you earned elsewhere and they repeated the very same process.

The problem is that the parents set the goals for you. Fortunately, they were right most of the time. Saving for a college education or a car are worthier goals than spending all your money on candy and carnivals.

That is something like the relationships local governments have now with the state government ... with the exception that the local government leaders are generally the ones acting like adults and the state leaders are the ones lacking maturity of judgment or, at least, fairness.

That has never been more evident than during the continued insistence on some kind of one-size-fits-all tax freeze by the state. Yet despite mass defections by legislators on both sides, the Taxpayer Bill of Rights - a constitutional amendment effort known as TABOR - continues to stalk the marbled halls in the Concrete Big Top in Madison.

It's like the monster that wouldn't die.

State Reps. Frank Lasee, R-Bellevue, and state Rep. Jeff Wood, R-Chippewa Falls, are the mad scientists who created this thing, despite witnessing that similar beasts had run amok in other states, most notably Colorado. But it is such a pretty monster ...

It offers a beautiful vision of Wisconsin taxpayers finally freed from living in "taxpayer hell," as the state is often called.

As proposed, TABOR would limit local governments to spending each year at current levels, with an increase only up until the rate of inflation. The only way to exceed that level of spending would be to hold a referendum. The reasoning is that if local governments are forced to cap spending, they will be forced to make cuts. There is this child-like notion that such a plan will make everything better.

The problem is, every time something is cut in local government, someone gets hurt in a profound way.

Waukesha County Board Chairman Jim Dwyer explained it best when he told two Republican state legislators earlier this week that there is none of the fabled fat in his county's government. Cut a dollar here or there and it means less services for the needy, delays in processing and jailing criminals, or potential delays in plowing or repairing roads.

And those are just some of the obvious problems.

State Rep. Suzanne Jeskewitz, R-Menomonee Falls, a past member of that county board, told her former colleagues she understood and vowed not to support TABOR. But state Rep. Ann Nischke, R-Waukesha, acknowledged she would probably have to support TABOR.

Yet neither of the legislators was talking about what services should be cut if they decide to cut back on the allowance to local governments. They believe that political dirty work is best left to the local leaders. After all, those are the tough choices.

In fact, the state legislators are seemingly on the verge of making matters worse by further cutting money for important human services without reducing mandates to those governments. If that state leaders were so convinced the job can be done for less, they ought to fully take over the courts system and the health and human services network that they have counties administer for them. Then they can prove that they can do it cheaper.

They aren't willing to make that kind of commitment to the problem, however. It is better to speak in slogans than do the real work.

The unspoken truth lurking behind TABOR is that it is at the state level where some kind of restraint is needed. There is no more bloated bureaucracy anywhere in Wisconsin than in the state Department of Administration, which grew exponentially and inexplicably under Gov. Tommy G. Thompson - a Republican.

Notice how such freeze ideas were never foisted by the Lasees and Woods of the state Legislature when Tommy was in charge?

If the Republican legislators backing TABOR were sincere about cutting the taxpayers' burden, they would begin to cut into the Madison bureaucracy. But they won't because they don't want to make the very same tough decisions they want local governments to make. Taxpayers should see that for the hypocrisy it is and demand of their legislators a more widespread and well-reasoned approach to controlling costs than TABOR.

With some admitted trepidation, I quote Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" lyric and apply it to these state politicians:

"I'm starting with the man in the mirror;

"I'm asking him to change his ways.

"And no message coulda been any clearer -

" 'If you want to make the world a better place,

"Take a look at yourself and make a change."

- Quote of the Week: Waukesha County Board Chairman Jim Dwyer to legislators on forcing local governments to pass a referendum every time spending increased: "What if I put on the ballot a question that asked, 'Would you like to have a unicameral legislature with 35 members that would cut your budget by 'x' amount of dollars and met twice a year ... and 85 percent of the voters said 'yes.' Would anybody in Madison vote themselves out of a job? Absolutely not. You only listen to the voters when it's exactly what you want to hear from them."

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