"Happy" International Women's Day

Wisconsin Republicans equal pay for women

In 2009, the Wisconsin legislature made it easier for victims of wage discrimination to have their day in court. That law is now on the verge of repeal.

The Equal Pay Enforcement Act was meant to deter employers from discriminating by allowing workers to plead their cases in the state circuit court system which is less costly and more accessible than federal court. In November, 2011, the state Senate led by Scott Fitzgerald approved SB202 to repeal this law. On March 1, 2012, the Wisconsin Assembly led by brother Jeff Fitzgerald did the same. Both were party-line votes. The legislation is now in the hands of Gov. Scott Walker (R) waiting for his signature.

"It really takes away the teeth and the enforcement aspect of equal pay in Wisconsin," said Sara Finger, director of the Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health (WAWH).

In Wisconsin, women earn 75 cents for every dollar that men earn according to WAWH, which also estimates that families in the state "lose more than $4,000 per year due to unequal pay."

What happens next? According to Sarah Finger, Governor Walker can ask for the bill to sign it or veto it right away. By default, it goes to his desk on March 22. If he does not act on the bill one way or another, it will automatically become law. The Women's Alliance is asking people to contact the Governor and tell him to veto the bill as soon as possible.


Adopt a streetlight or a cop?

During 2010 and 2011, the city of Colorado Springs had a unique program -- adopt a streetlight. Because of budget cuts, streetlights were being de-activated unless city residents adopted one near their house for 12 months. The cost was $125 for low wattage or $300 for high wattage lighting. Maybe someone should contact New Jersey Governor Christy where massive budget cuts have resulted in cutting 1/3 of the police force and crime rates have jumped. Closer to home, Illinois cut their highway patrols and fatal accidents are on the rise. It's a small price to pay for lower taxes, right?

On March 2, Ira Glass from the NPR program This American Life talked to citizens from Minnesota, New Jersey and Illinois about these issues. He also interviewed Grover Norquist, the uber-right winger and head of the group Americans for Tax Reform. He is notorious for his quote, "I want to shrink government until it is small enough to drown in the bathtub." For a frightening look at our possible future, you can listen to or download the program at this link http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/459/what-kind-of-country

Ronald Reagan as a sunshine socialist

A significant factor in the US' continuing economic weakness is the fact that government in the United States is doing exactly what both theory and history say it shouldn't — slashing spending in the face of a depressed economy. If it weren't for this destructive fiscal austerity, our unemployment rate would almost certainly be lower now than it was at a comparable stage of the "Morning in America" recovery during the Reagan era.

Notice that I said "government in the United States," not "the federal government." The big cuts have come at the state and local levels. These state and local cuts have led to a sharp fall in both government employment and government spending on goods and services, exerting a powerful drag on the economy as a whole.

Let's compare government employment and spending during the Obama-era economic expansion, which began in June 2009, with their tracks during the Reagan-era expansion, which began in November 1982. Reagan is the spender — and it worked for the economy.

(Excerpt from March 5 Paul Krugman column)
Spring 2012: Annual school budget cuts deeper than ever

Oshkosh:
The Oshkosh Area Board of Education voted unanimously Wednesday for cuts in the 2012-2013 school year totalling $3.3 million. The action freezes teacher pay at current levels and requires employees to pay more for their health insurance for the second consecutive year. It eliminates pay increases for years of experience and accumulation of graduate credits.

Other cuts in the plan include increasing middle school class sizes to 27 students and restructuring custodial services.

School Board President John Lemberger says, “These are all painful cuts. There aren’t any good cuts left in the budget. It’s all flesh and bone.”


Mount Horeb - Letter from School Superintendent Dr. Dwayne Anderson

Dear Staff and Community Members,

It is time to work on our 2012-2013 district budget — one of the most difficult budgets that our school district has had to assemble during my tenure. It has always been my goal and the goal of the Board of Education to create a balanced budget without staff layoffs. This continues to be our goal, but the obstacles in our way are more numerous than at any time in the past.

On both the federal and state level, education funding has been cut to lower our national and state debts and provide funds for other priorities. Based on these and other factors, our school district will need to cut approximately $1,000,000.

To balance the budget and minimize the impact on staff, the Administrative Council reviewed each building and department budget on a line-by-line basis and reduced the supplies, materials and equipment budgets for 2012-2013 by approximately $600,000. Hopefully, by using austerity measures, most of our current staff can be preserved for at least one more year. But, I don’t think it will be possible to balance next year’s budget with the same number of staff that we have in 2011-2012.

Madison:
In its first look at the 2012-13 school budget, the district is projecting a $12.4 million deficit. With rising insurance and fuel costs, the district projects general fund spending of $319.7 million while revenues are projected to be $307.3 million.

The district is looking at several options to close the gap. "The hope is we won't have to take more out of employee pockets or do any layoffs," said Erik Kass, assistant superintendent for business services.

http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/archives/2012/01/positioning_the.php

From the Washington desk -- OMB Watch

Report highlights need for additional revenue options

The current top federal income tax rate is 35 percent. But what would the top rate have to be in order to raise enough federal revenues to cover spending? A recent paper from the Tax Policy Center (TPC) and the Pew Fiscal Analysis Initiative sets out to answer that question, but its answer is incomplete. To bring federal revenues up from their current historic lows, Congress needs to consider more revenue options than just raising individual income tax rates.

http://www.ombwatch.org/node/11998/

GOP Candidates' Tax Plans Reduce Taxes on Wealthy, Increase Deficits

As the media focuses its attention on the Republican Party’s presidential nominating contest, several tax and budget organizations have taken turns examining the candidates’ tax proposals. In January, Citizens for Tax Justice (CTJ) released a report looking at the costs of each of the GOP contenders’ plans, and, just recently, the Tax Policy Center (TPC) scrutinized the distributional impacts of the candidates’ proposals. Both reports found that all of the contenders’ tax plans would disproportionately benefit the highest-income households and exacerbate budget deficits.

http://www.ombwatch.org/node/11999/

Quote of the Month

"Austerity politics is bad economics"  
(Jack Norman - Research Director, IWF)