

Budgets, currency, wages and pickle juice

August 7, 2010

Outta the Zone... Once again, if there's a more socialistic state in the union than Alaska someone will have to point it out. A USA Today analysis has found that per capita, citizens in Alaska have received \$3,505 of stimulus and unemployment benefits despite living in a state that has only a 7.9 percent jobless rate. (Compare that number one ranking with Michigan's 16th place finish of \$1,665 per capita with a 13.2 percent jobless rate.)

Add in the \$1,305 "dividend" each Alaskan gets just for living in the state and Alaskans enjoy a pretty nice position at the front of the handout line.

That's why it's so hilarious to watch half-term Alaska governor Sarah Palin tour the country purporting to have a clue about budgeting and taxes. In spite of crib notes written on her hand (like she did on a Fox News interview with Chris Wallace) why anyone would give any credence to economic advice from Palin or any other Alaskan politician is a mystery.

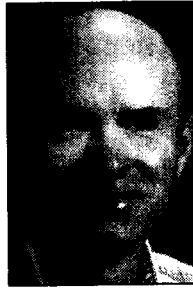
• Speaking of economics, there has been an increase in the use of what's called "competing currency" in Michigan. According to ConnectMidMichigan.com, the currency is not U.S. legal tender because the "dollars" are being printed by private mints, but some businesses are accepting the "currency" as payment for services, something that's perfectly legal. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, the Coinage Act of 1965 says: "Private businesses are free to develop their own policies on whether or not to accept cash unless there is a state law which says otherwise." So, technically, if a business

agrees to be paid with U.S. dollars, competing currency, gold bullion, or even monopoly money, it's their choice.

• On the subject of pay, be thankful you're not a Chinese factory worker. After workers all over that country went on strike last month for higher wages, the raises they won actually turned out to be decreases in pay. All the companies (like Foxconn which makes iPhones, Honda, and several toy factories) did is eliminate overtime and increase the workload. According to China Times, some workers now are required to work 11 hours and now have to assemble 17 components per hour instead of 15. In reality, their per hour/per item pay has been reduced.

Plus, even though a factory worker currently might make \$280 per month, factory owners have begun charging workers for lunches that had previously been free, so the "raise" actually is going back into the owners' pockets.

• Hey, as long as we're on China, Beijing has an interesting take on the immigration problem. As more people come to China's capital looking for work, the crime rate has risen. So, officials are making the immigrants live in gated communities, but the twist is the gates are being locked from the outside to keep the immigrants in (not locked from the inside to keep the crime out). Gates are locked at 11 p.m. and opened at 6 a.m. The Chinese call this "sealed management." (Associated Press).



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• Hey, don't laugh. Michigan may be able to use this "sealed management" approach when it comes to the Great Lakes water supply. According to the Detroit Free Press, a new study shows that 14 states, from Montana to Florida, are at risk of water shortages. It's now dawning on these states that their growth will be stopped because they lack something Michigan

has: fresh water.

The National Resources Defense Council is charged with managing our strategic resources, so what's to prevent other states from demanding that our water be redistributed?

I agree with the Free Press that the next governor needs to enforce a strict hands-off policy when it comes to "our" water. Make no mistake, we need to think of Great Lakes water as "ours" just like Alaska thinks of its oil wells as "our oil." If water is essential for your business growth, then the new governor needs to "make sure they know where the water is, along with great bunches of people thirsty for work."

• This from David Stockman, former Reagan budget director: "Republicans used to believe that prosperity depended upon the regular balancing of accounts — in government, in international trade, on the ledgers of central banks, and in the financial affairs of private households and businesses, too. But the new catechism, as practiced by Republican policymakers for decades

now has amounted to little more than money printing and deficit finance ... This approach has...led to the serial financial bubbles and Wall Street depredations that have crippled our economy."

• Finally, the world has gone bonkers and I can prove it. For years we've been told that to be environmentally responsible we need to replace our incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. The problem is, CFLs contain mercury, a neurotoxin. So, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, here's what you're supposed to do if a CFL breaks in your home.

"Have all people and pets evacuate the room. Turn off heating or air conditioning. Open all windows for at least 15 minutes. Carefully scoop up any broken fragments into a glass jar with a metal lid."

OK, so here's the deal ... It's the middle of winter with a blizzard raging outside and a CFL breaks. I turn off the heat, open the windows, find a glass jar with a metal lid (spilling the pickle juice it used to contain all over my shoes which then freeze solid because the windows are open and it's now 40-below in the house), and I scoop up the broken CFL fragments and seal the jar.

Which leads to my real question: Now what? I have the broken CFL in the jar. Where do I put it? In the trash so it contaminates the landfill? On a shelf in the garage until I die and then it's my kids' problem? Mail it to the EPA? It's all seems a tad bonkers to me.

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