

War on Spending

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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Finding ways to trim government deficits is all the rage. The State of Wisconsin took center stage after Governor Scott Walker introduced legislation to mandate that State employees contribute toward their own health insurance and retirement benefits while diminishing the collective bargaining rights of these employees' unions. Politicians and pundits from all over the country weighed in on the move, with other Republican governors waiting anxiously to see if the measure passed so they could introduce it in their states.

Because of government deficits at the municipal, county, state and federal levels, officials and legislators are constantly looking for ways to cut spending. Democratic Representative Betty McCollum from Minnesota believes she has an idea that puts her ahead of the pack, and she's racing to Washington to support her idea.

McCollum offered an amendment to the 2011 House budget bill to ban the U.S. military's sponsorship of NASCAR race teams. Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s team is sponsored by the National Guard, Ryan Newman is sponsored by the Army, and A.J. Allmendinger is sponsored by the Air Force. McCollum believes that the \$100 million spent by the military on these sponsorships over the last decade has been a waste of taxpayer money.

McCollum's chief of staff, Bill Harper, said "I would challenge the Pentagon to give me one example of someone today in Iraq or Afghanistan who saw the Go Army car going around the racetrack and that's why they joined the Army."

NASCAR spokesman Randy Poston responded by saying, "NASCAR fans are the kind of people who fight America's wars, which would put into question the wisdom of banning the military's ability to reach out to them."

McCollum's amendment to the budget bill is just one of more than 400 that have been offered. To become part of the law, an amendment must survive subcommittee and committee votes as well as passage by both Houses of Congress, followed by the president's signature.

But the military isn't the only part of the federal government under scrutiny for sponsorships. During the glory days of Lance Armstrong's professional cycling career, the U.S. Postal Service spent \$31.9 million to sponsor his racing team from 2001 to 2004. This amounted to approximately 65 percent of the team's total budget and may help explain part of the USPS' \$7 billion deficit.

To put this kind of sponsorship into perspective, consider that General Motors paid Tiger Woods \$40 million from 2005 through 2009 to sponsor Buick. While Woods played in almost 40 nationally-televised tournaments a year during that stretch, Armstrong only participated in one race that shows up on America's radar, the Tour de France.

The information about the USPS deal was obtained from court documents uncovered during a fraud probe involving doping allegations in Armstrong's cycling team. If the allegations prove true, Armstrong and his teammates would not only be in trouble with the International Cycling Union, but could also face charges of fraudulently using government funds.

Floyd Landis, one of Armstrong's teammates, apparently peddled information to federal officials about the doping on Armstrong's team, Tailwind Sports. Tailwind strongly denies the allegations. While Landis himself was caught doping, he could potentially profit from snitching; if the government can prove fraud, whistleblowers are entitled to up to a third of the trebled damages that come from any convictions.

One thing's for sure: these findings certainly make our office's sponsorship of my softball team look like a steal.

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