

March 2, 2016

The Honorable Kevin Brady
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sander M. Levin
Ranking Member
Committee on Ways and Means
United States House of Representatives
1106 Longworth House Office Building
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The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Brady, Ranking Member Levin, Chairman Hatch, and Ranking Member Wyden:

As leaders in state and municipal government, we are writing to stress the importance of maintaining the current tax exemption for municipal bonds. It has been estimated that at the combined state and local levels, we must spend \$3.6 trillion by the year 2020 to meet our infrastructure needs, and the importance of building and maintaining our public infrastructure has never been more apparent.¹ Tax exemption of interest on municipal bonds was implemented more than 100 years ago at the dawn of the U.S. income tax system, and we strenuously oppose any reduction or elimination of this tax exemption. Any such change will inhibit our ability to make critical infrastructure investments. Proposals to change this commitment to tax-free municipal bonds would not only be costly for state and local taxpayers, but also result in fewer projects, fewer jobs and further deterioration of our infrastructure.

Three quarters of all public infrastructure projects in the United States are built by the states and local governmental entities and tax-exempt bonds are the primary financing mechanism for these essential projects. Municipal bonds have a very strong repayment record – much higher than corporate bonds – allowing state and local governments to borrow responsibly for capital projects, and providing a safe and reliable investment option for our citizens.

Tax-exempt municipal bonds finance highways, bridges, transit systems, airports, water and wastewater systems, schools, higher education facilities, and many other basic infrastructure projects. Tax-exempt bonds bring affordable capital to these projects, saving an average of 25 to 30 percent on interest costs compared to taxable bonds. In an age of constrained federal and state budgets, the ability to save billions of dollars on infrastructure financing is critical for state and

¹ “Failure to Act, The Impact of Current Infrastructure Investment on America’s Economic Future.” Page 7, Report, American Society of Civil Engineers, January 15, 2013.
http://www.asce.org/uploadedFiles/Infrastructure/Failure_to_Act/Failure_to_Act_Report.pdf

local governments and their taxpayers. If issuing affordable debt is no longer an option and unfunded projects begin to further mount, state and local governments will have to seek additional infrastructure support at the federal level through federal highway legislation and other sources.

Simply put, any change to the tax treatment of municipal bonds will have a serious impact on the cost to state and local governments of financing critical infrastructure projects. Yet proposals have been offered by both parties to limit the long-lived tax exemption for these bonds.

The cost savings state and local governments realize through tax-exempt municipal bonds occur because investors are willing to accept a lower rate of interest in exchange for that interest being exempt from taxation. If the tax-exemption is capped or eliminated investors will demand a higher interest rate on municipal bonds thereby increasing the cost to municipal issuers. As a result, municipalities will have to either curtail infrastructure projects or raise taxes on sales, property or income. Additionally, if changes to the tax treatment of these bonds are enacted, a tax risk premium will be built into interest rates demanded by future investors. The potential impact of the change is more than theoretical: in December of 2012 the municipal bond market experienced a spike in rates as investors recognized a cap on exemption was under consideration.²

We urge you to take into account the consequences that any change in the taxation of municipal bonds will have on the taxpayers in every state and reject any proposed changes to the tax deductibility of municipal bond interest.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

American Public Power Association

Government Finance Officers Association

National Association of Health and Educational Facilities Finance Authorities

National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers and Treasurers

National Association of State Treasurers

² Tax-Status Threat Fuels Worst Losses Since Whitney: Muni Credit. December 21, 2012
<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-12-21/tax-status-threat-fuels-worst-losses-since-whitney-muni-credit>

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Brian O'Connell
Utilities Director, City of
Bowling Green

Doug Johnson
Mayor, City of Bryan

Kevin Cornish
Village Manager, Village of
Clinton

Kenneth Harsanje, Sr.
Mayor, City of Genoa

Patrick Moeller
Mayor, City of Hamilton

Carla Fiehrer
Vice Mayor, City of Hamilton

Joshua Smith
City Manager, City of
Hamilton

Ryan Shoffstall
Mayor, City of Lakeview

Brian Rospert
Village Administrator, Village
of Milan

Donald Harrod
Village Administrator, Village
of Minster

Travis Sheaffer
Council Member, City of
Napoleon

City Council, City of
Napoleon

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Mayor, City of New
Martinsville

Randall Genzman
Village Administrator, Village
of Oak Harbor

Steve Dupee
Electric Director, City of
Oberlin

David Handwerk
Mayor, City of Orrville

Jeff Brediger
Finance Director, City of
Orrville

Terry Pugh
Mayor, City of St. Clairsville

Robert Vincenzo
Former Mayor, City of St.
Clarsville

Pat Hale
Mayor, City of Tipp City

Catherine Fix
Auditor, City of Wadsworth

Robert Patrick
Director of Public Service,
City of Wadsworth

Robin Laubaugh
Mayor, City of Wadsworth

Karen Wintrow
Council President, City of
Yellow Springs

David Coffee
Director of Budget and
Finance, City of Kent

Brian Huff
Controller, City of Kent

Roy Johnson
Village Administrator, Village
of Carey

Lori DiNallo
City Council Member, City of
Painesville

Jim Fodor
City Council Member, City of
Painesville

Tom Fitzgerald
City Council Member, City of
Painesville

Christine Shoop
City Council Member, City of
Painesville

Katie Jenkins
City Council Member, City of
Painesville

Mike DeLeone
City Council Member, City of
Painesville

Paul W. Hach, II
City Council Member, City of
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City Manager, City of Milford

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Council Member, City of
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Mary Dunbar
Council Member, City of
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Matt Zone
Council Member, City of
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Grand River Dam Authority

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Municipal Power Authority

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Electric Systems of
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Treasurer, City of Watonga

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Business Director, City of
Watonga

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Mayor, City of Ponca City

Craig Stephenson
City Manager, City of Ponca
City

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General Manager of Electric
Utilities, Ponca City Energy

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City Manager, City of Marlow

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Vicki Cox
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Mary Dungan
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Buster Aldrich
Trustee, Town of Okeene

Robert Jones
Trustee, Town of Okeene

Ron Pittman
Trustee, Town of Okeene

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Charles Kelly Jr.
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Manager, Plymouth Utilities

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Utilities

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Chris VanderHayden
Superintendent, Menasha
Joint School District

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and Water Commission

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Light and Water

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Utilities

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Water and Light

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Water and Light

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Tim Herlitzka
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Utilities

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Oconomowoc

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Oconomowoc Utilities

Sarah Kitsembel
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Oconomowoc

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Falls

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River Falls Municipal Utilities

Brad Chown
City Administrator, Black
River Falls

Dale Oppermann
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Utilities

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Holstein Utilities

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Sac

Thad Birmingham
Mayor, City of Sturgeon Bay

Stewart Fett
Utility Commission President,
Sturgeon Bay Utilities

James Stawicki
General Manager, Sturgeon
Bay Utilities

Greg Buckley
City Manager, City of Two
Rivers

Tom Bushman
Electric Utility Director, Two
Rivers Water & Light

Ken Kozak
Associate Director, Two
Rivers Water & Light

Jill Weiss
Utility Manager, Jefferson
Utilities

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Mayor, City of Sun Prairie

Nancy Everson
Commissioner, Sun Prairie
Utilities

Dan Presser
Commissioner, Sun Prairie
Utilities

Ted Chase
Commissioner, Sun Prairie
Utilities

Rick Wicklund
Utility Manager, Sun Prairie
Utilities

Wyoming

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Treasurer