

# THE CENTERPIECE

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- A majority of people believe that current tax law provides no encouragement for honest reporting, according to a recent national sample survey completed by the **Survey Research Office** for **Accounting Professor Don Morris**. An additional 25 percent said that the law provides very little encouragement. Currently, the tax code contains only disincentives to discourage honest reporting. A reform proposed by Morris seeks to encourage honest tax reporting and would provide a financial incentive – a refundable tax credit – to taxpayers who are willing to have their tax returns classified as public information. In the survey, 49.2 percent of the 748 people polled indicated that they were either very likely or somewhat likely to take advantage of a 10 percent credit for consenting to release the privacy restrictions on their returns. The IRS set its most recent estimate of the tax gap – the difference between what taxpayers should pay and what they actually pay on a timely basis – at \$450 billion annually, equal to about 20 percent of the tax collected. Funding for the survey was provided by the Center for State Policy and Leadership.
- **Peggy Jo Jackson** was released from prison on March 29th through a commutation of her sentence by Governor Pat Quinn. Jackson was serving a life sentence without parole for killing her husband 27 years ago. The husband had regularly beaten and abused Jackson and her children. All parties agreed that Jackson was not present at the murder scene and should be set free. The **Illinois Innocence Project** joined with the Illinois Clemency Project for Battered Women in filing a petition for Jackson’s release to the Governor’s Prison Review Board last October.
- Political Science **Professor Michael Miller’s** article, “Do audible alerts reduce undervotes? Evidence from Illinois,” will be published in an upcoming issue of the *Election Law Journal*. In November 2007, Illinois became the only state to require that voters casting optical scan ballots be alerted to undervotes. An undervote occurs when a voter fails to make a choice among one or more contests on a ballot. The Illinois undervote alert involves an audible beep and ballot kickback when the voter inserts the ballot into the optical scanning machine. Miller looked at undervote patterns in the 2010 general primary election and found no evidence that the audible alert reduced undervoting.
- Voters take the post-disaster action of incumbent politicians into account when judging them after natural disasters (evaluating governors and presidents more favorably when an official disaster declaration follows), but politicians’ actions in the wake of man-made disasters have no effect on voters’ (more negative) assessment of them. These are the main findings of thesis research conducted by political science graduate student **Meagan Musgrave** and presented at the recent annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science

Association. Musgrave's thesis, advised by **Professor Michael Miller**, has been awarded the 2013 best thesis prize by the UIS Department of Political Science.

- The **Survey Research Office** recently completed the spring Sangamon County Economic Outlook Survey, which asks local businesses and nonprofits for their assessment of how the economy will do in the next twelve months. Results indicate more positive evaluations of the economy than in the fall 2012 survey, but still negative expectations for the overall Sangamon County economy, particularly for the education sector. Expectations for education and educational services have dropped significantly from a year ago. The recent survey also finds that, when asked about the effects that various economic factors will have on their businesses, respondents are most concerned about state government finances and payments. Other concerns include the national economy, the Affordable Care Act, the expiration of the payroll tax holiday, and reductions in federal spending. The survey is funded by the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce.
- The Affordable Care Act, commonly called Obamacare, goes fully into effect in January 2014, and enrollment in the new insurance options provided under the law begins this October. Even though full implementation is only months away, it remains to be seen whether the new law will make health insurance more affordable for average Illinoisans. The May edition of **Illinois Issues** explores that question in depth.
- The 2013 edition of the popular **Roster of State Government Officials**, published by **Illinois Issues**, is now on sale. The Roster contains information on how to contact constitutional officers, legislators and staff, state agencies, congressional representatives, and media outlets. Individual copies are available for \$7.00, but discounts are offered for bulk purchases. For more information or to order, visit the Illinois Issues website, <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>, email [illinoisissues@uis.edu](mailto:illinoisissues@uis.edu), or phone (217)206-6084.
- **National Public Radio** has announced that it is ending production of the popular program, Talk of the Nation, June 30. Over the years, Talk of the Nation was the most requested program by WUIS listeners, and last July it was added to the station's weekday afternoon program lineup as part of the move to an all news and information format. **WUIS** is currently looking into using other NPR programs to fill the gap.
- The **Brian T. Milbrandt Memorial Award for Excellence**, annually presented to a graduating Graduate Public Service Intern (GPSI), was awarded April 18th to **Destiny Moser**, an intern with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS). Moser, who is finishing her master's in human development counseling, was nominated by her supervisor, John Harris, for, among other things, developing and presenting a comprehensive training program for HFS staff and taking on a workload previously handled by two interns. The **Sagarika Madala Memorial Award for Exemplary Leadership**, annually presented to a GPSI supervisor, was given to **John Baranzelli**, an engineer with the Illinois Department of Transportation. Both awards were presented at the GPSI Annual Recognition Breakfast at UIS.

David P. Racine, Ph.D.  
Interim Executive Director, Center for State Policy and Leadership  
Director, Institute for Legal, Legislative, and Policy Studies  
University of Illinois Springfield

One University Plaza, MS PAC 409  
Springfield, IL 62703-5407  
Phone: (217)206-8417