



HGSUW News & Views

Hasselberg Grebe Snodgrass
Urban & Wentworth
Attorneys and Counselors

Volume 10, Issue 1

March 2013

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE OUR NEW FIRM NAME



Charles J. Urban

We are pleased to announce that we have changed our law firm's name to Hasselberg Grebe Snodgrass Urban & Wentworth. Chuck Urban was a founding partner of our firm at its creation in 1997. David Wentworth II joined our firm in 1998, and became a partner in 2001. Both gentlemen have contributed substantially to our law firm's success over the years, and the inclusion of their names in our law firm's name is meant to recognize their contribution and the leadership roles they have taken on for the future.



David L. Wentworth II

Our firm began in 1997 with the name of Hasselberg, Williams, Grebe & Snodgrass. In 2002 Sandra Birdsall joined our firm, and the name was changed to Hasselberg, Williams, Grebe, Snodgrass & Birdsall. Mrs. Birdsall retired from the practice of law in 2007. Mr. Williams retired in 2010. We want to thank Mrs. Birdsall and Mr. Williams for their contributions to our law firm and wish them the best in their retirement.



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Special Points of Interest:

- my Social Security online website
- Julie's Law
- Insurance companies and employers looking at credit histories

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NEW DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

The Social Security Administration made an important announcement last December that affects people looking to bring forth social security disability claims. To help disabled individuals collect their benefits faster, the Commissioner of Social Security announced that the Social Security Administration has added an additional 35 conditions to their Compassionate Allowances list. This list is a way for the agency to quickly identify disabilities and other medical conditions that meet their standards of a disability, and allows the organization to fast-track the disability application process. Individuals diagnosed with conditions on the Compassionate Allowances list are able to get approved for benefits usually within a couple weeks of submitting their application.

Another important announcement coming from the Social Security Administration this year is the agency has expanded the services available online for people who have a *my Social Security* account, which is a personalized online account individuals can use at any stage of their career, whether they are accruing Social Security benefits or receiving them. The new online services allow individuals better access to their claims and benefits. Users are now able to access their benefit verification letter, payment history, and earnings record instantly. Beneficiaries can also change their address and start or change direct deposit information online.

Any person 18 years of age or older who is not receiving benefits can sign up for a *my Social Security* account. Qualified workers will have secure access to their Social Security earnings and benefits information. The account also provides users with an estimation of future benefits so they can better plan for their retirement.

If you have any questions regarding the filing of a social security disability claim or any pending claim you may have, please contact Ken Snodgrass at (309) 637-1400.



NEW YEAR, NEW DRIVING LAWS

The New Year brings with it newly enacted laws; there are about 150 of them. Illinois motorists need to be aware of the new rules of the road. Ignorance is no defense. For those motorcycle enthusiasts out there, getting caught popping a wheelie while speeding will now carry a \$1,000 fine. While not all motorists are driving around performing daring stunts, there are a few new laws that are important to note as they relate to license plate registration, the use of cell phones and speeding.

The annual fee for basic license plates has been increased by \$2 to \$101 annually. The fee increase is expected to raise as much as \$20 million to support the Department of Natural Resources. Not all motorists will be affected this year though. The law was not signed by Governor Quinn until this past December, after the January and February renewal notices were already sent. Consequently, those renewing their plates in January and February will still pay the 2012 fee. Also beginning this year is a special registration plate for siblings of a person who lost their life while serving in the U.S. armed forces. The Secretary of State began issuing these special license plates in January. These plates do not require an additional fee.

With regard to the use of cell phones, a new law has expanded the ban on the use of mobile phones in construction zones to include areas without reduced speed. Before the enactment of this law, it was only illegal for Illinois motorists to use their cell phones while driving in construction zones with reduced speed limits. Now, it is illegal in all construction zones. Further, the use of cell phones is now prohibited when Illinois motorists are driving within 500 feet of an emergency scene.

Another new law, known as Julie's law, has been passed but will not go into effect until July 1, 2013. Under this law, judges are no longer able to enter an order granting court supervision to motorists who are found traveling more than 25 mph over the speed limit on a non-rural road or more than 30 mph over the limit on highways. Instead, these motorists will face increased penalties. The previous law allowed courts to grant court supervision to drivers caught driving up to 40 mph over the limit.

If you have questions regarding these laws or any other traffic violations, please contact Boyd O. Roberts III or Vincent M. Boyle at (309) 637-1400.



YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO COPIES OF YOUR CREDIT REPORTS

Most people are aware that a bad Credit Score can keep them from getting loans, or require them to pay higher interest rates on loans they do obtain. However, many may not know that Credit Scores are also used in matters unrelated to the extension of credit. For instance, insurance companies often use a person's credit history in determining the rates to charge a customer, and even whether to cover an individual at all. Additionally, although the practice is banned by law in most situations in Illinois, where it is allowed employers sometimes use applicants' credit histories when making decisions regarding hiring and promotions.

Many factors go into a person's Credit Score, and the credit reporting agencies that produce these scores do not provide their exact formulas. One thing that is certainly important to maintaining a good Credit Score, regardless of the exact formula, is knowledge. In that regard it is important to know that by law each of the three credit reporting agencies are required to provide you with a free copy of your Credit Report on an annual basis if you make the request. This Report will not include your Credit Score, but it will provide you with the information that is used to make up your Score, and will allow you to identify any inaccuracies or areas of concern for you to address. Your Credit Report from each of the three credit reporting agencies can be obtained free of charge at www.annualcreditreport.com. You can obtain all three at the same time, but it may be advisable to spread out your requests through the year so that you can identify any new issues that may arise quicker than if you obtained all three reports at the same time on an annual basis.

If you have any questions relating to credit or consumer law issues, please contact David L. Wentworth II, Alison E. McLaughlin, Michael P. Roush, or David B. Wiest at (309) 637-1400.



NEW TAX LAW NARROWLY AVOIDS THE FISCAL CLIFF

The last minute nature of the deal to avoid the "fiscal cliff" caused the name of the Act to be questionable, but it was passed in time to avoid taxes being dramatically raised on most Americans. The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 was actually passed by the Senate in the first couple of hours of 2013, and was passed by the House of Representatives later that day. It was signed by President Obama on January 2, 2013.

The Act made permanent certain prior tax cuts that were set to expire at the end of 2012. The federal income tax rate on individuals making under \$400,000.00 and married couples filing jointly making under \$450,000.00 will not change in 2013. The tax rate for income above those levels will increase from 35% to 39.6%.

Additionally, the personal exemption and itemized deductions will begin to phase out for individuals starting at an income of \$250,000.00, and at an income of \$300,000.00 for married couples filing jointly.

Higher earners will also have higher capital gains tax rates in 2013. For individuals making more than \$400,000.00 and couples making more than \$450,000.00 the capital gains tax rate will increase from 15% to 20%. Additionally, as a part of Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act health care law there will be a 3.8% Medicare surcharge on investment income for individuals making over \$200,000.00 and couples making over \$250,000.00.

Additionally, those who are not in the higher income levels will also see a larger portion of their income taken in taxes. A "payroll tax holiday," which had reduced employees' contributions to Social Security, was not renewed by the Act. Therefore, the payroll tax deducted from employees' paychecks will return to 6.2% from the 4.2% which was in effect in 2012.

If you would like to discuss allowing us to assist you with your tax preparation, or if you have any other tax related questions, please contact James R. Grebe, John G. Dundas, or Michael P. Roush at (309) 637-1400.

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A special thanks to John Dundas and Vince Boyle, our editors and associate attorneys, for their selection and preparation of the articles appearing in this edition of HGSUW News & Views.

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EXPECT DELAYS ON INCOME TAX REFUNDS

Like the rest of America, the late passage of the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 appears to have caused confusion and concern with the Internal Revenue Service. Citing changes made in the Act, the IRS delayed the start of processing of 2012 tax returns until January 30, 2013. It is expected that this will also result in a delay in the processing of refunds to taxpayers. However, it is important to note that the IRS has not extended the deadlines for the filing of 2012 tax returns. The IRS has, however, extended the deadline to avoid estimated tax penalties for qualifying farmers to April 15, 2013.

If you would like to discuss allowing us to assist you with your tax preparation, or if you have any other tax related questions, please contact James R. Grebe, John G. Dundas, or Michael P. Roush at (309) 637-1400.

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