

Public Forum:

What a difference a year makes!

Just a year ago (on May 9, 2002), I took the oath of office out at the Milwaukee County Zoo. We had the swearing in ceremony at a very public location in respect to the fact that the people of this county really brought out the change in county government. Throughout the year, I worked hard to remember those same people in all of our actions.

Besides the pension and sick leave benefits scandals, I inherited a \$51 million shortfall from the previous administration. Instead of turning to our overburdened property taxpayers to balance our problems, I sent down a budget for 2003 that had NO increase in the property tax levy.

The county board sent added some spending and I sent a budget back with 27 vetoes and NO increase in the property tax levy. In the end, the board voted to override nine of my vetoes, but the difference between my 0% increase and their action was less than one-half of one percent.

In December of last year, Milwaukee County made the Top Ten list. Only this time, it was having one of the Top Ten lowest tax levies in the state.

Looking ahead, we will face some equally dramatic challenges in the next year. While we changed the pension for new employees, the past system will require \$20 million more next year (on top of the \$15 million we put in for 2003). In addition, sick leave benefits granted in November of 2000 will cost up to \$15 to \$22 million in 2004.

Despite claims last fall that local governments would not feel cuts from state government this year, Milwaukee County will see a reduction of \$7.5 million in 2003 and \$15 to \$20 million in 2004. The state aid lost this year is the largest part of the current \$11.35 million shortfall.

Since I realize that it is unlikely that the state will restore those funds, we will propose ways to further reduce our spending. Instead of looking to point fingers of blame, the public is looking for leaders who are able to point out solutions. This is our plan: to provide answers and not just complaints.

Our goals for the next year are simple:

- Continue to restore trust in county government
- Fix the financial messes left from the previous administration
- Help retain and create jobs in Milwaukee County

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While the challenges we face are large, so are the opportunities. Just as we did over the past 12 months, I will continue to involve people from all over Milwaukee County to make certain that

this is a better county government for everyone. For those who helped us along that path and for those who are willing to help during the next year, I say thank you!

Scott Walker  
Milwaukee County Executive

Inserts:

[In Greenfield and Greendale, this means moving forward with local civic and business leaders on the work on 76<sup>th</sup> Street to attract shoppers and employers to the area.

[In Wauwatosa, this means working with local officials to insure the proper use of land on the county grounds – from a state forest in the northeast quadrant to medical technology on the Milwaukee County Research Park.

[In Franklin, this means working with local officials to insure that 76<sup>th</sup> Street is usable by residents and employers.