In November of 2003, 20 of the 25 Milwaukee County Board Supervisors voted for our budget that actually cut the tax levy for 2004. Last Wednesday, a majority of the Milwaukee County Board voted to raise the property tax levy by $6.5 million. Ironically, most of these Supervisors voted for our county budget just last fall. So what happened?

The answer is simple and it points to a very real problem in our fight to lower property taxes here and across the State of Wisconsin. The difference between this year and last is that all of the Supervisors were just elected to four-year-terms in April. Now, with three and a half years to go before voters arrive at the polls, they feel empowered to ignore taxpayers and side with special interest groups.

The other irony is that most of these Supervisors are also the people who voted to put the county in this mess four years ago when they approved Tom Ament's pension and sick leave plan. In 2000, the county budget included no payments to the pension fund from the tax levy. In 2005, we need $37.8 million to cover the pension contribution.

The outrageous pension and sick leave benefits were enough to blow the lid off of years worth of pent up frustration over growing property tax bills. Thankfully, the people rose up to take back their government.

The tax levy went up nearly twice the rate of inflation in each of the two budgets prior to this great change in county government. Now, for the third year in a row, I presented a budget to lower the tax levy from the previous year.

Our proposal lowered the tax levy while still maintaining core county services. We continue to support our parks and zoo. We keep all of our bus routes without fare increases. We continue to provide health care for the poor. We continue to provide assistance to people with disabilities, support for our seniors and aid to our veterans.

While the vast majority of my budget remained in place after the budget vote, the big issue that the county board took out was our pension obligation bond plan. A number of Supervisors even attacked the plan and one even got out a credit card and tried to argue that we were balancing the budget on a credit card-like plan.

The facts show that I have to act more like a parent who comes into clean up the mess by the kids after they held a party and ran up charges on the credit card. That's what took place four years ago when the pension and sick leave plan was approved by the county board and we're still paying for it today.

Currently, we have a $262.3 million obligation to the county pension system and the liability to pay it remains – with or without pension obligation bonds. Our plan would use this financial tool to save taxpayers' money while paying for this obligation. The State of Wisconsin and the MPS system did it last year and many other communities are using pension obligation bonds as a way to responsibly balance the budget.

The cruel irony is that many Supervisors are talking about approving such a plan early in 2005. The only real difference between this and our plan is that we used the savings to balance the budget without a tax levy increase.

In the end, I still want to thank taxpayers from all over this county who contacted their Supervisor. While we did not get down to a zero percent increase, I am certain that the levy would have gone up much higher than 2.9% if not for the calls, emails and letters from concerned voters. Thank you so much!