

In November of 2003, 20 of the 25 Milwaukee County Board Supervisors voted for our budget that actually cut the tax levy for this year. On Thursday, September 30, 2004, a majority of the members of the Milwaukee County Board held a press conference just minutes after my address to denounce the details of my third budget that cuts the tax levy. 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, our budget again lowers the tax levy from the previous year. The owner of an average home assessed at \$150,000 in Milwaukee would see a cut of \$54 on the tax bill in December. This represents the lowest tax rate since 1980.

Since the budget came out, I've been walking through neighbors all across this county. At each door, I talk about our budget and the great debate with the County Board. On one side is our proposal to lower the tax levy while still maintaining core county services. We continue to support our parks and zoo. 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.

On the other side stands our opponents who are ready to raise taxes to the maximum allowed under state law. If they continued this trend over the next four years, the county portion of our tax bill would go from just over \$700 to over \$1,000 on an average home in Milwaukee. Apparently, these people choose to ignore the census data that shows that we're the only county in the state to lose population over the past decade or that our county lost jobs during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

What would they get with such a big tax hike? They suggest that want to replace the jobs we eliminate in this budget - even though most are held vacant because of retirements. That means more of a burden on our future budgets because of those incredible fringe benefits. They suggest that they want to replace the Pension

Obligation Bond plan that is more conservative than the one used by the state and the school district. They suggest that they don't want to budget for land sales that we've worked with the City of Wauwatosa on for nearly two years.

In other words, this is a debate between higher taxes and more spending versus our plan to cut taxes, lower spending and use all of our financial tools to balance the budget.