

As always, I will respect the will of the people.

They don't want us to raise taxes, so I will continue to propose budgets that hold the line.

They don't want us to propose 261 million in bonding to pay for the mess created by Tom Ament and many people on this current County Board, so I will not propose to do so.

Looking ahead to the 2006 county budget, we have some real challenges. One way in which we hoped to tackle some of those challenges was through the use of Pension Relief Bonds. The way in which the wording of the referendum question on this issue was put on the ballot by the members of the county board made it all but impossible to pass – since many voters thought that the county would be taking on a new spending project.

Overall, I was surprised that the referendum question received as many votes as it did. It is somewhat ironic that people who pushed the wording were here when Ament pushed through the pension and sick leave deal and did nothing to stop it. Now, they oppose these ideas, but have nothing to offer as an alternative.

Well, I won't leave it to them to offer answers. I'd be waiting forever.

Regardless of the way in which the ballot question was worded, however, I respect the will of the people. We will not go forward with this particular plan as a way to balance the 2006 county budget.

One point made by opponents of the referendum question is exactly right - this was one of our ideas to help me NOT raise the property tax levy. Today, I want to make it crystal clear that I will still NOT raise the property tax levy.

My full cabinet is meeting tomorrow morning. The major topic of our meeting will be 2006 budget instructions and the fact that departments will be expected to come in without a tax levy increase - and with some additional cuts to offset other issues like state aid cuts, lawsuits and possible wage and benefits increases through arbitration.

We will find the reductions in spending needed to balance the 2006 budget. Unlike the members of the county board, we will offer solutions to the problems that we inherited that actually work. Looking at the 2005 budget, we are already facing challenges because of the unrealistic changes made by the county board during the last budget debate.

The bottom line to take from all of this is simple: I will NOT raise the property tax levy.

I know that continues to be the will of the people.

That mandate was reaffirmed last April when the voters of Milwaukee County re-elected me with nearly 58% of the vote.