

In 1991, the Milwaukee County Board passed a .5% sales tax with the promise of “property tax relief.” From 1992 to 2002, the property tax levy went up 55.1%.

Now, the Milwaukee County Board is asking voters to approve a referendum calling for a 1% sales tax increase with the promise of property tax relief – as well as funding for other quality of life benefits. Do they really think we will fall for that trick again?

Here are the facts:

- First, there is no guarantee of “property tax relief.” The referendum does not require property tax relief. The current County Board cannot prevent another County Board (or even themselves) from raising property taxes in the future.
- Second, the referendum calls for a \$130 million sales tax increase. With a weak economy, does anyone believe that now is the time to enact a \$130 million tax increase?
- Third, Milwaukee County already has a higher sales tax than our neighbors in Racine and Waukesha counties. Do we want to be the highest in the region and in the state?
- Fourth, there are other (I would argue better) options. Our budget proposal for 2009 calls for NO increase in the property tax levy. At the same time, we maintain all transit routes and increase transit services for people with disabilities; we add 26,000 hours of labor in the parks, build a new aquatics center and replace failing bathrooms and playground equipment; and we maintain one of the best EMS systems of paramedics in the country.

If the members of the County Board want to provide property tax relief while protecting transit, improving our parks, and preserving a quality EMS system, they should pass our 2009 budget.

Long-term, we have better plans for transit and parks too.

Recently, Chicago got a bid for \$2.5 billion to run Midway Airport. We propose a similar bid for Mitchell Airport and that the proceeds be used as a long-term funding source for improving and upgrading transit.

An independently elected Parks District is a better alternative to support a system that has been challenged for the past two decades. This option would preserve funds collected for use on parks and not for state mandates or employee and retiree benefits from the county.

Each of these is a better alternative than raising taxes during times of economic unrest.

Politicians make a lot of promises around election time. Voters should look at the facts before casting their votes.

Years ago, the County Board promised “property tax relief” and the property tax levy went up 55.1%. Hearing these facts, the public should remember the old saying, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”