

FAIR - AND - ADEQUATE

close tax loopholes

protect public structures

control property taxes

The Institute for Wisconsin's Future newsletter on tax policy

October *TAX NEWS* Headlines:

Inadequate funding for local prosecutors puts communities at risk

Alliance of Cities survey finds widespread cuts in municipal services

Milwaukee: Crowds protest budget plan

Dane County reduces support for people with severe disabilities

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Inadequate funding for local prosecutors puts communities at risk

The Wisconsin criminal justice system faced a jump in the number of criminal cases filed since 2001 with felony cases climbing by 16.2 percent. At the same time the state has reduced the number of prosecutors by 4.4 % which has increased the caseload for each prosecutor.

A Legislative Audit Bureau report noted that there is a shortage of 119 prosecutors in the state. According to Winnebago County District Attorney Christian Gossett, "Attorneys are unable to issue charges for every referral they receive from law enforcement officials." This leads to a focus on felony crimes with fewer charges for misdemeanor or juvenile offenses as well as less early intervention to prevent more serious crimes later on.

Both the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence have called for adequate staffing of the District Attorney's office so they are able to effectively prosecute crimes and ensure prompt and responsive action for victims.

Not only are there too few local prosecutors, the ones in place earn low wages. Winnebago County Assistant DA Scott Ceman has an \$80,000 law school debt, earns \$48,000 and works weekends as a welder to make ends meet. This is not unusual.

Low wages have resulted in a substantial turnover as prosecutors leave the field for more lucrative private sector positions which may pay between \$80,000-100,000 a year. There has been a 72% turnover rate in the past six years with more than 240 district attorneys leaving their position. This leads to a preponderance of young, less experienced attorneys dealing with serious cases impacting both victims and the accused.

Wisconsin Atty. General J.B. Van Hollen stated that the prosecutor shortage and compensation issues slow the processing of criminal cases and threaten public safety in communities.

<http://www.thenorthwestern.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080925/OSH0101/809250468/1987>

<http://www.thenorthwestern.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080923/OSH0101/80923184/1987>

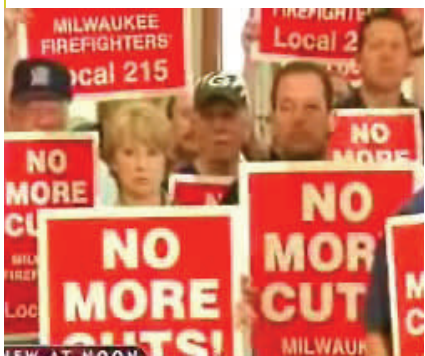
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Annual budget wars underway across the state....

Alliance of Cities survey finds widespread cuts in municipal services

Cities across Wisconsin will be completing their budgets in the next couple of weeks, and the outlook for avoiding cuts in services is grim for many of them, according to a recent survey by the Wisconsin Alliance of Cities. Local officials said they were doing everything possible to avert layoffs, but job vacancies will not be filled among most of the more than 20 cities responding to the survey. Rich Eggleston of the Alliance summarized the findings saying, "Local officials are streamlining their operations to avoid layoffs, pooling their resources and cutting to the bone of the services our communities offer." In many cities, budgets are not yet final, but in others jobs in police and fire departments, public works departments and recycling programs are on the line. "Some employees will be asked to take early retirement, others will see their workloads increase as vacancies go unfilled," Eggleston said. "And they're the lucky ones." Hard numbers should be available soon.



Milwaukee crowds protest budget plan

Milwaukee librarians, firefighters urge city not to cut deeper

Hundreds of Milwaukee residents crowded into City Hall on September 20 to oppose cuts in firefighter staffing, libraries and other public services. Every one of the 350 seats in the Common Council chamber galleries was taken, while other residents stood in the back of the room and packed the hallways outside, as the council and Mayor Tom Barrett held a public hearing on the 2009 city budget.

What brought them together was Barrett's spending plan. The mayor has said that if aldermen don't raise the solid waste fee by 28%, the city must close two neighborhood libraries and two pumper engine companies and leave 56 police officer jobs vacant. Even with the garbage fee increase, the budget would close one engine company downtown, slice ladder truck crews from five to four in the companies that haven't been cut already, trim other services and raise property taxes 4.8%. <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=808125>

Dane County reduces support for people with severe disabilities

Dane County's funding for developmentally disabled people is being spread thinner, angering some service providers and intensifying the debate about how the county's commitment to its most vulnerable citizens has changed over the years.

"We're backpedaling. There's no question about it," said Richard Berling, executive director of Madison Area Rehabilitation Centers, which provides daytime services for adults with disabilities.

<http://www.madison.com/wsj/topstories/310430>



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"For the last 20 years, there's been a pervasive and persistent disinvestment in government's ability to provide services. We're pitting cops against firefighters and libraries against after-school (programs). We've gone from 'no taxation without representation' to 'no taxation.' ... I don't even listen to AM radio any more. It makes my hair hurt." --

Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn (JOnline: October 15, 2008)