



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chris Abele

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Milwaukee County Executive Abele's Inauguration Address
April 24, 2012
As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you Hector and Bishop McClelland for your kind words and important reflections and thank you Chief Judge Jeffery Kremers for administering the Oath of Office and for your thoughtful leadership in the Courts.

Thank you Chairwoman Dimitrijevic and the other members of the Milwaukee County Board for being here and for the vital work you do.

Thank you tribal leaders and elected officials for being here. Thank you to my wife and family for your continued support, strength and love. Most importantly, I thank the voters who have put their faith in me. Holding this office is a privilege and responsibility I take very seriously and I will continue to work very hard to be worthy of that support.

Last year when I took office, this state was in the middle of a bitter political fight and Milwaukee County was facing a \$55 million budget deficit. I'm proud of the work our administration did in response. We had to make tough decisions including some that were not politically easy, but we put the County on a better path for the future.

We introduced a balanced budget without raising taxes or using furlough days. We created an Economic Development Department that is better staffed and resourced than any time in recent memory, and that is beginning to be recognized by businesses wishing to expand in the county. We prevented what would have been huge cuts to our critical transit system and we did it without raising fixed route fares. We added \$3 million for community based care at the Mental Health Complex and we proudly extended health benefits for domestic partners.

As I look to our next 4 years I plan to build on that success.

To help us do that, I've been fortunate to be able to recruit a lot of talented new leadership to complement some of the great folks who were already here. Many of them bring impressive private sector experience. Our new Human Resources Director, Kerry Mitchell, came from US Bank. Our Corporation Counsel, Kimberly Walker, joined us from Johnson Controls. Our new Information Management Director, Chris Lindberg, joined us from Miller Coors.

These valued employees are all helping the county create a culture of professionalism, integrity and innovation. They all left the private sector and came here because, like me, they believe that public service is an honorable cause. And because they share my belief in what Milwaukee County can be.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished but I know we couldn't do it without the many great public servants at Milwaukee County. Deputies, prosecutors, parks workers, every Milwaukee County employee, you are the engine that drives this county forward.

For my part, I will continue to seek to improve the environment in which you do this good work. I remain committed to building a fair and respectful culture that supports our good employees. Together we can change perceptions and attitudes.

As we move forward in crafting a budget for 2013, I will tell you there are no easy days ahead. Everyone is well aware of the tight times we face, but we will not back down from making the tough decisions. I have been, and will remain, white hot focused on finding efficiencies, improving services and lowering the cost for Milwaukee County taxpayers.

Make no mistake, there are also very exciting days ahead.

Many of you have heard that there are big opportunities on the horizon for development along the lakefront. We have a number of groups looking to buy and develop the underused downtown transit center.

This is one of the most sought-after pieces of land in the entire state. The redevelopment will help transform downtown Milwaukee while keeping our cherished lakefront pristine. Whichever project goes forward will create jobs and add much needed tax revenue.

Moving forward on this project is especially notable because it exemplifies the more aggressive and proactive approach we are taking to seek out and take advantage of any and all opportunities at the county.

We're looking to do more public-private partnerships. The Lakefront Development Committee is an excellent example. We brought together the businesses community, county supervisors, Milwaukee aldermen and state officials. They were tasked with coming up with recommendations on how to improve the lakefront. And now we're moving forward trying to implement the shared vision of these leaders - including working with DOT on the 794 ramps.

We will continue to work with developers, businesses, and workers to make sure Milwaukee County is always growing. As I announced earlier this year, we've put together a Park East advisory group, another public-private partnership that is already positioning us for the next opportunity. After years of inactivity in the Park East, we are seeing movement.

In the first meeting of the Park East steering committee, we talked about cleaning up the site and putting a marketing plan together. Another suggestion we have already started working on is partnering with the city to create a team that will have a shared vision on what that land will become. As business leaders are learning through our aggressive approach, we will move mountains if that's what it takes to get things done.

I'm also renewing my call today for more civility in all levels of government. We can have our differences and disagreements, but nobody wins if we are not also willing to work together to solve problems. The most corrosive factor in American democracy right now is the hyper-partisanship we see in all levels of government. Everybody here knows we can do better than that.

I'm proud that I have a good relationship with Mayor Tom Barrett and Governor Scott Walker. As County Executive, my job is to move the county forward and the best way to do that is to work with everyone.

Leadership in a democracy is about our shared mission to serve the citizens. Leadership is not about announcing to everyone who you're angry at or publicly insulting other public servants.

I won't apologize for believing in people and the process. You've heard me talk about that a lot and get used to it, I'm going to keep saying it.

Members of the County Board, I'm looking forward to working together with you. There is a lot more we can achieve working hand in hand than apart. I've had many great conversations with you and I look forward to working closely together. I believe our already good relationship will be strengthened under your new leadership.

It's good to see newly elected Comptroller Scott Manske here today. He was elected two weeks ago, making him the first, independently elected comptroller in the history of Milwaukee County.

I pushed hard for the creation this office because I believe it will increase transparency and accountability to taxpayers. We must always make sure Milwaukee County government is run ethically and fairly. I know Scott takes this seriously and I look forward to working with him.

We've seen many accomplishments this past year; I want to end today talking about one in particular that shows what my administration is all about.

Milwaukee County is one of only two places in Wisconsin to receive a federal "Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood" grant.

Jim Sullivan, the head of the Child Support Services Department, aggressively pursued and received the \$5.4 million grant. Only NY and California received more funding under this program than Wisconsin.

Over the next 3 years, Milwaukee County will lead a group of 10 community partner agencies that will reach thousands of families. This public-private partnership will help teach fathers important job and life skills.

The "Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood" program aims to get fathers more actively involved in the lives of their children. This program supports families in three areas; economic stability, responsible parenting, and healthy marriages.

The program will also help these men get into the workforce. Putting fathers to work helps them financially and helps their families who too often count on public assistance to get by.

As I look towards the next four years I know there are great things ahead for Milwaukee County. I've always been proud to be a Milwaukeean. I've never been more excited about what that can mean. Everyday won't be as sunny as today, but things are getting brighter.

Thank you.