

July 18, 2010

This Election is about the Future By Senator Kathleen Vinehout

This election is about the future.
What we want our state to look like...
For those who will come after us...
We face incredible risks to what's important to our families and our quality of life in Wisconsin.

Do we want a first class education system? Or one where class sizes are larger and our children's choices are smaller?
Do we want to protect the environment or exploit it?
Do we want families to have affordable health care or not?
How about affordable college tuition?
Do we want a growing economy or are we OK with jobs going to China and India?

To grow our state and compete in a world economy we must have an educated workforce. I've spent a lot of time working with teachers and administrators to begin to fix education – and in the words of a superintendent from Mississippi who moved to Wisconsin – we are sliding in the direction of Mississippi.

When politicians talk of cutting taxes and shrinking spending – education is on the top of the list; why? Public education makes up 45% of the state's general fund – the place where our tax dollars—yours and mine-- go.

We know the troubles our hard working school boards had balancing their budgets this year. Eau Claire cut \$ 2.4 million. Alma, a much smaller district where my son goes to school cut \$270,000. Those were difficult decisions, but what would have happened if those cuts had been six times larger?

In one of my opponent's first actions as a candidate he went to Eau Claire to join hands with Washington conservative Grover Norquist – who famously proclaimed we need to shrink government down so small we can flush it down the drain in the bathtub." That is his goal. When other countries do that we call them "Failed States".

Five Billion Dollars is a common figure thrown around this summer by business leaders and the Republicans. Ed Thompson said he would not have supported \$5 billion in this year's state budget.

Let me tell you what that would look like.

There are only so many places you can go to get Five Billion Dollars. Almost 80% of our state dollars pay for **Five things**:

Schools

Health Care

Corrections and Courts

Higher Education

Aid to Local Government

What if you took \$1 billion out of each of these programs to get to the Republicans' \$5 billion? What would that look like?

If you took A Billion Dollars out of education - \$1150 a student – What would this mean?

- \$12.5 million from the Eau Claire School District
- \$1.7 million from Altoona
- \$750,000 from Augusta

Or

- Black River Falls would lose \$2.1 million
- Melrose-Mindoro \$850,000
- Blair Taylor \$780,000
- Alma Center \$700,000

Or

- 7 school districts in Trempealeau would lose \$6 million

Or

- \$7 million out of all schools in Monroe County (\$6,995,000)
- \$2,973,900 out of Sparta
- \$3,612,150 out of Tomah
- \$803,850 out of Norwalk, Ontario & Wilton
- \$654,000 out of Cashton

What would it look like if you took a Billion Dollars from Health Care? That's 20% cut in all health care –about 200,000 people would lose health care – children, the elderly, blind and disabled, a 20% cut to our doctors, hospitals, senior care and long term care.

- 27,360 elderly people
- 30,080 blind & disabled people
- 85,100 children
- 48,180 parents
- 8,000 uninsured w/o children
- 12,180 well women, other limited programs
-
- 210,900 people

What about A Billion Dollars out of Corrections and Courts?

You would have to...

- Fire one-third of the judges.
- Close one-third of the prisons,
- Free one-third of the convicted felons

What about higher education? A Billion Dollars is a 40% cut in state funding for all universities. You could close all four Western Wisconsin campuses – UW-L; UW EC; Stout; River Falls – and you would only get to a little over half a billion dollars.

A Billion Dollars out of Aid to Local Government? You would cut our aid to local government in half.

You thought you had trouble getting your snow plowed last year? What happens when the City of Eau Claire loses another \$3.7 million dollars? The county \$1.5 million? Altoona \$600,000 other local governments in Eau Claire County – another \$1 million?

Or You would cut our aid to local government in half. \$1,635,000 to all units of local government in Jackson Co. County \$560,000; Black River Falls 305,000; rest of government in Jackson County \$760,000

Or \$3.3 million out of local government in Trempealeau County, including taking money from Trempealeau County \$950,00; And the cities of Whitehall \$225,000; Osseo \$120,000; Blair \$300,000; Arcadia \$360,000; Independence \$150,000; Galesville \$175,000 Other units of local government would lose \$1,025,000

Or You thought Monroe County had budget troubles last year – A One Billion Dollar cut would cut \$4.3 million out of county and local government – \$1.03 million from Sparta; \$860,000 from Tomah; almost \$1.3 million from Monroe County and another \$1.2 million from local government in the rest of the county.

So how about if you cut the **Rest of State Government? – Except for roads and transportation that are funded separately with gas taxes and license fees.**

I am not talking about cutting the waste, or becoming more efficient. I am saying if you close the rest of state government down completely – done – gone – including the Governor, the Legislature, everybody -- you could then choose to restore the billion dollar cuts to three of the five major programs – but only three. So choose: local schools? Health Care? Corrections? Our universities? Aid to Local governments?

Now the state must balance its budget. **Everyone who thinks ANY tax increases should not have been passed has a responsibility to say how they are going to CUT SPENDING**

PAUSE

It is time we started talking sense about budgets, about spending and about taxes.

Not all spending is good. Not all taxes are bad.

All of us need and rely on public services. The services need to be necessary, effective and performed efficiently. It's up to us in the public sector to make sure that happens.

What government does – **what we do collectively as a people** – makes our communities a better place to live, play and work – and run a business.

It's time to talk sensibly and specifically about the kind of community we want and what we are willing to pay to achieve our goals. It's time to put aside the rhetoric and the slogans and sit down and arrive at solutions that work.

You can't grow an economy and build a brighter future if our kids are lagging behind, if farmers and small businesses can't afford health insurance, if families can't afford to send their teenagers to college, if our communities are not safe, if our transportation system is lagging behind – whether it is light rail or fixing our bridges.

You can't bring people to this beautiful state and keep them here if our rivers and lakes are polluted. You can't build a beautiful state for our grandchildren if the Stewardship fund is raided or not reauthorized and every beautiful spot in the state is off-limits except to those wealthy enough to own it.

We can and we should Celebrate Wisconsin. My opponent, the State Chamber of Commerce, the large international corporations, keep telling us that Wisconsin is a hell hole, people and businesses are packing up and leaving. They remind me of vultures waiting for the next body to drop. The Wisconsin that you and I know is not like that. It is a great place to live and work.

This past April Forbes Magazine ranked the Best Small Places (under 250,000) to run a business and pursue a career – Areas and I quote, “with reasonable business costs, strong economic outlooks, and a solid quality of life.” Wisconsin ranked first with the most cities ranked in the top Best Small Places to run a business and pursue a career – with nine. Texas came in second with eight, Indiana was third with seven, no other state had more than five.

At the beginning of July, Portfolio.com, a national business news site, put Madison fourth on a top 10 nationwide list of mid-sized cities that offer the best quality of life – characterized by, “healthy economies, good housing markets, good schools.”

Wisconsin is not a “failed state”. The things that are mentioned over and over again that make our cities and our state attractive, are: good schools, a strong university system, low crime, an attractive environment, good transportation – all the things that will be on the chopping block if my opponent is elected and takes his \$5 billion out of the budget. Wisconsin will become a failed state. Wisconsin will no longer lead the country with the most Best Places to live, and work, and run a business.

This election is about the future. And there is a clear choice between Ed and myself. I have tried to describe the practical effects of that choice.

In closing, I want our children and our grandchildren to remember all of us by saying, “They made the tough decisions, they invested wisely and made Wisconsin a place where I can have a good job, raise my family in a safe community with great schools, surrounded by a beautiful environment, and I am proud to call myself a Wisconsinite – I wouldn’t dream of moving to another state.”

But I can’t make this happen without your help.