

It's Time for an Elected Leader

Opinion pieces by John Torinus and Owen Robinson, recently published in the editorial page of the Daily News examined the potential for and their support for Washington County to change to the County Executive form of government. I happen to agree with their assessment. Let me tell you why. Washington County has met and solved some of our most daunting challenges, fiscally and operationally. In an era of property tax caps, unfunded mandates from the state and rising expenses, we have been able to maintain a solid financial foundation by acting proactively, confronting those challenges and creating innovative solutions. Our future holds many more challenges. We expect our strong growth to continue, both in population and in economic development. Our future success depends upon strong leadership to be able to bring nearby counties, countywide partners, business leaders, technical colleges and community leaders to the table. To continue as a growing and thriving community, we will need to confront these challenges and formulate solutions that best benefit our citizens. We must be in the strongest position to take advantage of the economic opportunities that are paramount for the future of Washington County. This requires leadership elected by the people, someone who will advance the goals and visions of the people.

For the past five years our County Administrator and Washington County Board have set the stage for this transformative change. Most governments facing the challenges of increasing expenses and flat revenues will simply increase taxes to meet their expenses, continuing to provide services as they always have. In Washington County, we are more introspective. How can we serve our citizens in the most efficient and cost effective manner? Constantly evaluating the means and methods we employ has led us to embrace priority based budgeting, where we can determine the strategic priorities of Washington County and make certain that we perform at the most effective level. This self-analysis led us to merge health departments with Ozaukee County. This has saved \$250,000 annually in property taxes for Washington County homeowners and businesses. The combined department also provides a higher level of service that has Washington County ranked as providing the highest quality of life in Wisconsin. Washington County has been served well with our current form of government, but changing times dictate that we evolve to a government where we can serve our citizens even better.

As County Board Chair, I am responsible to set our meeting agendas and put Washington County in the best position to succeed. Yet, as County Board Chair, I am accountable to less than 4% of the county population, elected by the district I represent. Currently, the County Board decides who leads Washington County, not the people. They appoint an Administrator that is answerable to the County Board, not the people. The County Board sets the priorities, not the people. The citizens of Washington County deserve the opportunity to choose a leader that promotes their vision, their goals and their priorities. The citizens of Washington County deserve the opportunity to vote to elect their leader, not have one chosen for them. Washington County's leader needs to run for office on a platform that the County residents feel best represents their interests and desires and to be held accountable to them. It is time to give the people of Washington County the opportunity to speak and to elect their leader. It is time for an elected leader and that leader is a County Executive.

Please plan to attend our public forum on Wednesday, May 22rd at 6:00PM at the Washington County Fairgrounds to learn more about the benefits of electing a County Executive and to provide your input in this important decision. We need to hear from you.

Thank you,

Don Kriefall, Washington County Board Chairman