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TONY ZIELINSKI
ALDERMAN, 14TH DISTRICT

No money for police, lead hazard issues or infrastructure, but let's pump up the streetcar we can't afford

Statement of Alderman Tony Zielinski November 1, 2019

Mayor Barrett was front and center today at City Hall during the one year anniversary celebration for the streetcar. He was all smiles while most city residents drive down pothole-pocked streets and struggle to make ends meet, and while the city is facing its tightest budget in years.

The theme of the streetcar celebration should have been "Home of the Misplaced Priorities Express."

While the city is facing a looming pension crisis, and is eliminating 60 police officer positions in the 2020 proposed budget, the Mayor is relishing in the first year operation of the streetcar – a system relegated to serving a tiny sliver of the city (downtown) and no available funding for expansion (except without very likely hitting taxpayers hard).

The Mayor's misplaced priorities have him celebrating a downtown streetcar while he is championing an increase in the sales tax to help the city pay for basic services. But the move for a sales tax increase can only be approved by the state Legislature, and many of its members do not trust the Mayor and see the streetcar as discretionary spending.

My question is 'Why would the state give Milwaukee the sales tax increase if they feel the Mayor is just going to waste it?'

The Mayor is recklessly compromising our ability to get much needed help from the state BECAUSE of (and not in spite of) the streetcar!

The Mayor is celebrating the streetcar while vulnerable children are being affected by exposure to toxic lead that can impact them for the rest of their lives, both physically and mentally.

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The Mayor wants to eliminate 60 police officer positions while crime and public safety are THE biggest issues facing Milwaukee, with every neighborhood seeing reckless driving and with too many regularly dealing with incidents involving deadly gun violence.

Our pothole problems are getting worse, and now the Mayor and DPW want property owners to bear the burden of paying for alleys to be replaced, and for the second year in a row the Mayor has provided zero dollars for alley replacement.

Looking at the city's budget, the Wisconsin Public Policy Forum noted that "the gap between capital project requests and financing capacity is expanding, with roughly \$67 million in capital project requests deferred in the proposed budget." Translation: Our infrastructure will continue to deteriorate and crumble.

The Mayor's actions are negatively influencing the city's immediate and longer-term fiscal fortunes, and we are on a trajectory of things getting worse on all fronts.

But don't tell that to the Mayor – he is like Nero playing the violin while Rome was burning. Except in our case, the Mayor is eating Hop cake while Milwaukee is crumbling.