



### **Chris Danou's Capitol Report**

#### Assembly Votes to Send Milwaukee Arena Bill to the Governor

Last week, the Wisconsin State Assembly voted 52-34 to approve Senate Bill 209. This vote came after the State Senate voted 21-10 to approve the bill that's been supported and touted as being good for Wisconsin by the Governor. This bill provides the Milwaukee Bucks basketball organization with \$250 million in state, county and city money to build a new arena in downtown Milwaukee. It was a bipartisan vote for and against with 35 Republicans and 17 Democrats voting in favor. I was one of the 34 Democrats and Republicans to vote against the proposal.

Supporters of the bill gave several reasons for voting in favor that ranged from keeping an NBA team in the state, jobs that will be sustained and created, and the ancillary development planned for the surrounding area of the arena. The \$500 million project already had a pledge of \$150 million from the new owners and \$100 million from former owner U.S. Senator Herb Kohl. Supporters also highlighted this as a public-private partnership that doesn't create a new tax like what was done during the Miller Park debate in the mid-1990's.

Opponents of the bill highlighted our current budget and economic state in Wisconsin. Times are tough and the money we need for important things simply isn't there. Major road projects have been delayed by two years because our transportation budget is upside-down, our technical colleges and UW-System are receiving less money from the state, and we're struggling to maintain our parks and afford health care. Our K-12 public education system is being so underfunded that many communities have gone to a referendum in recent years to raise taxes to pay for necessary improvements to the school.

Even though it's been years since I've been to a Bucks game, I have fond memories of watching players like Sidney Moncrief lead the Bucks to many winning seasons. I also appreciate Milwaukee is one of 30 cities in North America with an NBA team that helps put our state's largest city on the national and international map. However, when we have so many things in our community, region and state that truly need our hard earned tax dollars, I had a really difficult time justifying sending \$250 million to a few out-of-state billionaires.

I listened to both sides regarding this bill, and after much thought and consideration, I reached some conclusions that led me to vote against the proposal. Recently, the Republican-controlled legislature patted themselves on the back for restoring \$200 million to Governor Walker's budget for K-12 schools. While I'm glad to see more money going to our kids and preparing them for the future, I can't help but take a step back and look at \$200 million for young people across the state and \$250 million for a few out-of-state billionaires in Milwaukee. It seemed like we didn't quite have our priorities straight on that one.

When I drive on some of our roads that are in desperate need of repair, see UW-System funding slashed and I talk to constituents who are having a difficult time making ends meet, I think of what that \$250 million (which after interest over twenty years is more like \$420 million) could have done to improve the quality of life in our area and other communities in Wisconsin.

It's not that I'm against the Milwaukee Bucks or economic growth in southeastern Wisconsin, I just believe we need to do a better job allocating tax dollars and resources during difficult economic times. Even though SB 209 is on its way to the Governor's desk, I feel I stood up for taxpayers in our community, region and state by voting against the bill.

