

Milwaukee Co. Sup. Chairman Lipscomb: Co. Exec. Abele granted unlawful raises

Posted on Thursday, Apr 27, 2017

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Contact: Brian Rothgery, [414-278-4230](tel:414-278-4230)
brian.rothgery@milwaukeecountywi.gov

Ruling affirms Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors authority over compensation of county employees

MILWAUKEE – County Board Chairman Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., heralded the decision of a circuit court judge that was released yesterday, in a case brought by the Board of Supervisors, saying that “The court’s ruling shows that Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele acted unlawfully when he granted numerous and costly unilateral raises for certain political appointees of Milwaukee County in violation of Board policies.”

Judge DiMotto’s ruling reaffirms the board’s policymaking role and fiscal control over county governance, stating in part, “This Court finds that the decision to set or change employees’ salaries is primarily a policy decision,” and that “2013 Wisconsin Act 14 did not eliminate the Board’s authority to provide, fix or change the compensation of county employees.”

“We appropriately sought clarification from the courts regarding the authority of the county board in the wake of significant changes to state law,” said County Board Chairman Theodore Lipscomb, Sr. “Today’s ruling is a victory for the taxpayers and for checks and balances in government, as it affirms the board’s role in ensuring that political appointees are not financially rewarded at the whim of the county executive.”

The Abele administration has kept hidden the total amount of the raises it unlawfully awarded to political appointees and up to 300 unclassified staff since Abele began unilaterally implementing increased compensation that conflicts with limitations approved by the board of supervisors.

One department head secretly [received](#) an unlawful annual salary increase of nearly \$50,000 in 2015. The former head of the county's pension plan was awarded a unilateral raise of nearly \$11,000 in 2015 and another unlawful [raise](#) of \$5,228 in January, 2017.

"We plan to abide by the court's decision, and County Executive Abele should not waste more taxpayer money on an appeal to fight the court." added Lipscomb.

As part of the same decision, the court ruled that the county executive may continue to refuse to attend public meetings of the county board when requested. Abele repeatedly refused to attend several county board budget meetings in 2015, did not attend a public meeting on the Mitchell Park Domes in early 2016 that was attended by hundreds of residents, and walked out of a committee meeting on his 2017 budget proposal, over the objections of several supervisors.

"We will continue to invite County Executive Abele to appear at public hearings and participate in open dialogue on important matters such as the county budget and the Domes. Every time Abele refuses to be transparent and attend board meetings or appear publicly, choosing instead to conduct county business in secret, the people are shut out of their government," concluded Lipscomb.

Attorney Susan Crawford of Pines Bach in Madison, who represented the Board in the court case, also praised the court's decision. "Even though legislation enacted in the past few years has expanded County Executive Abele's authority beyond that of any other county executive in the state, his primary role is still to execute the board's policies, not to act unilaterally. The court's decision upholds the democratic principles of separation of powers and checks and balances in Milwaukee County government," she said.