

# ‘UpFront’: Barrett says proposed sales tax would fund property tax relief, police, lead abatement

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Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett expressed hope that Republican lawmakers might allow the city and county to hold a sales tax referendum if they “understand exactly what we’re trying to do.”

Milwaukee County and its municipalities want to hold an April referendum on a 1 percent sales tax hike, with part of the revenue going to property tax relief.

“We’re not asking the state for any money,” Barrett said in an interview aired Sunday on “UpFront,” produced in partnership with WisPolitics.com.

“What we’re asking is that you allow us to go to our taxpayers and see how we want to tax ourselves and visitors here,” he said.

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If the tax were approved, it would raise an estimated \$160 million, Barrett said, and 25 percent, or \$40 million, would go to property tax relief in the form of a credit.

Barrett said the city of Milwaukee would use part of the money for lead abatement, both on aging homes with lead paint and replacing lead laterals in the city’s water system.

He said without the additional revenue, the Milwaukee Police Department is likely to have fewer officers in the next city budget.

“I do not want to do that,” Barrett said. “A way for us to avoid that is to have this sales tax.”

He said he thought voters would OK the tax if it was explained and they understood how much of the revenue would come from visitors to the city and county.

“UpFront” host Adrienne Pedersen also asked Barrett whether he would run for re-election in 2020. Barrett said he is planning on it but was not making an official announcement.

“I love this job,” he said. “I love this city, and I love being the mayor of this city.”

Barrett said an announcement would come before Dec. 1.

In another segment, Kenosha County Sheriff David Beth suggested state lawmakers look at ways to curb vaping.

The nation has seen a spike in vaping-related deaths and injuries. In Wisconsin, at least 34 cases of vaping-related illness have been reported.

Beth spoke after Kenosha County authorities busted a black-market vaping ring and arrested two brothers in connection with it. They seized about 100,000 vaping cartridges, some 30,000 of which were laced with THC oil. THC is the active ingredient in marijuana. THC vaping cartridges are illegal in Wisconsin.

Beth said the investigation into that ring is growing, and federal agencies, including the DEA, CDC and FDA are getting involved.

“I think this is going to grow substantially,” Beth said. “I think this is just the tip of the iceberg.”

“We’re looking to see who is hurt, who is involved and who we can bring to justice on this,” Beth said, adding authorities are looking at additional persons of interest.

Beth said he would welcome lawmakers to learn “how this case and vaping is affecting people.”

“I would love for them to get involved and curb this somehow,” he said. “To what level I don’t know yet, but they need to get involved and take a lead.”

The vaping cartridge packaging in the Kenosha County case looked like candy, he said, and would not have aroused the suspicions of many parents.



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