

## How Not To Stage A Protest

By LORRAINE SWANSON

Editor

The [Lakeview Action Coalition](#) wants [Rep. John Fritchey](#) (11<sup>th</sup> District) to know that they stopped by his house Sunday evening. Singing parody lyrics to the tune of "If I Had A Hammer" about the ever fluid state budget situation, organizers delivered a letter to Fritchey urging him to support a solution to the current Illinois budget that will not gut the state's social service programs.



Members of the Lakeview Action Coalition march to Rep. John Fritchey's Lakeview residence Sunday evening.

Fritchey wasn't home, but his dog barked at demonstrators from the window.

Perhaps the most effective way to piss off an elected official is to stage a protest in front of his or her private residence. However well-intentioned the advocate or the cause, it's a sure fire way to get your organization's phone calls placed on the bottom of the "call back" pile.

But LAC wanted to get its message across to Fritchey before state lawmakers reconvene in Springfield on Tuesday to hash out a state budget. Fritchey voted against raising the state income tax, stating that he would not support raising taxes without property tax and educational funding reform. He proceeded to support the "doomsday" budget that slashed state spending by 50 percent, many of those cuts targeting state-funded social services programs, since vetoed by [Gov. Pat Quinn](#).

LAC Board President Allen Wesolowski said members didn't have enough time to organize an action at Fritchey's Lakeview district office during business hours on Monday. According to the letter LAC left on Fritchey's front gate, members were feeling "overwhelmed by the magnitude" of the budget situation.

"Everything is happening so fast with what's being proposed," Wesolowski said. "We knew about the special session on Tuesday. There are rumors that the state legislature is going to override the governor's veto."

Fritchey did meet with coalition members last month at his district office after he voted against increasing the state income tax to close an \$11 billion bleeding hole in the state budget, the worst in Illinois history.

"We did meet with him last month," Wesolowski said, prompted by questions as to whether members thought Fritchey was unresponsive or inaccessible. "He explained his position on voting against the tax increase. Basically, he wants a more structured, permanent solution."

On Sunday, LAC members met at Wrightwood Park at Wrightwood and Ashland before heading over to Fritchey's house a few blocks away. Gathered in the park were staff and clients of the 41 member institutions of LAC from Lakeview, Lincoln Park and North Center.



Members of the 41 member institutions of the LAC gather in front of Fritchey's house. Included were the usual folks caught between state lawmakers' political bickering.

A few of them were seniors who hiked to Fritchey's house using canes and walkers. Some of the others lived in supportive house, terrified that they would be cast out into the street. In other words, the usual folks caught in the middle of state lawmakers' political bickering.

Perhaps setting the tone for the evening were the several mounds of dog crap that people accidentally stepped into at Wrightwood Park. There was also confusion as to where Fritchey actually lived; two addresses popped up on Google.

Jennifer Gonzalez, executive director of LAC, said if they went to the wrong house, they would head over to the second address. She also advised protestors to be respectful of Fritchey's neighbors, any family members who might answer the door and that if the cops showed up, to let her talk to them.

"The vote on Tuesday is too important to ignore," Wesolowski told the crowd of the 40 or so vigilantes. "We don't know what will happen. Maybe it will be 10 percent of cuts instead of doomsday. Hopefully with our encouragement, [Fritchey] will take a leadership role."

Along the way to Fritchey's house, LAC members placed pink fliers on car listing their demands: that Fritchey take the lead and vote for a budget solution that stops "the current disastrous cuts to human

services." While they supported his desire for a long term solution that included property tax relief in addition to any income tax increase, they needed "his quick and decisive action right now to STOP THE BLEEDING."

The vigil in front of Fritchey's house lasted about 30 minutes. Gonzalez rang his door bell, demonstrators sang a few rounds of "If I Had A Hammer" and upset his dog. One of Fritchey's neighbors came out and ordered the demonstrators off his parkway.



A few of the signs left on Fritchey's gate. A cop stopped the demonstrators after the gathering broke up and told them to go back and remove them.

Wrapping their neon-colored, poster-board protest signs on Fritchey's front gate and papering the block with more pink fliers, the demonstrators left. Walking down Ashland, a police officer from the 19<sup>th</sup> District barreled to the curb.

"Who's responsible for organizing this event," a cop asked.

One of the members stepped forward, Gonzalez far ahead on the sidewalk.

"Go back and get your signs off that guy's fence," she said. "And remove all those fliers. Next time get a permit."

Returning to the scene, the same neighbor who ordered the demonstrators off the parkway was talking to the cop. All traces of the sidewalk demonstration that had taken place in front of Fritchey's house moments before had been removed, except for a few pink fliers that remained stuck under people's windshield wipers.

Later that evening Fritchey posted a note on his Facebook page: "Note to LAC – whoever thought that having a protest rally in front of my house, on a Sunday evening no less, was a good idea – was wrong."

The next morning, Fritchey expressed bewilderment. "In light of the fact that I met with LAC representatives a couple weeks ago at my office and explained at the time that I have been supporting [raising the state income tax] for over a decade, I found it odd that they would show up unannounced at my doorstep on a Sunday evening," Fritchey said, explaining that he wasn't home and learned of their visit from a neighbor. "They took the time to notify the media, but it would have made sense to call or e-mail me so I could make a point of being there to talk to them."

Asked what he thought was going to happen in Springfield this week, Fritchey said that his guess was as good as anyone's. The only option left, he said, is to override the governor's veto and put a five-month budget in place so that state legislators can try and reach a workable solution. The 7-percent property tax cap is set to expire this year, and property reassessments in Lakeview are due in a few weeks.

"Social service providers and recipients are scared for a good reason," Fritchey said. "It's sad that many find themselves caught in the middle of political bickering. I try the best I can to honestly explain the situation and tell them to stay tuned and hope we can get the support we need."

Maybe the Lakeview Action Coalition would have been off buying lottery tickets after stepping in dog doo-doo.

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