

INSIDE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

State Rep: Time to cleaning up state government

Should anybody ever need a reminder of the importance of comprehensive ethics and campaign finance laws, they unfortunately need look no further than right here in Illinois. At a time when a sputtering economy, skyrocketing gas prices, and home foreclosures dominate the headlines of most states, residents of Illinois find themselves confronted daily with news stories about corruption investigations, indictments and convictions of individuals tied to state government. Making matters worse is the fact that this same news cycle has now lasted for almost a decade, only the names have been changed – and not to protect the innocent.

With no limits on campaign contributions, lax reporting laws and little lobbyist oversight, Illinois has long been referred to as the 'Wild West' of campaign finance laws. So perhaps it is no surprise that 3 of the last 7 Illinois Governors have gone to jail and that over 70 lobbyists, state employees and government officials have also been convicted in recent years for offenses related to the abuse of state government. While many may feel that the justice system may have worked as it was intended to, I would argue that good prosecution is no substitute for good government.

To that end, over three years ago, I introduced legislation which would be considered a given in most states, but which was unheard of, and unwelcome, in Illinois. The legislation would end pay-to-play politics in Illinois and reform the current manner of "doing busi-

ness" that has dominated headlines for far too long. In sum, the legislation prohibits any person or entity holding a state contract in excess of \$50,000 from contributing to the officeholder who awarded the contract. The bill further requires that, as part of the procurement process, bidders on state contracts disclose all campaign contributions

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to the officeholder awarding the contract for the prior two years.

But Illinois political culture being what it is, and despite picking up numerous co-sponsors in the House, we were unable to gain the necessary traction to move the bill forward the first two years of trying to do so.

Then came what I refer to as a 'perfect storm for ethics reform'. Former Governor George Ryan was convicted and sentenced to 6 years for offenses related to the exchange of payoffs for state business. Concurrently, Governor Blagojevich was being dogged by multiple federal investigations and

the indictments and convictions of multiple individuals in his inner circle, bringing with it stringing allegations of what U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald referred to as 'pay-play on steroids'. Add these two factors to a backdrop of legislative stalemate and a record overtime session last year, and you get a public whose complacency had quickly vaulted past discontent and was now in outrage mode.

Following several weeks of intensive negotiations, an agreement on language was reached between the two chambers. Three years of effort and countless obstacles along the way caused me to lead off the press conference announcing the agreement by stating that "it must be snowing in Hell".

On the last scheduled day of this legislative session, the Illinois General Assembly unanimously passed what the Chicago Tribune described as "the strongest campaign fundraising restrictions state lawmakers have ever approved." It must be noted that as of the time of writing this article, it remains to be seen what action Governor Blagojevich will take with respect to the bill.

I have now served in the Illinois General Assembly for twelve years, and am proud to count passage of this measure among the achievements of my tenure. Public confidence in government, once shaken, is very difficult to rebuild. But through the passage of this bill, we have taken a significant step in the right direction.

State Rep. John Fritchey (D-11)

CPS launches program to help kids catch up online
Online summer school offered to 600

In accordance with Chicago Public Schools push to get freshmen students on-track for graduation, the district has launched a pilot program that for the first time ever offers online credit recovery to CPS students during the summer.

June 30 marked the first day of Summer Online Credit Recovery, when students started logging onto the Internet and, with the assistance and supervision of a CPS mentor, taking courses and recovering lost credits. The pilot program targets first-time freshmen who have accumulated one or two credits less than what is required to be academically on-track to graduation.

"We must use all available resources to get our students on track, including the summer months when school is out of session and the technology at our fingertips," said CPS Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan. "We believe that Summer Online Credit Recovery will help us put our students on a path that leads to high school graduation and much, much more." The 30 CPS mentors facilitating these courses will support students, at their schools, as they progress through their individual programs of study in a variety of online courses simultaneously in a single classroom. About 600 students from 19 schools are participating in the entirely virtual credit recovery experience.

Each course taken in Summer Online Credit Recovery represents 60 hours of class time. A passing grade in an online course earns a student half, or 0.5, of a high school credit. A total of 24 credits, or six credits a year, are needed for graduation from high school.

Data shows that credit recovery is most effective in a student's freshman year. First-time freshmen, who have earned four of six possible credits by the end of their freshman year, have only a 24 percent chance of graduating from high school. However, if these students are able to recover just one of these credits, for a total of five credits by the end of their freshman year, their chances of graduating high school go up to 45 percent. If these students reach a total of six credits, their chances of graduating high school shoot up to 68 percent.

"Summer Online Credit Recovery allows students to work at their own pace, so they can move quickly through the parts that they understand and spend more time on the concepts that they find challenging," said Rufus Williams, President of the Chicago Board of Education. "This independence gives our students control of their own success."

CPS students currently can take online credit recovery classes during the school year, but the online credit recovery program never has been used as a summer school program, nor has it ever specifically targeted ninth graders. Funding for the pilot program is provided by the CPS Department of Graduation Pathways.

June 30 also marked the start of Freshman Connection, a collection of programs that for the first time ever is making summer enrichment activities available to all in-coming CPS freshmen.

Lincoln Park Health Center moves, changes name

On July 21, the Advocate Health Center in Lincoln Park will begin seeing patients in its new location at 1460 North Halsted Street, Suite 401, at the corner of Halsted and Blackhawk. The center currently is located at 2400 N. Sheffield.

To reflect its new location, the center will change its name. As of July 21, it will be called the Advocate Health Center—Halsted and Blackhawk.

The new office offers many benefits. It was built specifically for the convenience and needs of our patients and staff members. It is easy to access because it is near the intersection of North Avenue and Halsted Street and close to the #8 Halsted and Blackhawk bus stop and the Red Line "L" stop at North and Clybourn. It also offers discounted indoor parking for patients.

"We are delighted about our new location. This new location will be easy for our current patients to access and will be convenient for the many new patients we hope to attract. Our medical staff includes board certified internal medicine and family medicine physicians, so we can offer care to

"Count on me to provide the best homeowners insurance value in town."



State Farm Agent

Larry Adams and Johanna McKenzie Miller in

Phantom

Book by Arthur Kopit • Music & Lyrics by Maury Yeston

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