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MEDIA INQUIRIES:
mediainquiries@proft2010.com

Illinois Isn't Broken. It's Fixed

I grew up in Wheaton and have spent my entire life here in Illinois. Our state is blessed with abundant resources, vibrant centers of commerce, top-quality institutions, and a diverse economy.

We feed the world with corn, soybeans and wheat grown here. Illinois' manufacturing sector supplies the world with machinery, electronics, and clothing.

Chicago's economy is one of the largest in the country. Our vast rail networks and airports have made Chicago the logistics and transportation hub of the Midwest.

Illinois has world-class museums, universities, numerous Fortune 500 companies, and a vibrant arts and humanities community.

So why is everyone leaving?

Despite these advantages, 736,000 more people left Illinois in the last decade than came here. Only New York and California have lost more people.

Despite these advantages, Illinois is 48th in the nation in economic performance. Only Michigan and Ohio rank lower.

Despite these advantages, 175,000 Illinoisans in the private sector lost their jobs last year, and just last week our unemployment rate passed 10%, the highest rate in 25 years.

In short, we are failing to take advantage of Illinois' many blessings.

Politicians from both parties have told us that Rod Blagojevich was the problem and that what Illinois needed was a better management team in the Governor's office.

While Blagojevich was a disastrous chief executive, he is now gone. But our problems persist.

The General Assembly has again been forced into an overtime session. There is no state budget for the coming fiscal year. The era of good feelings supposedly ushered in with Governor Pat Quinn has produced little in the way of results.

So to argue that Illinois' problems are simply a function of bad management is like saying the Soviet Union failed because the wrong guys were on the Politburo.

The truth is Illinois state government is plagued with systemic problems.

So now those same politicians from both parties attempt to explain away the ongoing corruption and incompetence rife in state government by telling us that the real problem is that the system is broken; that Illinois is broken.

But Illinois isn't broken.

They say the reason the Chicago Public Schools only graduate 50% of its students is that the system is broken.

But CPS isn't broken.

They say the reason nothing has been done to reform the state's unsustainable Medicaid system, which will consume half the state's budget in 10 years, is that the system is broken.

But Medicaid isn't broken.

They say the reason Illinois tollways are inefficient, congested and poorly maintained is that the system is broken.

But the Toll Highway Authority isn't broken. And neither is Illinois.

Illinois isn't broken. It's fixed.

When something is broken, it does not do what it is intended to do. But these government systems – our schools, our health care, our transportation -- are in fact doing exactly what they are intended to do. They create dependent and dependable voting blocs that sustain and advance the political careers of those in charge. They provide secure jobs and guaranteed pensions for the patronage armies of the political establishment.

These systems are not designed to produce efficient, responsive government or provide services that improve the quality of life, and they don't.

Illinois isn't broken. It's fixed.

Who benefits from these fixed systems?

The Chicago Nine, as I like to call them.

Those would be the nine Chicago Democrats who live within a few square miles of each other and who currently control more than \$70 billion worth of government and more than 125,000 public sector jobs in Illinois.

They are the great protectors of the status quo because they derive their political power from the public sector unions and other dependents of state government largesse.

This explains the great paradox of Illinois politics: systems that no one in power wants to defend and yet no one in power wants to change.

The Chicago Nine want us to believe that they just arrived on the scene; that they are as shocked and appalled as we are at what has been going on in Illinois.

The Chicago Nine want us to believe that they did not support the election of Rod Blagojevich. But they did -- twice.

The Chicago Nine want us to believe they did not turn a blind eye to the Blagojevich administration's corruption and shady dealings. But they did – for six years.

In 2002, during her campaign for Attorney General, Lisa Madigan and the other members of The Chicago Nine brutalized her predecessor Jim Ryan for not doing enough to root out public corruption. They accused Jim Ryan of being asleep at the switch, or worse, when it came to the corruption rampant in Governor George Ryan's administration.

Well, where was Lisa Madigan during the Blagojevich reign? Which corrupt public officials has Attorney General Lisa Madigan brought to justice?

The Chicago Nine also want us to believe that they are not responsible for the economic destruction wrought on Illinois under their regime and their policies. But they are.

And now The Chicago Nine want us to believe that Illinois is broken and the solution is to elevate one of their own.

But Illinois isn't broken. It's fixed.

Let me provide some specific examples of how and why Illinois is fixed.

The Chicago Public Schools is one of the biggest tax-funded systems in the state. You might think CPS is supposed to provide a quality education for children and prepare them to be successful adults.

Yet only half of CPS freshman will ever graduate high school, and only 6 of every 100 will go on to get a bachelor's degree by the age of 25.

Six in 100 will get a B.A. in a system responsible for 400,000 children.

That is worse than unacceptable. In my view, that is child abuse. A college degree is increasingly the difference between the haves and have-nots in our society. The average college graduate will earn more than twice as much over their lifetime as a person with only a high school diploma and, in our digital age, that gap is widening.

The teachers' unions and CPS apologists will tell you the problem is lack of funding. But CPS spends more than \$22,000 per high school graduate per year. That is more than twice the state average. And that is more than New Trier High School, which spends \$18,000 per student, but graduates 99% of its students.

What the teachers' unions will not tell you is that CPS is not designed to provide a quality education; it is not intended to serve the interests of students. It is designed to use state income-tax dollars to provide job security and guaranteed pensions for CPS employees, who in turn vote to keep the established politicians in office.

CPS is not designed for its students, but for the convenience and benefit of the adults—beyond even the money. We have known for decades that children best learn foreign languages in the primary grades, and yet CPS still mostly teach foreign languages in high school. Why is this?

The CPS school day is a 50-year old anachronism modeled after a family structure that no longer reflects the realities of their students' home lives. So why won't CPS consider lengthening the school day to accommodate parents working full-time jobs, especially since that would give students more time to learn?

Because CPS is not interested in what works and CPS is not interested in the quality of education it provides, no matter the evidence or the undeniable realities of the present day.

CPS isn't broken. It's fixed.

Illinois' Medicaid system.

When Medicaid was created, it was limited to the state's neediest families. It was not meant to be a growing benefit, expanded to buy political support.

Yet Illinois will spend at least 25% more on Medicaid next year than it did just three years ago. In 10 years, Medicaid spending will consume half the state's budget. That is unsustainable.

One of the 14 charges for which Rod Blagojevich was impeached cited his expansion of Medicaid eligibility from 200 percent of the poverty level to 400 percent – up to household incomes of roughly \$85,000.

That expansion was illegal. Dan Proft didn't say it was illegal, the General Assembly said so when the State Senate voted 59-0 to remove Blagojevich from office based on this and other charges.

Blagojevich is gone, the benefit remains. Why?

Because once the political establishment has conferred a benefit, even illegally, and even to a group of folks for whom the benefit was never intended, they would rather bankrupt the state than risk any political capital to set things right. They have created more dependency. To borrow a phrase from Tocqueville, they have bribed more people with their own money. In short, they have bought more votes.

Medicaid isn't broken. It's fixed.

The Illinois Toll Highway Authority.

You were told by the Illinois Toll Highway Authority that the \$720 million investment in Open Road Tolling was supposed to streamline the toll system and save money over the long term.

So why, three years later, has the number of employees increased? And why, three years later, has the budget increased nearly 20%?

Because The Chicago Nine are not interested in efficiencies. The Chicago Nine are not interested in the Illinois motorist or the Illinois taxpayer. The Chicago Nine are interested in preserving the political loyalty of these employees, at any price.

The Tollway is not organized to enhance our transportation infrastructure; it is designed to build political patronage armies for The Chicago Nine.

The Tollway isn't broken. It's fixed.

The Chicago Nine don't deny that CPS is failing its students; that Medicaid obligations threaten to bankrupt Illinois; and that agencies like the Toll Highway Authority have failed to make good on their promises. What they deny is that the system is at fault; that the system is fixed in their favor and against the average Illinoisan.

And so the challenge, as I see it, is not to fix Illinois, but to un-fix Illinois.

To un-fix Illinois, we must take the fight to The Chicago Nine who control this state. We must make them defend systems whose performance is indefensible.

We must make them explain why they seemingly have no interest in defending these systems but also have no interest in changing them.

Some might wonder why Republicans and independent Democrats have failed to take up this fight.

There are two reasons.

First, the Chicago Nine are very proficient at the dirty business of exchanging other people's money for political support.

Second, those who hold leadership titles in the Illinois Republican Party have laid down their arms. They have refused to present an alternative vision for Illinois.

Instead, establishment Republicans in Illinois have embraced the false virtue of bipartisanship, which has been nothing more than a euphemism for going along to get along.

To paraphrase a favorite economist of mine, F. A. Hayek, to agree on bipartisanship for its own sake is akin to committing to take a journey before agreeing on a destination.

And still we hear calls to “end the partisan bickering.”

I say: “Let’s start the partisan bickering.”

The people of Illinois deserve the spirited, substantive policy arguments that have been missing from our public discourse for a generation. Our policy choices have consequences. Robust debate is not “bickering”; it is the currency of a healthy, functioning democracy.

The problem in Springfield has been general agreement on the wrong ideas.

It is bipartisanship that led us to record state debt. It was GOP State Senators who cast the deciding votes to pass Blagojevich’s \$10 billion bond scheme in his first term, which doubled Illinois’ bond-indebtedness in one fell swoop.

It is the compromises of the political establishment that have eroded the quality of our schools. Despite a 32% increase in state funding over the last 20 years, during both Republican and Democratic administrations, Illinois test scores have remained essentially unchanged, because we have failed to rethink how we provide education in the digital age.

It is the bi-partisan political bargains that have led us to the brink of bankruptcy. Our two parties have increased Illinois General Fund spending 44% since 1990, a rate nearly four times Illinois’ population growth over the same period—and what do we have to show for it?

It is the quiet collusion between the leadership of the two parties that has made Illinois the laughingstock of the nation.

For the last 15 years, I have slugged it out in the Illinois political arena, running campaigns, serving in state and local government, writing and opining for WLS Radio, *Human Events*, *School Reform News*, and numerous other outlets.

Before transparency was all the rage, I worked with Tony Peraica in 2005 to post the names and salaries of Cook County employees online.

Before it was fashionable for Republican Party leaders to criticize bad actors in our party, I joined other conservative activists and called for the resignation of GOP National Committeeman Bob Kjellander.

Before the political establishment was prepared to disown George Ryan, I was using an online media outlet I founded, IllinoisLeader.com, to detail the intricate webs of influence-peddling being spun throughout state government.

Before establishment Republicans mustered the courage to oppose tax increases, I publicly objected to three DuPage GOP State Senators for voting to increase sales taxes to bailout the Regional Transit Authority.

These disappointments and numerous others have caused Republican voters in Illinois to lose faith in their party and their state.

For a party to matter, it must present policies consistent with its stated principles and explain how those policies will produce better results. It is the failure to do this that highlights why the Illinois Republican Party has not mattered for some time.

It is time to try something new. It is time to present the conservative case. It is time that those who seek to lead the party and the state were able to articulate a coherent set of first principles that inform their views and give form to their judgments—and then stick by those first principles.

I have always been and will always be my own person. I have never wavered in my principles. I entered politics to advance those principles. I am not in search of self-affirmation. I have no aspirations to build an ornate mausoleum detailing my accomplishments or erect a building in my honor.

I am not the standard of conduct by which others should be judged. As a Catholic, I believe in Original Sin and I have added to that in my 37 years. The enlightened conservative principles that call on us to challenge systems, such as those I have spoke about, that mete out cruelty and indifference to human suffering, are the standards against which all of us will be judged.

What I am is a fighter who will not be bullied.

What I am is fearless and relentless.

What I am is ready to take the fight to The Chicago Nine and their media functionaries in order to un-fix Illinois.

Both what I am not and what I am has prepared me for what I want to be.

And so today I announce my candidacy to be the next Governor of Illinois.

Our campaign is for whom I like to call the People Who Play By The Rules in this state.

You know who they are...

They are the small business owners who don't have lobbyists in Springfield to carve out special rules for them and don't get bailed out when they make bad strategic decisions or suffer bad luck in the

marketplace.

They are the people who do not have guaranteed pensions and who have seen the value of their 401Ks plummet, but are still taxed to pay for multiple pensions for the politically connected in government. More than 3,000 individuals have more than one public pension in Illinois.

The people who play by the rules are the families who taught their children that education and hard work are the tools for success; but who instead see their children rejected from a university system that would rather accommodate children of the politically connected than reward the deserving.

The people who play by the rules are the people who are too busy raising children, running businesses, volunteering in their communities, and working overtime to keep tabs on The Chicago Nine.

Our campaign is for them.

Governor Quinn prefers to call some of these people, “those with the ability to pay.”

Governor, they’ve got news for you: they also have the ability to leave. And many have already decided that The Chicago Nine have gone too far, and that neighboring states like Indiana aren’t too far to go.

Just the other day, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels actually extended an invitation, when he said: “We’ve cut property taxes to some of the lowest in America. All you folks in Illinois, you businesses and homeowners, come on over [to Indiana] and lower your costs of living.”

Governor Daniels isn’t joking—and he has \$15 billion in foreign investment in Indiana in just the last two years to prove it.

Businesses aren’t coming and families are leaving not because Illinois is broken, but because it’s fixed.

Un-fixing Illinois starts with a clear set of conservative principles that will inform my policy decisions:

- Promote competition.
- Protect private property.
- Invest in families, not bureaucracies.
- Keep our promises.
- Decrease tax and regulatory burdens.
- Promote transparent, responsive government.
- Respect life.

In the coming weeks, I will lay out the specific policies that flow from these conservative principles.

An un-fixed Illinois will get education right. Because if we get the education of our young people right, a lot of our other problems become easier to address.

An un-fixed Illinois will cap spending and lower taxes.

An un-fixed Illinois will be a state where success is not a function of political access, but the result of one's diligence, creativity and personal responsibility.

The reality in Illinois is grim right now, but our opportunity is great.

Illinois is blessed with too many gifts and too many resources—we are too industrious and too creative—to find ourselves teetering on the precipice of economic collapse.

Again, the political establishment bosses do not deny this. How can they? What they deny is that their singular focus on political power is the proximate cause of our problems.

Our campaign is going to pull the curtain back to expose their false concern and their empty rhetoric. Our campaign is going to explain how they have fixed the system and how we can un-fix it.

I am under no illusion that this will be an easy task. Remember, The Chicago Nine believe themselves entitled to their power. They will not relinquish it without incident. They will bring the full complement of their resources to bear on this fight—from their loyal subjects in the public sector unions to their handmaidens in the media. All favors will be called in.

The odds are formidable. But there are more of us than there are of them. There are more people who play by the rules than there are those who have been given license by The Chicago Nine to bend the rules.

And if we choose to stand and fight...

If we choose to push back and say, "Enough"...

If we choose to recognize that the way things are in Illinois is not the way things have to be, that nothing is inevitable...

If we choose to chart a new course and decide our own lives...

Then we can win.

I have made my choice. I am running for governor so that others like me, who might have lost faith in their party and their state, know that a choice exists and know that their fight has been joined.

This is our state and this is our government. Let's un-fix it together.

Thank you. God Bless America and God Bless Illinois.