



from your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

AWHILE BACK I had the opportunity to address the members of a county association. After I had given my remarks and the meeting was over, one of the officials attending the meeting came up to me and said, "Hey, lighten up. We need more jokes and not so much gloom and doom." At the moment I thought that I didn't mean to convey any gloom or doom, but instead wanted to get across to everyone that unless we are actively involved in what's happening and doing our best to influence our own destiny, township government might face a bleak future. I tried to convey to the audience that if we monitor what happens in our state and federal battles and routinely communicate with those who make things happen, we can have a positive influence.

Township government in Illinois is in its 165th year as a governmental body. For many of those 165 years, because of the makeup of the state legislature, township people had a strong influence in Springfield. However, as the state changed from a predominately rural entity, to one with more urban areas, we have seen some of our influence fade.

In the last few years, however, as our members have become more knowledgeable and active, they have had a new impact, especially in the state legislature. We've had some great opportunities and made substantive change in state law that provides our members better ways to serve their constituents. Our overall rate of success in the legislature has improved greatly over what it was in the 1970s. A lot of that has to do with the "electronic age" and being able to get our message out quickly to our members, who in turn do the same thing.

Many people in the world are denied the opportunity to communicate directly with those they elect to office. We live in a state and nation where we can communicate with lawmakers by phone, mail, fax or email. Letter writing or communication is not the sole responsibility of the voters, it should be a cooperative effort between the voters and those that represent them in local government.

We in township government have a great opportunity to change the course of our own communities. We can do it, not by just being militant, but by being aware and by communicating what our needs are to our state

and federal leaders and what the needs of our constituents are. We need to work towards equal recognition for townships in all parts of the state. We can do all of those things, but only if we try. If we don't make the effort, our future certainly is gloomy. The future of township government is not based on "gloom and doom." Our combined efforts have produced a golden history. The right kind of effort by everyone can make the future even brighter!

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Annual Educational Conference, November 8-10 in Springfield!

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