



# From Your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

## *Bill Prather: Saying goodbye to an old friend*

**T**HE PAST YEAR has been pretty rough on past presidents of the Township Officials of Illinois. Since June 2014, five former presidents of TOI have passed away:

- Warren Behr 1976-1977
- George Miller 1977-1979
- Delbert Lay 1983-1986
- William Prather 2000-2002
- Richard Ralston 2008-2010

I had the pleasure of knowing each of these men and their combined years of service in township government was well over 100 years. Each one definitely left his mark not only in TOI, but also in his own community. While it was hard to say goodbye to each one, I especially wanted to remember one who became a very close friend through the years.

Bill Prather was one of the first people I met when I started getting involved in township government and TOI. Back in 1986, then-State Senate President Phil Rock formed a statewide task force on township government, and Bill was named co-chair of that task force. Senators from around the state named township officials to the task force, and I was fortunate enough to be named by mine. It was there that I met Bill. A large, imposing man, he always went out of his way to make me, the “youngster” of the group, feel at ease. This was the beginning of our friendship that would last until Bill passed away on April 20.

Soon after the township task force concluded its business, I joined the staff of TOI and Bill was serving on the Board of Directors. Bill was always supportive, a good listener and up-to-date on the issues. The entire staff always looked forward to his gift of mixed nuts that he faithfully gave us each Christmas.

When Bill became president of TOI in 2000, we had the opportunity to work closer with each other and attend more meetings together. One very memorable meeting occurred in early 2002. I had received a call from our national association, NATaT (National Association of Towns and Townships) inviting me as a NATaT

Board member to a White House announcement by President George W. Bush. I was told that the White House wanted an elected township official to attend the announcement also and they asked if Bill Prather (TOI’s President and also a NATaT Board member) could attend, since he was an elected township highway commissioner. I contacted Bill and without hesitation, he agreed to go with me.

The White House announcement was on Homeland Security and the U.S. Conference of Mayors was in town and about 300 mayors had been invited. Bill and I were going to be the only township representatives.

As we went through security, Bill’s name wasn’t on the list and I was told to go on in while Bill’s problem was sorted out. After being in the White House for a few minutes, Bill came in with a big smile on his face to tell me that after a phone call had been made, his entrance problem was cleared up. He also proudly told me that he got to walk in and visit briefly with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. They exchanged business cards and Bill later proudly told me

that Mayor Daley had sent him a personal note after getting home. Pictured with this article is a favorite picture of mine of Bill and me on this White House visit. Both of us were able to meet and shake hands with the President.

Later, Bill shared with me stories of a previous White House meeting with President Carter. Bill was an ardent Democrat, but sometimes worked with Republicans better than Democrats! He always spoke his mind and you knew where you stood with him, good or bad.

As I attended Bill’s funeral to pay my respects, I couldn’t help but think of all the good Bill did in his community. Pictures, plaques and tributes were everywhere, showing all he had done for others through the years. I’m grateful for the 29 years I could call Bill my friend.

He was a true friend and I will miss his laugh and those wonderful mixed nuts at Christmas!



**BILL PRATHER** and Bryan Smith at the White House.