



From Your Executive Director

Township officials
step up to be heard!

LAST MONTH, I wrote about the “winter attack” on township road districts with the introduction of SB 1811 (and later incorporated with SB 958) and how township officials from all over the state responded in droves by contacting their legislators and members of the Senate Local Government Committee, asking for their opposition to the bill. This “attack” was definitely a “call to arms” and township officials responded admirably. Then came the month of March and early April.

There is an old saying about the month of March coming in or out like a lion or a lamb. Well, this year, it definitely came in and out as a lion in the form of Senate Bill 1926, sponsored by Sen. Terry Link, 30th Dist. While this bill isn’t a direct attack on township government, it is an attack on local government. Senator Link insists that the bill is not directed at townships but the intent of the legislation is a consideration of the validity of all units of local government which includes townships. Legislative intent must be considered with every action of the General Assembly.

Senate Bill 1926, which during the week of April 11, was amended onto Senate Bill 173, would create a commission to consolidate or eliminate certain local governments. It would be comprised of eight people appointed by leadership of the General Assembly, who with a majority of five, could submit a take-it-or-leave-it plan to the General Assembly for consideration next spring. If the legislature does not take up the plan within 30 days, the bill requires that a draft of the plan be formatted into legislation and submitted to the General Assembly for a vote. The legislature cannot make any changes to the plan as submitted by the commission, which could eliminate or consolidate local governments individually or by category.

Sen. Link has never exhibited any unfriendliness toward township government, but it certainly is a threat since any local government could be wiped out with approval of this legislation.

During TOI’s Annual Topics Day this year on April 6, record numbers of township officials responded by registering and attending the event and making it a huge success for the association. Township offi-

cials swarmed the Capitol in the afternoon and visited with as many legislators as possible. Many township officials were introduced from the House Gallery, and one group met with Sen. Link to discuss his proposal. In the evening, record numbers of legislators attended our reception, and township officials once again had the chance to lobby legislators on bills we support or oppose. All in all, it was a very successful day and I’m very proud of all the officials who attended, participated, and responded to our call to arms.

The week of April 11 saw SB 173 make its way through the Senate Executive Committee on mostly a partisan vote and then to the Senate floor. Once again, township officials responded admirably to our request to ask legislators to oppose SB 173. Our lobbyist, Tim

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LT. GOV. SHEILA SIMON is welcomed to the Topics Day lunch by TOI President Mickey Goral (right) and TOI Executive Director Bryan Smith

Bramlet, and myself heard from many at the Capitol that township officials were flooding the phones with calls. There are many unanswered questions about this legislation but mostly our opinion that it is unconstitutional and gives the commission extraordinary authority to abolish potentially thousands of local government entities.

While neither SB 173 or 958 have been called for

a vote and parliamentary procedures have been used to keep them “alive” using other bills, the concept of attacking township government can be incorporated into a bill and reappear any time before final adjournment of the General Assembly at the end of May. SB 173 was not called for a vote before the Senate left for their spring break on April 15, but deadlines for final passage of bills not called by then was extended until they return from break on May 4, so the battle isn’t over yet. Our collective voices have been heard and it’s making an impact but we can’t stop now.

As I said last month, now is not the time to let down our guard. We must keep working together to ensure that the township message is heard loud and clear with our legislators. We are playing a lot of defense this year and we’ve been successful with everyone’s help so far, but we can’t stop.

Everyone has to keep their eyes wide open in case a new month brings another attack. Like the motto of the Boy Scouts: BE PREPARED!



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