



from your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL has taken some real beatings in the last few years. Local governments in particular have been faced with new obstacles to overcome and even some setbacks. On more than one occasion, legislation has been approved seemingly intended only to obstruct the normal functions of local government officials. Things such as PTELL and the Freedom of Information Act, can sometimes cause very difficult burdens on local officials.

How could this happen to local elected officials? Why would the legislature make it seem so difficult for local officials to govern?

The answers can very often be found in the headlines. Late last year, I read several headlines such as "Councilman Convicted," "County Officials Indicted," and "Township Official Charged." These headlines hit straight to the heart of a community. People who were given the "honor" of serving their neighbors and once considered "pillars" of the community suffered shame, disgrace, and in some cases imprisonment.

With the knowledge of this type of infraction, is it really any wonder that the legislature establishes new rules regulating the actions of local officials? They know that honesty and morality can't be legislated. They are also aware that the new statutes make it more difficult for elected officials to be dishonest when working under the critical gaze of the taxpayer. It is a theory similar to putting locks on a door. They are not installed to make dishonest people honest. They are there to keep honest people honest.

The vast majority of local elected officials in Illinois are honest, hardworking people, dedicated to providing good service to their constituents. Unfortunately, they are painted with the same black brush of corruption and scandal as their less responsible counterparts. They also suffer from the restraints placed on them by things such as PTELL and the Freedom of Information Act.

Over the last several months, I have received countless newspaper articles from township officials in various parts of the state with headlines showing scandal involving township officials. The charges were outrageous and the township officials pled guilty and resigned from office. Shortly after, two more officials from the same township were indicted on criminal

charges. Like the old saying goes, "birds of a feather."

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy said, "No president can excuse or pardon the slightest deviation from the irreproachable standards of behavior on the part of any member of the Executive Branch." The same philosophy can and *SHOULD* apply to *ALL* elected officials at every level of government.

Once elected officials take the oath of office, they have an obligation to every taxpayer and to the form of government we represent, whichever it may be. It is true that elected officials live in a "fish bowl" and the smaller the town, the bigger the bowl!

As elected officials, we are the stewards of our community's destiny and must live with what is, what has been, and what could be. Let's make our reputation something we can live with.

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