

Food for Thought:

**Cook County Clerk David Orr
Still Seeking Reforms**

"I ran for County Clerk in 1990 to win and prove that a Cook County office could be run well and cleanly," said Cook County Clerk David Orr.

Clerk Orr was the featured speaker at the "Food for Thought" luncheon sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Cook County on July 16, 2018. Speaking before a sold-out event, Clerk Orr touched on a number of topics: some of the accomplishments over the past 28 years that he has been Clerk; some of the current challenges to our democracy; and some of his recommendations for improving elections and government. This event raised over \$900 for the League's Education Fund, which will likely be used to help support the Video Voter's Guide for the November election which the Cook County League helps sponsor with WTTW, Channel 11.

Some accomplishments Clerk Orr pointed to:

- Transferring City Clerk responsibilities for birth and death records to County Clerk, which Orr estimates produced almost \$40 million in savings over the years
- Shedding more light on Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts
- Running for Office toolkit produced by the Clerk for suburban candidates
- Moving the election of school boards in 1999 from stand-alone November elections to the election cycle of other local bodies in the spring, with savings of \$2.5 million in Cook County alone every 2 years
- Successful efforts he spearheaded or supported to make it easier to register and vote:
 - Motor Voter law
 - Early voting
 - Teen judges and 17-year olds voting in primaries if going to be 18 by November
 - Same day voter registration on election day
 - Automatic Voter Registration, just going into effect, which should also do much to clean up voter rolls through address corrections

Some challenges to democracy Clerk Orr identified:

- Money in politics
 - Speech determined by how much money you have
 - Making it harder for qualified people to run
 - Effect on policy: powerful money interests vs. the people
 - Campaigns too long and nonsensical with most of the money going to tv and radio ads that contain half-truths and lies and are very negative, thus discouraging people from voting at all
- Voter suppression (fortunately, thus far not as much of a problem in Illinois)
 - Many states ban people convicted of felonies from voting for rest of life; points out that one state's misdemeanor (e.g., spitting on a sidewalk) can be defined as a felony in another state
 - Supreme Court decision which struck down the pre-clearance requirement in the Voting Rights Act which has led to numerous voter suppression statutes

Some changes Clerk Orr is recommending in Illinois, particularly in light of some of the issues in the March primary:

- E-sign for petitions to get on the ballot; less than 50% of petitions are accurate (missing info, not living in right district, already having signed another petition for same office, etc., as well as other reasons); Denver piloted using tablets for signing petitions which allowed for instant look-ups of address with result that over 90% of petitions were accurate.

- Reductions in signatures needed; currently those running for County Clerk need more signatures than candidates for Governor; reducing the needed signatures will save time and money for reviews of validity
- Change election calendar by
 - Adding 2 more weeks between candidate filing deadline and election
 - Move primary elections to May or June

Clerk Orr said that generally what is needed in government are

- To take training of public employees more seriously
- To do more cross-training of employees so that they can be moved among different areas to meet needs, as well as to make employees' jobs more interesting
- To do more consolidation of government bodies and offices

With regard to the consolidation of the Recorder of Deeds office into the County Clerk in 2020, which the League supported, Clerk Orr said that there can easily be a \$2 million annual savings by getting rid of redundant positions (for example, public relations and human relations), as well as savings through cross-training of employees. The Civic Consulting Alliance is doing a study now to help with the consolidation.

Clerk Orr has chosen not to run for reelection as County Clerk this November, but he promised, "I'm not going away, but will remain active in improving government and encouraging active participation by others." Sounds like he would make an excellent League member!