

WILLIAMSVILLE C.U.S.D. #15



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DISTRICT DISPATCH

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From the Superintendent's Desk

Citizenship 101

There is a rather infamous line from the 1976 movie Network starring the British actor Peter Finch in which Finch shouts, "I'm mad as (heck), and I'm not going to take it anymore." I think the same frustration being expressed by Finch in his outburst is similar to what I have experienced over the past few years as I have watched our state government in action.

There are two major sources to my frustration. First, the conduct and mostly inaction on the part of our General Assembly has been inexcusable. Having taught American Government to high school seniors for fifteen years I would be hard-pressed today to explain the actions of our lawmakers to a group of high school students. The Illinois General Assembly has certainly violated the spirit of representative government if not the letter of the law. Certainly they have not acted alone in bringing about the stalemate that now exists in our state. Even the most casual observer would recognize Governor Rauner as being equally responsible for bringing about the dysfunction that currently characterizes the government in Illinois.

Let's review a few of the facts. The Office of Governor is held by a Republican. The Illinois Senate is controlled by the Democrats and its president John Cullerton. The Illinois House of Representatives is controlled by the Democrats and its leader Michael Madigan. One might surmise that if all three entities were controlled by the same party it would be much easier to get things done. Wrong!! If you recall, the Democrats controlled both houses of the legislature and the Governor's office for many years and we still experienced constant gridlock. Furthermore, I really don't care which party is in control or holds the leadership position. I'm much more interested in WHAT is accomplished by the General Assembly not WHO is doing it. The concept of teamwork seemingly has no place in our current state government. I'm sure many of you have seen the acronym T.E.A.M. which stands for Together Everyone Achieves More. The qualities of a team – cooperation, compromise, sharing, humility, etc. all seem to have been lost on this current group of lawmakers.

More facts – the state budget, which historically is completed in late April or early May, was not even enacted for Fiscal Year 2016. For Fiscal Year 2017, the legislature and governor agreed to a stop gap budget in which it is funded for only a half year. Education has been funded for the entire year but there isn't much optimism that there is enough revenue in the state coffers to keep this promise. Meanwhile, the legislators and the governor continue to play the blame game with no one taking responsibility. Yet we heard report after report about the millions (more likely billions) of dollars spent in the last election cycle by local, state, and national candidates. I'm pretty sure we aren't going to get much bang for our buck in most cases.

The second source of my frustration is the apathetic, passive, laissez- faire type of attitude displayed by the majority of our citizenry towards the workings of our state government. We seem to just accept the actions or inactions of these elected representatives without much discourse. The newspapers and television newscasts have been filled with stories for months and months about the problems in Springfield but yet how many of us have written letters, made phone calls, or conducted a face-to-face meeting with our state representative or state senator? Where's the outcry?

Where's the demand that these folks be accountable to us the citizens? Are they really representing us with their conduct and actions in the manner which we have the right to expect?

I'm almost amused (but it is truly sad) that the General Assembly passed legislation a couple of years ago requiring school board members to attend trainings in order to maintain their positions on the board. Keep in mind this is for a position that is volunteer and one in which the vast majority of board members already voluntarily attend meetings and trainings throughout the year. And I can guarantee you that school board members have a much closer relationship with their constituents than do legislators. My question I guess would then be this – are members of the General Assembly going to be held to the same standard? The Governor? It seems only right since they are being paid by the citizens of Illinois with taxpayers' money. I'm not really holding out much hope that will be the case.

In the final analysis I just want to be a better citizen. I want to be better informed. I want to demand that my representatives be accountable and not continue to play the blame game as a justification for the issues we ignore. More importantly, I want to make sure the lessons I was teaching my students about American Government were not just a bunch of lies but rather that it is important that they be proactive. I want them to know they have a voice in our society and it is important that they exercise all the rights afforded to them as citizens in our country. I certainly thought I was teaching lessons that were real and applicable and not just some theory. I still believe that and hope you do to.