

State Sen. John Cullerton: Finally, real progress in wake of gridlock



AP Illinois Senate President John Cullerton, D-Chicago. (AP Photo/Seth Perlman)

By JOHN CULLERTON

GUEST COLUMN

Posted Apr 10, 2009 @ 12:05 AM

For far too long, the people of Illinois have been shortchanged by a government that puts partisan bickering and the politics of personality ahead of real progress. We have faced gridlock, in large part, because of an executive leader who put personal gain ahead of the real needs of our citizens.

When I was elected Senate president, I pledged to do my part to change the tone and put an end to the distrust and partisanship in Springfield. I made these promises because Illinois faces tremendous challenges that must be addressed. The people want bipartisan cooperation. They deserve real ethics reform.

And Illinois needs a capital plan that invests in local communities and creates jobs.

It's time for progress in Illinois. If the past three months are any indication, progress is happening now. We are only halfway through the legislative session, but, by working together, we have made significant strides in bipartisanship, capital and ethics.

The Senate's first bipartisan action was to sit in judgment of the impeachment of Rod Blagojevich.

Regardless of the claims Blagojevich has made, every party involved was provided a fair and equal opportunity to state its case. In the end, every one of the state's 59 senators decided that Blagojevich violated the public trust and the duties he was sworn to uphold.

The Senate Committee on Deficit Reduction is another example of our bipartisan efforts. We may not have agreed on all proposals to reduce our state's \$12.4 billion deficit, but everyone agrees that good policy happens when we work in a respectful bipartisan manner.

State lawmakers in the House and Senate joined together with Gov. Pat Quinn to pass a plan to jump-start capital projects. This is the first real plan the state has seen after 10 years of inaction. In 10 weeks, we've come together to put thousands of people to work on critical road projects.

The economic stabilization package that Illinois put into effect this week helps us capture billions of federal stimulus dollars — money that will help the state to pay its bills on time and that supports good jobs at a time when many areas of the state face double-digit unemployment rates. Over the life of the plan more than \$8 billion in state and federal funds put toward providing the people of this state the services they deserve.

The General Assembly is also working to craft needed reforms. The people of Illinois deserve a government ruled by ethos, not egos. To that end, I joined with House Speaker Michael Madigan to create the Joint Committee on Government Reform and announce our first reform measure.

The pension reform law will sweep the state pension boards of Blagojevich appointees and protected state pension funds from allowing private sector insiders to manipulate pension investments.

Our work is nowhere close to completion this year, but we have made significant progress. We have not yet provided all the reasonable solutions to our tremendous challenges. But make no mistake: The members of the General Assembly are working hard to deliver on the January 2009 promise to change Springfield. The past weeks prove that when we work together, we can make real progress to move Illinois forward.

State Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago, is president of the Illinois Senate.