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Froehlich co-sponsors SB600, Dillard disappoints SB600 supporters - Dave Diersen

(May 4, 2005) Since the 1980s, because of an amendment to the Illinois Election Code (IEC) that then Governor Thompson put through, Illinois Republican voters have not elected the members of the Illinois Republican Party (IRP) State Central Committee (SCC). Instead, they have been elected for 4-year terms at biennial county conventions by 50 Republican Ward Committeemen in Chicago, 30 Republican Township Committeemen in the rest of Cook County, and the Republican Precinct Committeemen in other 101 Illinois counties. SB600 would amend the IEC so that Republican voters would again elect IRP SCC members in primary elections every 4 years beginning next year.

Many support return to direct election

Organizations that have passed resolutions in support of returning to direct election of SCC members include the Illinois Center Right Coalition, Illinois Forum, and Renew Illinois. Jim Oberweis and I understand all the Republicans who are considering running for statewide offices in 2006 support returning to direct election.

On February 25, Senator Lauzen introduced SB2033 which subsequently was renumbered as SB 600 and on March 10, Senator Brady became a co-sponsor. On April 14, Illinois Senators including Senate Republican Leader Watson; Senator, SCC member, and DuPage County Republican Party Chairman Dillard; Senator and SCC member Bill Peterson; and all but three of the other Republican Senators voted for the bill. On April 15; House Republican Leader Cross became its Chief Sponsor; on April 27, Representative Saviano became its Alternate Chief Sponsor; and on April 28, Representative Parke became a Co-Sponsor.

In addition to the Illinois Republican State Senators and many Republican State Representatives, many other Illinois Republicans support returning to direct election of SCC members. They include Mary Jo Arndt, Jon Cox, Dave Diersen, Lidia Downs, Fran Eaton, Irwin Essensfeld, Earl Gough, Joe Hedrick, Bill Hogan, Doug Ibendahl, Rich Johns, George Kocan, John McNeal, Steve Meyer, Joseph Morris, Maureen Murphy, Patrick O'Malley, Dan Proft, Bob Redfern, Jack Roeser, Cathy Santos, Craig Simmons, Gary Skoien, Jeff Sykuta, Raymond True, Joe Wiegand, and Jon Zahm.

Good news and bad news on May 3

For those many Illinois Republicans who support SB600, the good news on May 3 was that Representative Paul Froehlich joined Representatives Cross, Saviano, and Parke in co-sponsoring the bill. However, the bad news was that DuPage Republican precinct committeemen received a letter dated May 2 from Senator Dillard that indicates he no longer supports the bill even though he voted for it on April 14. I have posted a copy of the letter in PDF format on the Download Files page of www.gopillinois.com.

Senator Dillard did not acknowledge or address arguments for direct election in his letter

In his May 2 letter, Senator Dillard did not acknowledge or address any of the serious problems that the current process for electing SCC members has brought Illinois Republicans. Those problems include SCC's election of an IRP Chairman who soon resigned - Lee Daniels; the divisive 2002 primary race for governor and the losing candidates in that race not totally supporting Jim Ryan; the 2002 election losses; SCC's outrageous and rude treatment of IRP Chairman Gary MacDougal; Scott Fawell's actions that resulted in his conviction; George Ryan's actions that resulted in his indictment; Jack Ryan's actions that resulted in his withdrawal; SCC's refusal to immediately fill the Jack Ryan vacancy with the candidate who Illinois Republican voters gave the second most votes to - Jim Oberweis; SCC's rejection of a petition signed by many IRP leaders and others last year that called for a special convention to elect a new IRP Chairman and to vote to return to direct election of SCC members; IRP's not posting the IRP

platform and the IRP by-laws on the IRP website; IRP's not improving its communications; IRP's not promptly hiring an Executive Director; and the outrageous argument that many IRP leaders and Republican elected officials continue to make that the IRP platform is too conservative and that conservatives cannot win statewide offices in Illinois.

In his May 2 letter, Senator Dillard did not address the fact that the current process for electing SCC members stifles if not kills healthy competition for SCC positions and has resulted in SCC members who are more responsive to the very few who put them in office rather than to the Republican voters in their district. He did not address the fact that generally, anyone who runs as a Republican for any kind of office in Illinois without being asked to by the "powers to be" is severely punished. He did not address the fact that direct election would bring healthy competition and the election of members who would be better qualified and responsive to the Republican voters in their district.

Some would ask, because Senator Dillard sent his May 2 letter on DuPage County Republican Party stationary and because his letter presents only arguments against the bill, did he first obtain input from the nine Republican Township Chairmen in DuPage County, from the other officers of those organizations, from the committee chairmen of those organizations, from the 671 precinct committeemen?

Senator Dillard now argues against the bill he voted for

At the end of his May 2 letter, Senator Dillard asks Republican precinct committeemen to write Representatives Cross and Saviano and "let them know if you support or oppose SB600, and why." However, Senator Dillard presents only arguments against SB600 in his letter.

Senator Dillard argues that returning to direct election of SCC members would lesson the power that precinct committeemen have to represent the voters in their precinct. However, Senator Dillard knows full well that under the current process for electing SCC members, Republican voters do not get information on who might be interested in seeking the SCC position in their congressional district, let alone who actually runs for the position. Returning to direct election would increase the precinct committeeman's power because Republican voters would rely heavily on their precinct committeeman's recommendation when voting for a SCC candidate.

Senator Dillard argues that SB600 limits who can serve as IRP Chairman to SCC members and that such a limitation is bad. However, Senator Dillard presents no facts to support his argument that such a limitation is bad other than his implication that IRP's problems would have been worst if its past chairmen had been SCC members elected by Illinois voters. Further, there is debate as to whether the current wording in the bill (page 4, lines 28-33) actually includes such a limitation, and of course, if in fact it does include such a limitation, the bill could be amended.

Senator Dillard cites "a \$100,000 divisive race in DuPage under the old election law" and argues that returning to direct election of SCC members would "drain financial resources away" from other Republican candidates. However, I hope that many will get all the facts concerning that \$100,000 race from all the parties involved, determine why it happened, determine how likely such a thing is to happen again, and if it is likely, how to avoid it. With the advent of the Internet, candidates for political office can get their message out to voters much more economically. With direct election of SCC members, I would expect that much of the money spent on SCC campaigns would be "new" money, that is, money that would not have been spent on or contributed to other campaigns.

Senator Dillard argues that Republicans should favor "fewer races on the ballot, not more." However, I, and I am sure many other Republicans, disagree.

Senator Dillard argues that in congressional districts dominated by Democrats, returning to direct election "would allow the Democrats to 'front' a candidate just to influence the Republican State Party - a tactic often used in other races in the (Chicago) to confuse voters." However, I am sure

that Chairman McKenna, Senator Dillard, the other current SCC members, and the 50 Ward Committeemen in Chicago could prevent that.

Senator Dillard argues that SB600 "was rushed through the Senate with virtually no discussion." However, Senator Dillard was aware of all the arguments against SB 600 before he voted for it. Further, according to Senator Lauzen, the bill was discussed extensively before it was voted out of committee by 10 - 0. Further, many are troubled by Senator Dillard's implication that if he had known then what he knows now, he would have voted against SB 600. That explanation reminds many of Senator Kerry's explanation for his voting for Iraq and then voting against Iraq.

Call for action

As a Republican Precinct Committeeman, I look forward to enactment of SB600, to highly qualified candidates seeking SCC positions, to strong and positive campaigns for SCC positions, to my selecting the best candidate to support for 6th congressional district, to my helping that candidate win, to the best possible candidate winning, and to a stronger and more responsive SCC. I urge all Illinois Republicans to urge all the Illinois Republican State Representatives to co-sponsor SB600, to ask the members of the House Rules Committee to move the bill forward, to call for the bill's earliest possible passage and enactment, and of course, to vote for the bill.