

## **FAMILY TAXPAYERS NETWORK & ILLINOIS LEADER**

### **Does the IL GOP have its own John Kerry? - Doug Ibendahl**

<http://www.thechampion.org/news/contentview.asp?c=157712>

<http://www.illinoisleader.com/opinion/opinionview.asp?c=25274>

***"I actually did vote for the \$87 billion before I voted against it." -- U.S. Senator John Kerry***

During last year's presidential campaign, President Bush made expert and repeated use of that now infamous Kerry flip-flop. Sadly, we appear to have our own version of Flipper within our camp in Illinois.

I live in Cook County but like many Republicans, I have received by now a copy of a letter State Senator Kirk Dillard sent on Monday to nearly 700 Precinct Committeemen in DuPage County. Dillard is the DuPage County Chairman and also one of the 19 members of the IL GOP's State Central Committee.

In his letter to DuPage County Precinct Committeeman, Dillard explains several concerns he has about Senate Bill 600, legislation that would restore greater Democracy and accountability to the Illinois Republican Party. The bill would return our State Party to a more open system where the 19 State Central Committeemen (one representing each U.S. Congressional District) would be elected directly by Republican primary voters every four years, reversing an ill conceived scheme from an old Republican Administration.

In his letter, Dillard lists several purported "cons" about SB600, but no "pros". He then asks his Precinct Committeemen to give their thoughts on the bill to the Republican sponsors in the House where it is now pending. But what Senator Dillard neglects to mention in his letter is that **HE PERSONALLY VOTED FOR the exact same bill himself less than a month ago- on April 14th! SB600 passed the State Senate unanimously on that date.**

I'll take the liberty of paraphrasing what Senator Flipper appears to be saying through his actions: *"I actually did vote for greater Democracy for Illinois Republicans, before I argued against it."*

Even more disappointing is the message Kirk Dillard is really now sending to the Republican rank and file- that he thinks we are all too stupid to elect our own State Party leadership. With this kind of "leadership", is it any wonder Illinois is getting "bluer" by the day?

### **The Blue Badge of Shame**

SB600 would just return our Party to essentially the system of election we originally had- basically the same system Illinois Democrats always retained and still use.

We wouldn't be this close to major Democratic reform if nearly 200 County Chairman and grassroots activists hadn't shown the courage to stand up and demand greater openness in the selection of a new Party Chairman this past January. The State Central Committee was forced to listen, and to their credit they eventually did the right thing. While still far from perfect, the more open process in January represented a historic victory and gave others the spine to finally stand up and publicly join the good fight for more transparency and accountability in our Illinois Party. A new benchmark was established in January that will be difficult to reverse.

Senator and State Central Committeeman Kirk Dillard still wears a blue badge of shame for actually opposing the open process in January. Dillard refused to join the call for more openness. I know because I personally asked him to sign on. But he wouldn't Think Red.

Now, instead of getting on the Democracy bandwagon and learning from past mistakes, Dillard is now lobbying against a bill he voted for less than a month ago. How many other times has Dillard voted "yea" while wearing his State Senator hat, while he works against a bill under another of his multiple titles?

### How it Works

Currently, State Central Committeemen are elected by the party apparatus beneath the Central Committee, meaning Precinct Committeemen in every county but Cook. In Cook County, which historically often has the largest Republican vote totals due to its large population (in terms of numbers, not percentage), only 30 Township Committeemen and 50 Ward Committeemen have a vote for State Central Committeemen. By law, Cook County does not have elected precinct committeemen with voting eligibility on any State Party matter. They can be appointed with no voting rights but few Ward and Township Committeemen in Cook even bother. The unique Party structure in Cook is important to remember given the significant percentage of the 19 Congressional Districts which are all, or partially, encompassed by Cook County.

SB600 would basically restore the greater openness and Democracy which Governor Thompson successfully took away in the 1980's. Many Republicans including myself, strongly believe Thompson's change from the old system has been disastrous. It's hard to simply blame demographic shifts or mere coincidence for the fact that we haven't won for a Republican Presidential nominee since the change was made. Illinois has just become a darker shade of "blue". I've looked at the laws and State Republican Parties in other states - especially the "red" ones. I find no other State Party operating under a system as closed as ours.

### Dillard's "Cons"

Because SB600 would restore a previous requirement that a State Chairman must be selected from the 19 member Central Committee, Dillard tells his Precinct Committeemen that "this would mean that our newly elected State Party Chairman, Andy McKenna, would not be eligible to continue as Chairman since he is not a State Central Committeeman, and Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka would not have been able to serve had this change been in effect."

Regarding Topinka, most people would consider that an argument in favor of SB600, but Dillard isn't being truthful regarding McKenna.

Andy was elected in January to serve out Topinka's remaining four year term. He's up for reelection by the Central Committee after next year's March Primary. The Committee's members will also be newly elected by then - by whichever system - and the new Committee will then elect its Chairman. If McKenna wants to be considered for reelection as Chairman, he simply has to run for State Central Committee in his home Congressional District and win.

In my opinion, the limitation of the Chairman candidate pool to just 19 is a positive corporate governance reform. The check and balance is that the pool will be limited to 19 people who have been vetted by Republican Primary voters in a real election. It means that we'll never (knock on wood) have to worry about someone like Bob Kjellander becoming State Chairman.

### More Scare Tactics

Dillard also warns his Precinct Committeemen that "this proposed law could drain financial resources away from Republican candidates for local and state office." I suppose we could eliminate all elections under that logic. It's nice of the Senator to tell us in which elections Republican voters matter and in which they don't. But after the U S Senate race fiasco of last year, Republicans now recognize the importance of the Central Committee. It was a big shock to

most when they woke up last summer to learn that the duly elected Jack Ryan would be replaced on the ballot by 19 people substituting their judgment for that of Republican primary voters. Few had heard of the Central Committee prior to that time and fewer had the slightest idea how to contact anyone on that Committee to express their preferences.

A six week trainwreck followed Jack Ryan being thrown on the tracks. About one week was taken up by Mr. Dillard preening for the cameras and urging us not to get our hopes up - but he might get into the race. That was somewhere between attention to other possible suitors including Da Coach, Rocker Ted Nugent, colonial wig guy living out of his car, and a former Bear star who eventually had to issue a press release saying, "thanks, but no thanks, I'm already supporting Obama."

The rest is history of course. Would a Central Committee accountable to Republican voters have been more hesitant to abandon a duly elected nominee with no one on deck? There's no knowing for sure but it's hard to imagine real Democracy producing a worse result or one that was more embarrassment for all Republicans.

### **Still More Scare Tactics**

Finally, Dillard states the dire worry that "this would allow the Democrats to 'front' a candidate just to infiltrate the Republican State Party - a tactic often used in other races in the city to confuse voters." Here's a news flash: it looks like we're already there. When you consider some of the things the State Party has done recently, one almost has to assume there are some Democrat moles in our midst.

In all seriousness, this "worry" is a complete red herring. Under the current system, it is now EASIER for Democrats or shady Republicans to scam the process and get on the Central Committee. With only 80 voting Ward and Township Committeemen in all of Cook County, there are fewer "voters" to worry about controlling. As everyone knows or suspects, the Chicago Republican Party really only exists on paper. Many, but not all, of the 50 Ward Committeemen are in place SOLELY because they were recruited for their once every four year vote for State Central Committeemen. Dedication to grassroots work or building the Party plays no role in many cases. This is a crucial point given the disproportionate control that just a few Chicago Ward Committeemen can have in determining the composition of the State Central Committee under our current closed system. The incentive system for running for Party office in Chicago is completely corrupted under the current system. The area of the state where Republicans most need to do better is only getting weaker.

Dillard's letter only skills for the interests of those who LIKE AND BENEFIT FROM the easily scammed system we currently have in Chicago.

### **What Dillard Ignores**

While centralizing power, accountability under the current system has been lost. Under the "go along to get along" status quo, we've witnessed the following:

An indicted former Governor.

Two of the State Party's officials - nearly 10% of the current senior team (State Central Committeeman Jack Dorgan and National Committeeman Bob Kjellander) - receiving mention in the Fed's Evidentiary Proffer in George Ryan's upcoming corruption trial.

Numerous former Republican state workers having to take the "perp walk" at the Federal Building.

A rigged-up State Convention in Collinsville for the sole purpose of allowing Bob Kjellander to keep the National Committeeman title which gives him greater cache to seek big lobbying contracts (e.g., the \$10 billion Blagojevich bond deal where Kjellander made \$809,000, for services he still refuses to describe).

The U.S. Senate race fiasco.

A contributor funded staff assigned primarily to the harassment and bullying of good Republicans who seek positive change and reform.

Abandonment and crucifixion of good Republicans like Peter Fitzgerald, Jack Ryan and Gary MacDougal, while the old guard preaches unity and the 11th Commandment to keep themselves in power.

The alienation from, and loss of respect for the State Party by many County Chairmen and grassroots activists.

The loss of all but one State Constitutional Office; a U.S. Senate Seat, a U.S. Congressional Seat, majorities in the State House and Senate, and most importantly - we haven't won for a Republican Presidential nominee since the change to less open elections was made.

### **A Panacea?**

Would direct elections solve all of our Party's problems? Certainly not. No one is saying it will. But it's a positive and crucial step forward. Just having each State Central Committeeman know that she or he will now be accountable to all Republican voters will make them better officials from day one. That's the power of Democracy.

Today, brave American men and women are fighting and dying for Democracy in the Middle East. It's sad to think that while young people are making such sacrifices, one of our public servants safe at home, who already has several titles, is whining about a return to more Democracy when it comes to a particular party position he has comfortably secured. Worse, Senator Dillard has resorted to dishonest arguments and scare tactics in an effort to preserve a failed status quo. Perhaps true reform of the IL GOP may have to await the return of our young fighting heroes from Iraq and Afghanistan. I look forward to many of them getting into the political process here in Illinois. Our State and our Party will benefit greatly when young people who have demonstrated courage under fire start teaching certain aging, self-centered baby-boomers a thing or two about honor, sacrifice, and what it really means to be an American and a Republican in Illinois.