

It has been my pleasure to have served on the [REDACTED] for the past ten years. As many of you know, I will be retiring from the profession at the end of March and, as such, my membership on this Committee will come to an end.

As my days as a city manager grow short, I have begun to reflect upon the state of our profession and, more broadly, upon the state of government in general... both in Illinois and in the United States. Although I believe that most local governments continue to be generally effective in addressing significant problems and challenges, my perspective on our governmental partners at both the state and federal level is much different.

It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the two party system, which underlies our systems of government at the state and federal levels, is undeniably failing. This failure is likely to have catastrophic consequences on virtually every aspect of our lives and will make the jobs of local government officials dramatically more difficult.

The polarization of our two prominent political parties is crippling the ability of our legislatures, at both the state and federal level, to develop and implement reasonable and effective solutions to many of the serious problems that we face as a state and as a nation.

In Illinois, we need not look any further than the state's financial crisis, including the debacle surrounding the funding of public pensions, as a clear example of our government's ineptitude. It appears that our state government has become incapable of addressing these dire financial problems. Most of us fully understand that any effective solution(s) will require significant and shared sacrifice. However, it is increasingly apparent that the Illinois General Assembly lacks both the resolve and the political courage to work together to forge any sort of effective solutions.

We are seeing this very same phenomenon play out at the federal level. Critical issues facing our country such as immigration, health care, race relations and infrastructure have become inexorably stuck in the quagmire of political extremism. The U.S. Congress has become virtually impotent in its ability to solve any type of serious problem. Infrastructure funding is a particularly interesting issue to dissect since both political parties, inclusive of far left liberals and far right conservatives, have all embraced the need to provide greater funding for infrastructure projects. Yet the demagogues that appear to control our most sacred and enduring governmental institutions are unwilling to tolerate compromise of any sort which has derailed all reasonable proposals to invest in the repair and improvement of our country's rapidly deteriorating highways, bridges, rail systems, etc.

It would certainly be convenient to blame all of this on the White House. Although it is true that the current Administration has done little to mitigate the dysfunction in Washington, DC, the fundamental problems of our political systems transcend even our current President.

What is particularly troubling to me is that these extremist legislators seem to be quite proud of their refusal to accept any compromise. They appear to have no regret or remorse over the fact that their ideological dogmatism has crippled the ability of our federal government to take necessary action to address very serious problems that threaten the well-being of all of us. They go so far as to trumpet such inaction by our government as some sort of a perverse virtue and they proudly campaign on their records of obstructionism. Sadly, these very people seem to get re-elected.

Unfortunately, we have too few statesmen left in both Springfield and Washington to make any sort of a difference. And I am sorry to report that the few good ones that are still left are beginning to head for the door. They have become exhausted by their recurrent failed efforts to bring their obstructionist colleagues together. It is also disheartening those legislators who still have the stomach to fight for compromise and progress have actually become targets for defeat by extreme factions within their very own political parties.

So...what is the solution?... Term limits? The emergence of a third major political party? A constitutional change? Or a crisis of such proportion that it shocks the electorate into withdrawing support for the hardline zealots that they have been sending to both Springfield and Washington DC? I can only hope that the ultimate catalyst for change is not the latter. However, I find it difficult to be even a little optimistic given what we witness transpiring nearly every day in both Washington and Springfield. It is truly unbelievable!

I wish those of you who remain in this profession the very best of luck. I fear that you will all need it. In the meantime, I will hope and pray for a miracle that will change the current trajectory of our political systems in this country. I will also pledge to be an unwavering and shrill voice of support for effective government at the local level that I am sure all of you will work hard to ensure.