



## **BGA Action Plan**

**Andy Shaw, Executive Director**

The indictment of former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich for, among other things, allegedly trying to sell Barack Obama's U.S. Senate seat to the highest bidder, is simply the most egregious example of a government that is all too often out of touch with voters and taxpayers, and frequently out of control.

We've been hit with record tax increases by the City of Chicago and Cook County, and Governor Quinn wanted to join the tax parade by hiking the Illinois income tax by 50 per cent without first considering alternative ways to manage the state's fiscal crisis.

We have dodged potholes, wrestled with parking meters, paid out millions to settle lawsuits and watched bureaucrats sleeping on the job or inside their hired trucks.

Meanwhile, federal prosecutors continue to charge and convict an endless series of politicians for corruption in this pervasive "pay to play" culture.

And groups like the Better Government Association, working with TV, radio and print reporters, continue to find glaring examples of government waste, inefficiency and cronyism.

Will we ever be able to eliminate or at least reduce the "corruption tax?" Or let Abe Lincoln "rest in peace" instead of "turning over in his grave," as U.S. Attorney Pat Fitzgerald said about the sad legacy of "pay to play" under Blagojevich?

The answer is yes! And that is my commitment as the new executive director of the BGA, a challenge I'm taking on after a 37-year career as a Chicago journalist, including the last 26 years covering politics and government for ABC 7 here in Chicago.

The BGA believes that every hard-earned tax dollar from Illinois workers and companies that have been stretched thinner than ever by the economic crisis should be spent on the goods and services we need, not the bureaucrats we don't need----the friends and relatives of the politicians. And that every branch of government should be transparent---operating in bright sunshine, not obscured by clouds and fog.

Our mission----to investigate, monitor, speak out and, if necessary, litigate---is more important than ever as traditional media outlets reel from economic blows that deplete reporting and investigative staffs.

The BGA is a proud organization----founded in 1923 to fight mobster Al Capone's stranglehold on City Hall---but we are struggling. I inherit an organization with only two employees and a budget of only \$350,000 a year.

So there's obviously a lot of work ahead if we're to realize my ambitious plans, which include:

- 1) An Accountability Project that's facilitated by a top-of-the-line interactive website featuring, among other things, media reports about corruption and government activities around the state of Illinois; email updates on those issues; a data base of budgets, contracts and government payrolls; blogs from reporter/monitors who will be watching and analyzing public meetings at City Hall, Cook County, the suburbs and Springfield; a Pothole Page with pictures and a live clock that tells us how long they go unfilled; a similar page with a calendar indicating how long people have been waiting for governments to comply with Freedom of Information requests; a Picture Page with viewer photos of visible waste or inefficiency, like five municipal workers standing around a job site instead of actually working; a Complaint Corner for citizens with gripes about what a particular branch of government is or isn't doing; and a Whistleblower Page for anonymous tips about alleged corruption, waste and inefficiency.
- 2) Monthly BGA forums to discuss and debate key issues like privatization, video poker, tax increment financing and the 2016 Olympics. The forums would feature experts and well-known leaders representing differing viewpoints on the topics, and each forum would be videotaped and digitized for the widest possible distribution on websites, social media outlets and, of course, to all the newspapers and TV and radio stations.
- 3) Compilation of a "Good Government Report Card" or "Score Card" that will be handed out to all of the major office holders and widely publicized after a careful analysis of the way their offices perform in key areas, like the percentage of the budget that goes to vital goods and services vs. bureaucracy; the speed with which they respond to Freedom of Information requests; the number of employees who've been charged with corruption over the years; and the amount of taxpayer money that is paid out to settle lawsuits.
- 4) A study of duplication at various levels of government that could lead to streamlining recommendations or a call to merge or eliminate certain agencies, departments or offices.
- 5) Expanded waste, fraud and corruption investigations in partnership with traditional and non-traditional media organizations---including newspapers, TV and radio---but also on-line and freelance outlets that are currently doing valuable research under most radar screens.
- 6) A program, utilizing former reporters and editors and set up in conjunction with local colleges and universities, to train investigative reporters to work with media outlets on waste, fraud and corruption probes, and to train the monitors who will be covering the meetings and studying the budgets of government at all levels in Illinois.
- 7) An aggressive internship program that loops the best and brightest journalism, political science, business and law school students into worthwhile projects for academic credit under our supervision.

To accomplish my objectives, I estimate that I need a budget of about \$1.5 million per year. And a staff that includes, at a minimum, a grant writer, a special projects coordinator, an office manager, a technology officer, a lawyer, a development director, an administrative assistant, a publicity manager, 5 investigators and 5 monitors.

My fundraising plan includes an aggressive campaign to increase the involvement and the financial commitment of BGA Board members dedicated to the cause. I will also recruit a diverse group of new board members eager to lend their resources and expertise to the effort. And I will use my visibility and media access to ask reform-minded viewers, listeners and readers to become members of the BGA, and donors.

My plan also includes an accelerated pursuit of foundation grants for specific projects from Chicago's deeply committed philanthropic community. Many of the "action plan" items will be worked into specific grant applications over the next few months.

We will be also be assisted initially by the development of a formalized Strategic Plan that one of our foundation partners is underwriting, and the temporary use of a dozen new lawyers who are being deferred by their firms for a year and made available to us for "pro bono" work after they pass the bar exam in August. They will work in a satellite office with the help of remote technology that I hope to have available.

And finally, we will be looking for an "in kind" contribution of new and substantially larger office space when our lease at 11 E. Adams expires in November.

This is my dream and my passion. After a long career in the news business, and a lifetime in Cook County, I know how the system works or doesn't work, I know what's broken, I know where the bodies are buried, and I have a serious plan to fix it. But there won't be any witch hunts or personal attacks---this is not about "gotcha," it's about good government.

I've never been more excited about a challenge or an opportunity. But I need an army of supporters or I'll be tilting at windmills. Don Quixote was charming, but General Patton won the battle.

Please join me.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andy Shaw". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Andy Shaw