

REMARKS
JAMES R. REILLY

Thank you for this award. I am truly honored to receive it.

It is an even greater honor to be placed in such distinguished ranks as those of the past honorees, most of whom have been colleagues at one time or another, all of whom have made important contributions to life in our city and state and all of whom I consider to be friends.

Special thanks go to

- the Advisory Committee for having the generosity to nominate me,
- to Laurence Msall, Tom Livingston and the Civic Federation,
- to Matthew Blakely and the Motorola Foundation
- and to the sponsors for making this event possible.

To the extent that I am being honored this morning because of a supposed ability to reach across party lines and to craft workable solutions to difficult public policy issues by combining the best ideas from each side and compromising any differences, an ability shared by many past honorees, there is a certain poignancy in the air considering the current political atmosphere in this country.

It was not too long ago that it was commonplace, when the State or the Country faced critical problems, for the best of those in the two parties to come together after the election to compromise their differences and to take seriously the need to GOVERN; not just to campaign.

For all of the criticism that comes his way, Mike Madigan, the Speaker of the House, has often been a master of this process. The MPEA reform Act, utility rate reform, nursing home regulatory reform and the 2008 RTA Reform Act featuring a complete overhaul of the CTA pension system are but a few examples of his willingness to actually solve real problems, often in ways that adversely affected key constituencies of his own party while working with the leaders of the other party.

Senate President Cullerton comes from that same tradition and I have every reason to believe that Senator Radagno and Representative Cross would do the same should they someday achieve a majority in their chambers

However, at the national level, I look in vain for a legislative leader of either party willing to give anything more than lip service to bi-partisan cooperation. Largely that is because they cannot, given the make-up of their caucuses.

More and more the two major political parties are driven by the 10% of us on the far right and the 10% of us on the far left, holding hostage the great majority of us who recognize that we HAVE problems and we just want them SOLVED; not used as campaign fodder.

If one believes that compromise is “treason,” then you really do not believe in democracy because, in a pluralistic society, compromise is the very life blood of democracy. A political system that operates on the “compromise is treason” premise in a multi-faceted country such as ours simply cannot function. It cannot solve serious problems and increasingly that seems to be true of our governing structure.

And we do have extremely serious problems that need solving such as energy policy and immigration reform. But the looming crisis that should really focus our attention are the interlocking problems of the deficit, social security and Medicare.

By 2020, we will be paying over \$1 trillion dollars a year just to service the debt. And as we all know the bond markets – all that is keeping us afloat now – are with you until a nano second before they are not.

We are not Greece and the plug will not be pulled tomorrow or even next year but, if we do nothing, it will be pulled sometime between now and 2020 and when the time comes it will happen literally overnight and it will devastate the US beyond recognition.

As Tom Friedman the New York Times columnist wrote recently “If you jump off the top of an 80 story building, for 79 floors you can THINK that you are flying. It’s the sudden stop at the end that tells you that you are not.”

We just THINK that we are flying!

And yet this problem is not intellectually all that hard to solve. As two different bipartisan panels pointed out in recent weeks, every knowledgeable person not blinded by ideology knows that spending must be reduced, benefits must be reduced AND taxes have to go up – yet in both cases the far right said that tax increases could not be considered and the outgoing Speaker of the House said that benefit cuts are totally unacceptable.

What world are they living in?

Of course one can debate the mix between spending and benefit reductions on the one hand and tax increases on the other but, in the bigger picture, those are details that men and women of good will could work out once grown ups step in and agree that it is a myth to say that it could all be done by cuts or all done by tax increases. Unfortunately I do not see any grown ups entering the picture anytime soon.

I would guess that some of you in the audience right about now are thinking that we need a Danny Rostenkowski to put this right but in the poisonous political atmosphere today a Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee of either party who committed the mortal sin of actually liking a President of the opposite party and then followed that up with the treasonous act of actually making a deal with that President would not last 24 hours.

A party caucus would be called and the apostate would be toast by sunset.

Only time will tell whether the recent deal on tax extension heralds the dawn of a new day as some hope or is simply a dodge to get both parties out of a lose – lose situation as I suspect.

But enough trivia.

Let me step down from my soap box and happily tell you that, thanks to the bipartisan MPEA reform Act, the effort to restore Chicago to a preeminent position in the trade show and convention business is going exceedingly well. If all goes well by the end of 2011 we will have radically changed every aspect of the way we do business and will have set Navy Pier on the road to a needed refreshing.

I am the one standing here accepting this honor but the award belongs at least equally to the great teams that I have had the good fortune to work with at the various stages of my career

- Jim Thompson and the Thompson team
- John Schmidt, Kelly Welch and the great MPEA team in the 90's
- Jim Edgar and his team
- Deborah Sexton and the Convention Bureau team
- Steve Schlickman and his team at the RTA
- but none of them have been better than the tremendous team at the MPEA. Please stand
 - Renee Benjamin
 - Peggy Davis
 - David Causton
 - Steve Haemmerle
 - Marilynn Gardner
 - Margaret Murray
 - Richard Oldshue

And no Board has been more supportive than the current MPEA Board – headed by David Mosena. Please stand.

And without the support of my long suffering wife Veronica – herself a great solver of complicated legislative issues in her staff days – none of this would be possible.

And again, thanks to the Civic Federation, Motorola and all of you for the honor that you do me this morning.