

**IVI-IPO 2006 COOK COUNTY ASSESSOR QUESTIONNAIRE – Section 1**

DATE: August 19, 2006 PARTY: Democrat

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CAMPAIGN MANAGER: Tom Kelly

NUMBER OF PETITION SIGNATURES FILED: 10,000 NUMBER REQUIRED: 8,146

*Please use an additional sheet to complete the following background information:*

**A) Elective or appointive public or party offices previously held including dates.**

- Cook County Assessor: 1997 to present
- Three terms as an Illinois State Representative, representing the Lincoln Park/Lakeview area:  
1972-1978
- Administrative assistant to Chicago Mayor Harold Washington: 1983, first year of term
- Tax reformer with the Fair Equity Tax Commission: mid 1990's

**B) Other elective offices for which you have been a candidate.**

- Candidate for Illinois State Representative in 1972, 1974, and 1976

**C) What is your primary occupation?**

- Cook County Assessor

**D) Briefly list your civic activities of the past ten years.**

- Member of the International Association of Assessing Officers
- Member of the City Club of Chicago
- Member of Old St. Patrick's Church
- Member of the Irish Fellowship Club
- Member of the Cook County Democratic Party
- Continued supporter of the Joffery Ballet

**E) What subjects have you studied and what experience have you had which will be most helpful to you in the office you seek?**

I have served as Cook County Assessor from 1997 to the present. I have also served on the Fair Equity Tax Commission, served as an Illinois State Representative from 1972-1978 and prior to becoming Assessor, was president of All-Circo, Inc., a private consulting firm which focuses on government affairs and business planning. I am a graduate of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, IL. I have a B.A. in Philosophy (1965) and a S.T.B. in Theology (1967).

**F) What candidates have you supported? Please be specific in describing your role in each campaign.**

- I support all candidates slated by the Democratic Party in Illinois and abroad. This support includes financial contributions to State Treasurer candidate Alexi Giannoulis, State Senate candidate Dan Kotowski, Senator Terry Link and Cook County Board of Review candidate Brendan Houlihan.

**G) Please list all endorsements you have received so far.**

- Personal PAC
- Citizens Action/Illinois
- Alliance Printers and Publishers, Inc. Polish Daily News
- Chicago Firefighters' Union
- Chicago Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO
- Proviso Township Regular Democratic Organization

**H) As concisely as possible, please state why you feel you should be endorsed over the other candidate(s). What goals for the office you seek are most important to you personally?**

When I was appointed Assessor in 1997, I committed myself and my staff to creating an efficient, user-friendly office. I have worked to reshape the assessment process into one that is more understandable, accessible and accountable. While working to accomplish these goals, operations have been streamlined and duties have been performed more efficiently.

In addition, I have worked tirelessly towards both short-term and long-term property tax reform solutions. **I developed the 7% Expanded Homeowner Exemption in an effort to provide immediate relief to homeowners facing skyrocketing assessment increases.** The 7% Exemption, which is applied as an expanded version of the current Homeowner Exemption, has proven to be an enormous success county wide and has saved taxpayers money and brought predictability to property tax bills. It has allowed residents to remain in their homes, did not reduce funds available to education and did not overburden business owners in the process.

**Other notable recent assessment initiatives include:**

- The expansion of the Assessor's website -- one of the most visited local government websites in the state. Some of the website's features allow taxpayers to: file assessment appeals, review the status of appeals, view images of all Cook County properties, create interactive maps, file FOI requests and download applications and bulletins;
- The streamlining of the Homeowner Exemption application process by announcing that already-eligible homeowners no longer need to reapply for the exemption each year;
- The development of a Property Tax Exemption Booklet which contains applications and information for all residential exemptions in a single publication. As a direct result of the booklet, as of last year, close to 33,684 new Senior Citizen Assessment Freeze applications have been received;
- The reduction of the assessment level for residential apartment properties to encourage the creation and retention of multi-family apartment housing;
- The expansion of the Class 9 Property Tax Incentive to allow owners of multi-family rental properties who substantially rehabilitate their buildings or develop new buildings to receive a reduced assessment level if they agree to provide units at affordable rents;
- The creation of the Office of Special Assessment Programs which will focus on new initiatives to address special valuation concerns of affordable housing;
- The development of the South Suburban Tax Reactivation Project in order to provide incentives to develop and return properties in south suburban Cook County back to the tax rolls;
- The support of successful legislation which increases the income requirement for the Senior Citizen Assessment Freeze Exemption from \$40,000 to \$45,000;
- The support of successful legislation which increases the Home Improvement Exemption from \$45,000 to \$75,000;
- The support of successful legislation which provides safeguards during the home buying process – allowing for more accurate estimates of future tax bills at the time of sale closing.

Despite these accomplishments, I believe there is much more work to be done. If elected to another term as Cook County Assessor, I will continue to work to have the 7% Expanded Homeowner Exemption be made permanent, work towards long-term comprehensive property tax reform and continue to pursue innovative initiatives in order to make the assessment process more transparent, accessible and fair.

**I) What is your campaign budget? How much have you raised to date?**

- Budget: \$250,000.00 as of July 31<sup>st</sup> 2006; Raised: \$ 333,004.92 for calendar year 2006, as of July 31<sup>st</sup> 2006

**J) How many people are on your campaign staff? How many volunteers are on your list?**

- Campaign Staff: 4
- Volunteers: 50

## IVI-IPO 2006 COOK COUNTY ASSESSOR QUESTIONNAIRE – Section 2

**1. Will you accept or have you accepted campaign donations from current or potential suppliers, employees or contractors?**

- No, I believe this is a conflict of interest for any Cook County elected official.

**2. Will you accept or have you accepted contributions from attorneys, title insurers or property owners who do business with this office?**

- Yes, the property owners of Cook County are directly affected by the quality of work that is completed in my office and I am honored that they place their trust in me and that they support my campaign.

**3. Will you employ or have you employed staff in your office that holds other public sector jobs concurrently?**

- Yes, I do not feel this is a conflict of interest as long as they are committed to working for the taxpayers of Cook County and not looking for personal gain.

**4. Will you employ or have you employed staff in your office who have either outside employment or contracts with entities which do business with the County?**

- No, because this may cause a situation where Cook County would be vulnerable to people who would abuse their positions for contract allocation and other business transactions that may compromise ethics for personal gain.

**5. In what circumstances should the Assessor contract for outside professional services and what criteria would you implement for letting contracts? Please comment on any existing abuses and how you would correct them.**

- It is imperative that Cook County's best interests are at the forefront of the decision making process. Financial and ethical implications must also be taken into consideration. When an outside professional service can provide an efficient service and there is no feasible way to conduct the business with the current staff and resources, this type of situation may prove acceptable. These contracts must be allocated out in a fair, unbiased, open bid procedure in order to avoid an internal conflict of interest between the current county staff and the prospective vendors. I believe this is the best way to avoid the problems that have occurred with past city and county contracts.

**6. Would you support contracting for outside services with companies located outside Cook County? Why or why not?**

- No, I feel that the people of Cook County should be served by their peers and those peers should take pride in the work they do for Cook County as they are also benefiting from these services. This also keeps jobs in Cook County and assures that the interests of Cook County are taken seriously.

**7. Do you support patronage?**

- No, people should be hired based on merit, qualifications and what they offer the county as an employee.

**8. Do you support Affirmative Action?**

- Yes, it is important to me and my staff to have a diversified work environment that promotes growth and understanding.

**9. Do you favor restructuring the wage scale of county employees to correct disparities based on gender by instituting equal pay for jobs of comparable worth?**

- Yes, it is important to create a fair playing field for all Cook County employees. People should not be discriminated based on race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background or religion. People will perform better when discrimination is not a hindering factor and everyone is treated justly and fairly.

**10. In what ways can this office work more effectively with other county and municipal offices to avoid duplication and waste?**

- I believe Cook County should work to consolidate the four offices that currently handle property taxes into one office. Last year I supported State Senator John Cullerton's bill to merge parts of three of the county offices into a revamped assessor's office and I would also be willing to merge my office into one of the other county offices. I will continue to support future initiatives that promote efficiency in Cook County and save taxpayers money.

**11. Do you favor legislation requiring notification to governmental bodies of tax assessment appeals?**

- Yes, government works more efficiently when every agency is on the same page and working together.

**12. Do you favor disclosure of the method of arriving at assessed valuation through inclusion with assessment notices?**

- Yes, to better serve the taxpayers of Cook County it is important that we are in constant communication with them throughout the entire assessment process. In fact, making the Assessor's Office more accessible and transparent has been one of my goals since I began serving as Assessor in 1997 and we have made significant strides towards developing an assessment process that is easier to navigate and more understandable for the taxpayer.

**13. Do you favor allowing quarterly or monthly property tax payments in the year following reassessment?**

- Yes, this will act as yet another tool to ensure that the taxpayers of Cook County are able to budget and plan and are not forced out of their homes due to increases in tax bills.

**14. What will you do to ensure equal treatment of all taxpayers?**

- I will continue to provide accessible and reliable assessment information, continue to work to improve assessment procedures and provide an informed and highly trained staff to serve the taxpayers of Cook County.

**15. Do you favor making permanent the 7% property tax cap?**

- Yes, though I am a committed advocate of long-term property tax reform, having the protection of 7% permanently in place is very important until a long term solution can be found. An overheated residential real estate market will continue to affect assessments and the resulting property tax bills. It is critical that the 7% provision be made permanent in order to provide continued protection to homeowners facing rapidly rising assessment increases.

**16. Do you favor creation of a citizens' ombudsman position in your office to ensure fairness in tax policy?**

- Citizens entrust us with their tax dollars and one of my top priorities continues to be to make the assessment process as transparent and understandable as possible for all taxpayers. We currently have a Taxpayer Advocate who is available to provide personal interaction, review assessment appeal results and handle individual concerns taxpayers may have. I also recently appointed three office liaisons to better serve senior citizens, religious entities and taxpayers who speak foreign languages. I would support the creation of any position that works to increase fairness and understanding of tax policy and the assessment process.