

# EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

Seasonal Newsletter from the Citizen Advocacy Center and Citizens in the Western Suburbs  
FALL 1998

## What Better Cause? *Our democracy is at stake.*

Democracy has been an uphill battle in Harwood Heights. While we live in a great community, we feel there is room for improvement. In March 1997, residents concerned about issues affecting the rights of citizens formed the *Committee for a Better Harwood Heights*. Our goals are to get more residents involved in the legislative process and to be a "watchdog" group for our local government. There is no official membership list nor dues for our committee. Many people want to remain anonymous. We welcome everyone.

Our first project was a survey, hand-delivered to homeowners asking residents to rate the current administration; what changes they would like to see; their concerns about development and zoning; what areas need the most attention; and if they felt they are receiving enough information from the Village. The response to this survey gave us our "network" of concerned citizens. We distributed a newsletter with the results of the survey and other comments. Later, our flyers encouraged

residents to attend our planning meetings so that they could give their opinions of proposed developments.

One of our greatest concerns is that village ordinances are voted on and passed all in one meeting without the input of the citizens. There is no "reading of the ordinance." In fact, we must file a

### **C.O.R.E. - CITIZENS ORGANIZED TO RESTORE ELMHURST**

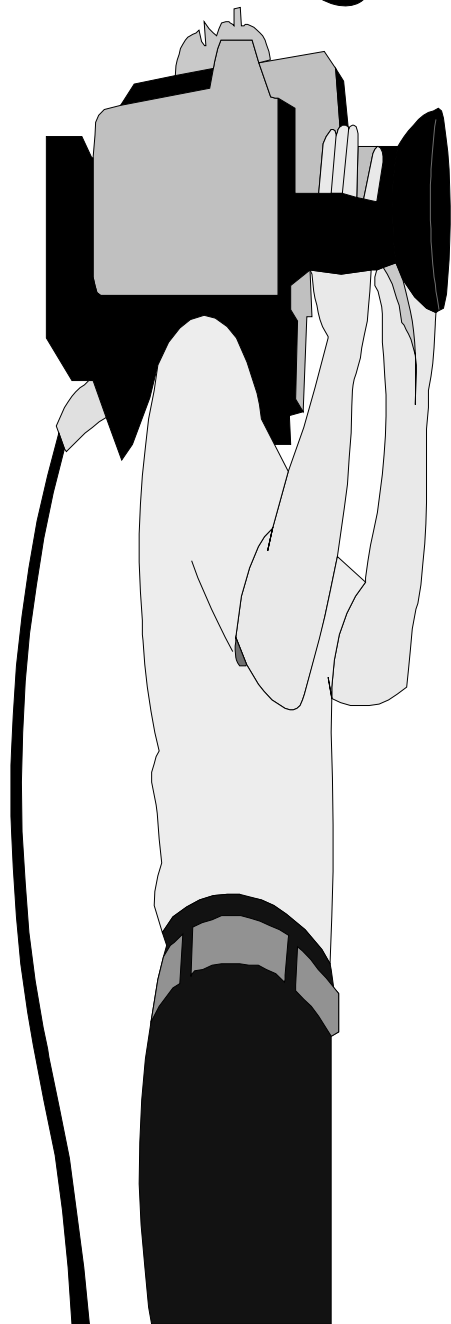
- WHAT:** A new group of Elmhurst Citizens committed to restoring Elmhurst, and concerned about the direction our local government was, and is, taking. We are a positive force for change.
- HOW:** By Citizens taking an active interest in City government. By looking for candidates to run for City offices as Aldermen, Mayor, or other important offices.
- WHY:** Too many important elected and appointed positions in Elmhurst city government have been filled with little or no opposition, or even discussion.
- FOCUS:** The primary focus of our government should be to continually improve the quality of residential life for all Citizens of Elmhurst.
- ISSUES:** Tear-downs; review existing zoning ordinances; zoning compliance; street and sewer maintenance; reforestation program—parkway trees and maintenance; tax increment financing (TIF); enhanced public participation in meetings—especially televising the City Council meetings.

Freedom of Information Act request in order to see the ordinance, which we don't receive until after it is passed and signed by the Mayor. We are being denied the right of being involved in the legislative process. Our democracy is at stake.

We have been fortunate that one of our local papers recognizes us, our issues, and even asks for our comments after Village Board Meetings. But we have not made much progress with opening up

There are many other issues facing our community. Why don't you join us and add your own! For more information please call (630) 832-2999 or mail to CORE, 207 N. Larch, Elmhurst, IL 60126.

Free  
Air  
waves



# To Clean Up Politics

Bill Moyers recently had a television report on Channel 11 reviewing campaign funding abuses. He reported that for the 1996 elections, both parties raised \$2.1 billion on all federal political races. Of that amount, \$1.8 billion was for broadcast time.

It should be noted that broadcasters have free air time because they were given exclusive use of a scarce public resource without payment to the nation. Broadcasters pay nothing to the people of the US for their licenses. They have 24 hours of free time, 365 days a year—time they sell to advertisers.

This need not be so. In Great Britain, political parties are entitled to free air time on radio and television a month before the elections. The campaign programs are shown on all the channels at the same time, helping voters become well informed.

“We now have a colossal irony,” Newton Minnow writes, “Politicians sell access to something we own: our government. Broadcasters sell access to something we own: our public airwaves. Both do so, they tell us, in our name. By creating this system of selling and buying access, we have a campaign system that makes good people do bad things and bad people do

worse things, a system that we do not want, that corrupts and trivializes public discourse, and that we have the power and the duty to change.”

To learn more about this issue, call Walter Cronkite’s group *Alliance for Better Campaigns* at (312) 621-9050

or surf the group’s website at [www.bettercampaigns.org](http://www.bettercampaigns.org).

--John Connelly  
CAC Advisory Council

# To Teach

Behind the camera at Channel 6 TV, the government access channel for the Village of Lombard, interns are learning TV production skills while creating programs for the community. It’s a win/win situation that other communities should consider: the interns gain practical experience and, with the increased programming, the citizens of Lombard can learn more about goings-on in their community.

*For more information about cable access stations and your telecommunication rights, call the Center for our free brochures at (630) 833-4080.*

# Social Security: Misinformation & Misconceptions

While YOU may not be a recipient of Social Security, it IS important that you keep informed about the “reform” plans being proposed for Social Security for the sake of your children and grandchildren!

I have read a bit about the *alleged* problems of the Social Security program and have come to the conclusion that there is a lot of *m i s i n f o r m a t i o n* and misconceptions being bandied about by many self-serving “experts.” The reason for this article is to provide you with some “handles” to assess the barrage of plans, proposals, and promises that have been appearing in the media.

Have you heard any of these MYTHS concerning Social Security?...

1.Myth: Social Security is going broke. Truth: it isn't; there are \$560 billion currently in the Social Security trust funds. It will start running on a deficit budget in 2030 if some financial policies are not changed.

2.Myth: the Social Security Administration is plagued with mismanagement and waste. Truth: the System is well-managed and efficient with a less than 1% cost to administer.

3.Myth: Social Security is a welfare program for seniors. Truth: Social Security retirement benefits is an *insurance* program; a “safety net” that has been *paid for* by the entitled seniors.

4.Myth: if people invest their money themselves, they will get a higher return than if they leave their Social Security taxes with the government. Truth: this may be true for some people, but not for the majority.

5.Myth: it is absolutely necessary to increase Social Security taxes and reduce benefits. Truth: not so; this is a scare tactic to induce citizens to look favorably on “privatizing” Social Security.

It is well to consider who is bankrolling the rush to privatize Social Security. The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, Steve Forbes, billionaire former presidential candidate, several representatives and senators in Congress and other “reformers” who are strongly supported by the financial services lobby companies that would immensely benefit from workers' personal investments in the stock market or other private markets.

There are several minor alternatives to “privatization” which should be considered **B E F O R E C o n g r e s s** approves any major reform:

1.Remove the cap on Social Security contributions. Presently, wage earners' annual contributions apply to only their first \$68,000 of income. Any income above, \$68,000 is exempt from the Social Security tax.

2.AFTER the cap on Social

Security contributions is removed, then Congress should consider raising the Social Security tax by 1.1%.

3.Over the next 20 years, gradually raise the age at which persons would be eligible to receive Social Security benefits.

These minor changes would alleviate the need to “reform” Social Security in the foreseeable future. These minor changes would not jeopardize the guaranteed benefits of the Social Security system. I urge you to listen carefully and to read carefully (and be sure to read **BETWEEN** the lines!!) so that you can discern when you are being manipulated into believing that “something must be done to save Social Security.”

--Milt Honel  
CAC Advisory Council

To learn more, read the *Social Better Cause?*

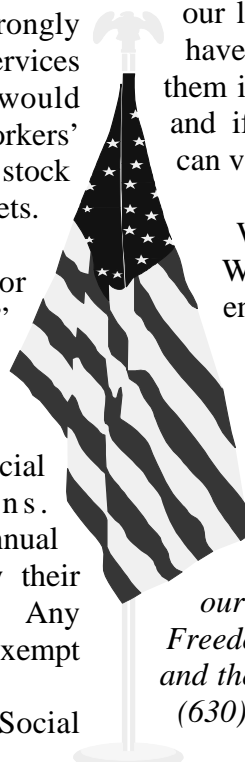
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our local government. They have told us that we voted them in to govern our village and if we don't like it, we can vote them out.

We are not discouraged. What better cause than to ensure democracy for the citizens of Harwood Heights?

--Margaret Fuller  
Harwood Heights

Call the Center for our free brochures on the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act at (630) 833-4080.



*Everyday Democracy* is a publication of the *Citizen Advocacy Center*, a non-profit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) corporation. Submissions from citizen advocates in the western suburbs of Chicago are encouraged. The *Center* is an educational and charitable organization dedicated to building democracy for the 21st century by strengthening the public's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance.

If you are interested in more information, becoming a volunteer, or making a tax-deductible contribution to the *Center*, please feel free to contact or visit us.

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If you would prefer to receive *Everyday Democracy* via e-mail, please send a note with your name and e-mail address to [cac@essential.org](mailto:cac@essential.org) Save the trees!

### New Face at CAC

The Center's staff has grown by one. Our new part-time Executive Assistant is Monica V. Davis, a dynamo from Downers Grove. Welcome, Monica!

### A Little Holiday Cheer

Please join us in wishing each other Happy Holidays on Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup> from 4 to 6 PM at the Center. All friends and neighbors of the Center invited!



**T**he Citizen Advocacy Center thanks the hundreds of volunteers, foundations, businesses, professionals, and others, who have contributed thousands of hours, dollars, and services to the Center's work throughout the last four years. No institution like the Center can survive without the dedication and support of many civic-minded individuals and organizations.

To all of you, we extend our heartfelt gratitude.

*Thank you*  
CITIZEN  
ADVOCACY  
CENTER