

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

CULTURE OF CORRUPTION



A Chicago elections worker, right, reviews petition signatures at the George W. Dunne Cook County Office Building in December. Candidates frequently challenge their opponents' paperwork in an effort to keep them off the ballot. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

BOSSING THE BALLOT

Illinois' arcane election rules turn politics into a blood sport where only the most powerful and savvy survive

By Joe Mahr
Chicago Tribune

This wasn't the speech Jose Wilson had hoped to give after making a run for Democratic committee person in Chicago's 1st Ward.

Two months before votes were cast in the March primary, the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners booted Wilson from the ballot. Though Wilson had turned in nearly 1,700 signatures on his nominating petitions

— knocking on doors for weeks last fall and winter — one of his rivals torpedoed Wilson's candidacy by successfully challenging enough of those signatures to keep him off the ballot.

And so, at a sparsely attended January hearing inside a sterile government conference room, Wilson rose to deliver his last speech of the race, directing his frustration at a cutthroat Illinois balloting process a Tribune investigation found is overly complicated, limits voters' choices and contributes to corruption that plagues government throughout the state.

"I don't think it's fair," Wilson

told election board members. "I don't think it's clear. I don't think it's transparent."

It is, however, a system firmly entrenched in Illinois, one that makes it harder for people to qualify for the ballot than in many states and easier to get kicked off.

The system grants incumbents an inherent advantage over neophytes who are new to the arcane balloting rules, some of which were written by the same veteran politicians who now reap the benefits. Using a cadre of well-versed attorneys,

ONLINE: Find the ongoing Culture of Corruption series at **chicagotribune.com/corruption**

insiders thwart challengers before the first votes are cast, often on questionable grounds.

It is, in essence, a way for the state's political power brokers to control the options voters have to choose from even if they can't control people's actual votes.

As the Tribune continues to examine Illinois' notorious political history in the series "Culture of Corruption," the state's convoluted ballot process provides a vivid demonstration of how generations of political leaders

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Elections officials pushing integrity

Talk of buying body armor arises amid fears of conspiracy theories

By Rick Pearson
Chicago Tribune

The roughly 100 men and women who oversee elections in Illinois — both Democrats and Republicans — have launched a voter integrity campaign to help debunk falsehoods being fed in large part by lies from former President Donald Trump and his allies that the 2020 election was stolen.

But even as the elections officials open their offices for tours and make themselves available for questions about the voting process and the equipment they are using to count ballots for the Nov. 5 election, the head of their state association said he is considering purchasing body armor amid fears the conspiracy theories will turn physical.

The efforts to be both more transparent about the election process while also keeping a keener eye on safety comes during one of the most polarized political times in American politics and as misinformation has taken hold in corners throughout the nation.

The Illinois Association of

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INSIDE



CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Student plotting his future in film

Columbia College student Carlos Lerma, from Monterrey, Mexico, creates autobiographical shorts to share his stories. **Life+Travel**

Chicago's cinematic luck continues

Encouraging signs for the 2024 Chicago International Film Festival — plus a look at 10 movies to get you started. **A+E**

Conducting 2 types of business on trip

The two sides of the Bears' London trip: The quiet countryside game planning and the jam-packed city marketing push. **Chicago Sports**

TODAY'S WEATHER

High **65**
Low **45**



Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 24

\$5.75 city and suburbs and elsewhere
177th year No. 287
© Chicago Tribune



Prison loss would be blow to downstate Lincoln

City has been hit by closures of key sites, including 2 colleges

By Jeremy Gorner
Chicago Tribune

LINCOLN, Ill. — Blanketed by thick smoke, Sangamon Street was blocked off by numerous firefighters, some of whom responded from more than 30 miles away, as they battled flames spouting from the roof of an old two-story building with apartments on its upper floor.

The strip just off downtown was known as "Dutch Row" many years ago because of the European heritage of business owners on a once-thriving block that included a grocery store, meat market and shoe store. A few dozen onlookers gazed at the late summer fire from down the street or across the railroad



Kayla States, left, and daughters Mollie, 8, center, and Emma, 8, exit Top Hat Creamery in Lincoln, Ill., on Oct. 2. **TESS CROWLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

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Our Mission: To End Pancreatic Cancer. Period.



The *Stephenson Prize for Innovation in Pancreatic Cancer Research* is uniting the world's brightest minds in a quest to cure the world's deadliest cancer. City of Hope® is honored to announce a \$150 million transformative gift from philanthropists A. Emmet Stephenson Jr. and Tessa Stephenson Brand to lift cancer research to new heights.

