

# Honesty does not pay

I've always said that politicians are not always honest because people don't want to hear the truth. With regard to my complaint to the Finance Committee of the Knox County Board about abuse of the per diem system, that same theory seems to hold true. The long article in the *Register-Mail* contains my complaints, the cold, hard facts and the many excuses and distortions given in defense of dishonesty, not following county board rules and misuse of tax payer funds.

*In defense of board chairman Allen Pickrel, he has had more than his share of responsibility and stress since December, with the board having to deal with the appointment of a new state's attorney, the hair-raising allegations and personnel changes in that office, special audits of two county departments and appointment of a new sheriff. He has assumed others are doing the right thing and of course, they have not. I contend that board members Jan Occhi and Dale Parsons have both taken advantage of the lack of attention given to the payment of per diems for representation on outside boards.*

Since their election in 2006, Occhi and Parsons have not been appointed to any of the outside board positions they have assumed in the community. Parsons was

appointed to the Tourism Council three years ago after I told Jan Occhi, chairman at the time, that I could not serve on the council because of time constraints. At that time, Parsons was told by the whole board that he would not be paid a per diem for that assignment. He has turned them in anyway and been paid. I served on that council for four years during my term in the early 1990s and never requested a per diem.

Occhi has appointed herself to the boards of the Chamber of Commerce, GREDA, civic center authority, Carver Center, juvenile justice commission and recently made an unauthorized trip to a conference of the United County Councils of Illinois (UCCI), apparently replacing Steve Johnson, who had been our representative to that group for three years. He told me he was not asked or informed of the change.

It's interesting that Democrats Occhi and Parsons accuse me of being vindictive about their voting for a Republican chairman of the board. I'll never forget it, that's for sure. As part of the county board Democratic Caucus that chose me as our candidate for county board chairman, they betrayed the Knox County Democrats and me with their votes. It was petty and destructive. What

is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that the three Democrats on the board who voted for Pickrel are being paid twice as much in per diems every month as the rest of the board members. I complained in December when Greg "Chops" Bacon was appointed to four committees and an outside board when the rest of us are on two committees, some on three. I felt this was clearly payback for his support of Pickrel, and now Occhi and Parsons are getting theirs.

Other board members have not been asked to serve on these boards. Few of these boards require membership of a county board member to get grants, except perhaps Carver Center, and both Occhi and Parsons have been paid for attending those board meetings. Surely we only need one representative.

Almost all board members have flexible schedules or are retired, so the argument about "everyone working" during the day is bogus.

The finance committee is going to find that hundreds of dollars a month of taxpayer money has been paid to board members Occhi and Parsons without any authorization by the county board. I object



to that and I believe the citizens of this county will too.

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