

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Moffitt's politics hits rock bottom: blames child support snafu on feds

94th District State Representative Don Moffitt never says a word about the child support mess created by the Illinois legislature and Republican administration without trying to blame it on the Federal government. This is politics at its slimiest being played with a disastrous situation where single parents are not receiving their child support checks on time — or in some cases, not at all.

Again, the Register-Mail provides millions of dollars of front page campaign advertising for Moffitt by continuously touting the fact his office staff is trying to help women of this district get their just support. Folks, this is their job. And it should go without saying that if your party administration and legislature have created a child support nightmare, the least a legislator could do is deal with the consequences.

Read the record. After four terms in the legislature, Moffitt's clout in Springfield still amounts to zero, so no matter how many ideas he may have or bills he may cosponsor, he can accomplish very little. Now Moffitt is trying to act like he's doing something by having a "town hall" meeting about the child support process and have some of the people on hand who screwed it up in the first place answer questions.

Let's just review the background of why the state changed the system in the first place. An article by Jennifer Davis in the January 2000 issue of *Illinois Issues* magazine says "it's been more than a decade since Congress called for a nationwide system of tracking deadbeat parents with computer databases that would, for example, let officials in Illinois monitor child support payments made in California. As part of welfare reform efforts, federal officials also want to establish an efficient system for delivering payments."

Big companies wanted to get away from having to distribute thousands of child support checks every month and the centralized system of disbursements enables them to send one check to the Circuit Clerk in DuPage County who would prepare the individual checks for mailing. The tricky part is to have the total received from the company equal the total funds needed for the names provided. By the way,

it's not actually the DuPage County Circuit Clerk who does the disbursing, it's jobbed out to a private company. And bid or no bids, the contract has gone to the home county of the Republican leadership in the House and Senate.

Moffitt falsely implies that all was perfect in Illinois before the "mandated" centralization, when in fact many Illinois counties have poor records of child support enforcement.

As it turns out, *Illinois Issues* says, Illinois' switch to a centralized system was made three months earlier than necessary. Seven states decided to wait until December 31st to go online with central databases and they faced no fine or sanctions. Michigan and Nebraska got extensions on their deadline and South Carolina immediately got a permanent exemption because Federal officials considered that state's system to be in compliance. Years ago, other states changed their systems with little fanfare. Illinois did not seek an extension because state officials believed they were ready. Had they taken more time, says *Illinois Issues*, spokesman for the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Michael Kharfen might not be citing Illinois for having the "most notable" problems of all states.

The state has issued emergency payments of about \$8 million. Early last month the backlog has shrunk, according to Davis, but the number was still close to 9,000 checks. The state will try to get back the \$8 million in emergency funds "loaned" for child support. Yeah, I'll bet those single parents will really be in the mood to do that.

A problem made more difficult by centralized disbursements is keeping track of single mothers who often move. But the kinks in administering this new program should and could have been worked out carefully beforehand.

I always thought Republicans were in favor of welfare reform and anything that would help big business. But in this election year, Moffitt is so anxious to transfer blame, he just hasn't told the truth.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg and can be reached at cporter@galesburg.net.

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