

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

The inaugural was a ball

Here we were, at least 45 of us, dressed to the teeth, in a fancy bus headed for the Inaugural ball in Springfield this Monday night. The buses made the rounds of six hotels every 15 minutes to take revelers to and from major events of the inauguration of our new Governor and the other state office-holders elected in November.

As we wound through the streets of Springfield towards the Exposition and Orr Buildings at the State Fairgrounds, the bus driver put his microphone in place and in a strong and impressive voice, sang a musical version of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. We loved it. This was the mood of the whole celebration. The bus was filled with those who had worked for and in some way supported the men and women who earlier in the day had been inaugurated to the highest government offices in Illinois.

The two day celebration was marked by thousands of people attending the events — apparently people who, in spite of the cynicism and apathy of the day, still have hope in our form of government and our ability to make things better. One only had to view the scene around the Governor's Mansion during the public open houses after the inauguration, where a line formed, five and six deep, for blocks around the mansion — people waiting outside in the cold but determined to shake hands with Governor Rod Blagojevich and Lieutenant Governor Patrick Quinn.

The inauguration itself was spectacular. We were encouraged to arrive early so we hopped an early bus. For people-watchers, it was pure heaven. The Prairie Capital Convention Center seats about six thousand people and I would guess close to five thousand were in attendance. The security at the main events was tight, but handled efficiently by men and women who were helpful and pleasant. We saw area people among the crowd: Chris Winick; Mel Neumann and Pete Calderone from Galesburg, Larry and Alice Enderlin from Monmouth, Katie Olson and her sister, "Max" Henry from Mercer County. It was fun to watch my daughter, Eva Goltermann, a radio news broadcaster and reporter, working the floor with familiarity and ease. And the method of communicating in such huge crowds? The cell phone, of course. They were in abundance and very helpful, just to help us *find* people.

While waiting we were treated to the music of the combined bands of the Illinois National Guard, 144th U.S. Army Band and the 566th U.S. Air Force Band. What a sound — for patriotic and marching music as well as any music needed for the moment during the program. Bob Sirott, managing editor and host of Chicago Tonight on WTTW (PBS Channel 11) was the master of ceremonies, and began by introducing former governors and their wives, walking on stage as they were introduced. Mrs. Dan Walker and her son, Dan Walker, Jr., were followed by Mr. & Mrs. Jim Thompson, Mr. & Mrs. Jim Edgar and Mrs. & Mrs. George Ryan.

The mayor of Springfield was front and center, as were both of Illinois' United States Senators, Dick Durbin and Peter Fitzgerald. Members of the Supreme Court and family members of the various state officers to be inaugurated were ushered on stage. Congressman Lane Evans and party legislative leaders of both parties were on stage. The real razzmatazz began with the introductions of those who were to be inaugurated. With the band providing the swells and mood music of the moment, the office holders, one at a time, appeared in the rear of the convention center and with the spotlight on them wound their way to

the stage through the aisles of well-wishers. It was the time to clap and hoot and enjoy the fruits of our labor. The only Republican office-holder, Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka, was greeted with as much fervor as her Democrat counterparts. She is the first state officer to be elected to a third term in many years and certainly the first woman.

Secretary of State Jesse White, who won in all 102 counties of the State, was accompanied by his daughter and, I think, a grandson. Lieutenant Governor Patrick Quinn's two grown sons walked with him. Comptroller Dan Hynes, whom I believe has a brilliant future, walked through the crowd with his wife, who is in her residency program as a physician. Lisa Madigan, the first woman Attorney General, marched along with her fiancé.

The entrance of the evening was Governor-Elect Rod Blagojevich with his very pregnant wife, Patty, and their 6-year-old daughter, Amy. The noise of the crowd

reached a fever pitch with the mostly Democrat party faithful thrilled to see a Democratic governor for the first time in a quarter century.

You've read other newspaper, television and radio reports of the speeches by the office-holders. I can't add much to that, except that Blagojevich was deadly serious and seems only too aware of the huge challenge ahead of him. Former Governor George Ryan smarted at remarks made in the inaugural speeches, his face growing red with anger and embarrassment.

But the political life of Illinois marches on, and as unpleasant as it can be, all we can do is accept our share of responsibility as citizens for what happens now and in the future. Believe me, the officers and legislators in Springfield are going to need our help.

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