

IN MY OPINION**Caroline Porter**

Voters love crooks: We have seen crooked politicians – and they are us



In the past few weeks two politicians of totally opposite stripes have been in the news. Former Senator Paul Simon unexpectedly died of complications of heart surgery and former Governor George Ryan was finally indicted for a myriad of crimes committed as Secretary of State and Governor of Illinois.

I met Paul Simon a number of times and he indeed had a reputation for being a straight shooter and honest. He was a good man and public servant. However, I have gotten tired of the news media saying what a rarity honesty and integrity are in politicians. There are no more dishonest people in public service than any other vocation and in fact, probably less, because politicians are subject to so much scrutiny. In fact, I've believed for years that elected representatives who have a history of dishonesty and crooked dealings probably represent their constituents' values quite well.

American voters love to vote for crooks. We do it all the time. Anyone playing with a full deck knew that George Ryan had a long history of shady activities in government, but voted for him anyway. Glenn Poshard, Ryan's opponent in the 1998 gubernatorial election, raised allegations of corruption during the campaign after six children were killed in a 1994 van accident caused by a truck driver who had illegally obtained his license with a bribe. Officials, most in Ryan's pocket, kept saying Ryan was not

under investigation, although the former Secretary of State's office was, and Ryan was protected from indictment his entire term as Governor. Even though Poshard was right and most voters knew it, Ryan was elected.

After Ryan's indictment, in an interview by Illinois Radio Network reporter Eva Goltermann, Poshard was understandably bitter. "The great tragedy, in my judgment," he said, "is that somebody had a mindset that climbing the political ladder to higher office was more important than the protection of innocent lives." He continued, "I feel strongly that all of us know the difference between right and wrong. We can pass all the ethics legislation in the world and, you know, if people choose to do the wrong thing and abuse the public trust, they're gonna do it."

In short, Glenn Poshard has a reputation for honesty and integrity. Ryan did not; his office was under investigation and voters still elected him. Former Secretary of State Paul Powell was found dead in his hotel room in Springfield, surrounded by shoe boxes filled with millions of dollars in cash. As a young voter in the 1960's who lived in Cook County, even I knew Powell was a crook. Yet, he was elected time after time. As a Democrat, I am proud to say I never voted for him or other Democrats who were notorious for their activities.

When Richard Nixon was elected president for a second term, the Watergate investigation was well under way, but voters chose to ignore it. One of Nixon's famous photos and statements is his scowling into the television camera and announcing firmly, "I am not a crook." Unfortunately, the actual break-in at the Democrat headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. wasn't so serious, but it was the massive cover-up and other activities revealed in the investigation that were illegal and abusive.

Yep, I don't have much sympathy for voters who complain about corrupt politicians. We elect these people. Candidates and voters know right from wrong – too many of them just don't care.

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