

Illinois needs fewer state offices

By Jim Nowlan

Illinois state government operates with a divided executive branch. In addition to the governor, voters elect a lieutenant governor (elected as a team with the governor), attorney general, secretary of state, comptroller and treasurer. The offices were originally created in the 19th Century when legislatures feared the executive branch and wanted to have executive functions divided among several constitutional offices. The national government has a unified executive branch, with the President appointing all office functions that in Illinois are elected statewide, other than vice president. Tennessee is the only state in which the governor is the sole statewide elected executive branch official.

Ten states operate without a lieutenant governor. In Illinois, the office has only relatively minor responsibilities. Without a lieutenant governor, succession to the governorship could be through the attorney general and secretary of state, as provided for in the Illinois Constitution, or through the president of the state Senate and Speaker of the House.

The state attorney general is the attorney for the State. Unfortunately, as both the governor and attorney general are elected as independent officers in Illinois, the two offices have through history often been in competition with one another and even at political odds. Governors have been known to hire their own attorneys rather than use the office of the attorney general. The Illinois secretary of state is responsible primarily for motor vehicle regulation, drivers' licensing, and business services and regulation. These largely ministerial services could be managed within the umbrella of the governor's office.

For several legislative sessions, the Illinois treasurer and the Illinois comptroller have proposed that one of these constitutional offices be eliminated. We go further and propose that

both offices be eliminated and that the offices' functions be placed in a new Department of Finance in the Office of the Governor. The pre-audit function could be performed by this department, and the post-audit would continue to be performed by the legislature's Office of the Auditor General.

Option: Eliminate all statewide elected offices other than governor. This would unify executive functions in one office, shorten the ballot and focus voters' attention on the office of governor.

Option: Replace the offices of treasurer and comptroller with a new office of Chief Financial Officer of Illinois, appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Illinois Senate. This new office would combine the functions of banking (treasurer), pre-audit and bill paying (comptroller) with those of financial management, which are largely the responsibility of the governor's office and management and budget.