

Time for O'Hare growth is now Flier misfires Still friends Priests

Chicago Sun-Times, October 31, 2002, Letter to the Editor

Despite challenging economic times, the O'Hare Modernization Program is needed now more than ever. The fact that Chicago's airports have recovered faster than most other major airports in the nation is a testament to the region's demand for air travel. Like any other business, Chicago's airports must adjust to the current economic situation while continuing to plan for the future.

Even as the airlines continue to suffer major losses, they remain committed to the modernization program because of the impact it will have on their long-term financial standing. It is estimated that the airlines will save more than \$370 million in operational costs, and passengers will save more than \$380 million in time annually.

But the fate of these airlines should not dictate whether improvements are made at O'Hare. Airlines have merged, changed, or even gone out of business, but after times of national crisis, people have always kept flying in even greater numbers. In fact, since 1977, there have been 125 airline bankruptcies, but not one airport bond has gone into default.

This is a sentiment echoed by transportation experts. Joseph Schweiterman, director of the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul, wrote in a Sept. 25 op-ed in the Sun-Times ["Airline woes shouldn't stop progress"] that "to argue that the City of Chicago should abandon its runway construction plans because of the financial problems of major airlines is akin to arguing that we should not build new roads because of the mounting debts of motorists. Emphasis must be placed on anticipated growth in traffic, not on the balance sheets of those operating the airlines."

If we want to be competitive in the future, we have to address the inefficiencies of O'Hare's airfield now. The fact that some airlines, American in particular, are recording improved on-time performance is a result of the drop-off in passenger levels. The airline has not "dehubbed" its operations; rather, as a prudent business decision, American has responded to changes in the market by consolidating its operations. Once the market shifts upward again, and history has proven that it will, we need to be ready to meet the demand and avoid delays.

As we move forward with the modernization program, Midway will serve as an example of how an airport can remain operational while undergoing a major expansion. Throughout the Midway Airport Terminal Development Program, Midway has experienced record-breaking growth and few delays. In fact, in 2000, 98 percent of flights at Midway were on time. Last year, that record improved to 99.2 percent of flights on time.

If we're not willing to take these steps now to modernize O'Hare, we will experience increased delays and congestion. At stake is the economic vitality of our region and state.

John Harris,
first deputy commissioner,
Department of Aviation

Re: Mark Brown's column Tuesday [" 'IRS' campaign flier lamest stunt of season"], I am writing this letter in order to apologize directly to Clare Donovan and any other voters who may have been offended by my campaign mailing, which stated "IRS Wage Garnishment Notice" enclosed, and did indeed contain a picture of the IRS wage garnishment notice issued to my opponent for the 16th District Cook County commissioner race.

It was not my intent to offend any person in any way. I felt that it was important that potential voters actually read the information contained in the mailing, and I truly believed that they would be appreciative for having access to that information. In retrospect, I was wrong, and I apologize for any offense I may have caused.

This is a very important election for the residents of Cook County. Five incumbents (including my Republican primary opponent, Commissioner Allan C. Carr) were defeated in the March primary, and there is now a genuine opportunity before the voters to effectuate real reform in Cook County government. I ask that voters put aside their resentment over this admittedly inappropriate tactic and focus on the real issue before them: electing commissioners who have the interests of Cook County and its people as their priority, rather than protecting their personal interests and agendas.

Unlike most on the board, I have pledged to work hard for real reform and to accept the commissioner's post as my full-time job, while at the same time refusing to accept the selfish \$24,000 pay raise the current board members voted themselves. While the manner in which I tried

to convey my message was inappropriate, my intentions were--and remain--sincere.

Tony Peraica,
candidate, 16th District,
Cook County Board

When Friends of the Forest Preserves and Friends of the Parks issued our report on the operations of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County [Oct. 10 story and Oct. 11 editorial "Buds poisoning forest preserves"], we intended to focus attention on serious programmatic and structural problems with the district's operations that have caused it to stray from its core mission of protecting and preserving, restoring and restocking its precious natural lands. We regret that the tone of our report and the subsequent news coverage was critical of people, including President John Stroger, the general superintendent and members of the board.