Politics

BY BEN STRAUSS

MIXED MESSAGES

Two reports on public corruption in Illinois and other states are at odds

WHEN THE POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO released a study a few months back crowning Chicago the most corrupt metro area in the nation (and Illinois the third most corrupt state), it wasn't exactly a surprise.

Yet with the ink barely dry on the UIC report, a collaboration led by the Center for Public Integrity, a Washington-based watchdog group, released its own report card on political corruption nationwide. While no parent would be proud of its grades (eight Cs, two Ds, and an F), Illinois ranked as the tenth least corrupt state (tied with Hawaii and Massachusetts) in the country.

METHODOLOGY

KEY NUMBERS

CONCLUSIONS

Who's right? You be the judge.

UNIV. OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Took a historical approach, adding up the number of federal convictions of Illinois elected officials and their aides between 1976 and 2010.

The report calculates that

Illinoisans have been convicted on the third most of any state, behind New York (2.522) and California (2.345).

Of those

the most of any federal court district.

The extent and pervasiveness of bribery, fraud, stealing from the taxpayers, and illegal patronage have made the city and state national leaders of corruption.'

Urges a law allowing voters to pass ethics reforms by referendum. Also recommends an increased role for the city inspector general, amending the city's ethics ordinance to apply to aldermen and their staffs, and banning almost all gifts to elected officials.

CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

Analyzed 330 "corruption risk indicators" in 14 categories—including campaign financing, ethics enforcement. public access to information, and the redistricting and state budget processes-taking into account whether laws exist and if they're effective.

Gives Illinois an overall score of

(a solid C on its A-to-F scale) including ...

for public

major public contracts

After suffering through indictment after indictment of local political figures, Chicago and Illinois have enacted a series of ethics reforms that are now stronger than those of most other states. "New campaign finance limits [and] an overhaul of state procurement rules . . . amount to substantive change.'

Favors continued strengthening of existing ethics laws by closing loopholes.



MILK DUD NO MORE?

Little noticed among the higher-profile races in the March primary election was a rare victory for the Aurora dairy-magnateturned-perennial-candidate JIM OBERWEIS. Nicknamed the Milk Dud for his failed bids for U.S. Senate, governor, and Congress, Oberweis won the Republican nomination for the state senate seat from the 25th District in the western suburbs. And unlike in his previous races, he hasn't even spent a cent.

-BEN GOLDBERGER

2002 U.S. SENATE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

DEDSONAL SPENDING: \$1.01 million COST PER VOTE: \$3.87

2004 U.S. SENATE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY

PERSONAL SPENDING: \$3.01 million COST PER VOTE:

\$19.31

2006 GUBERNATORIAL **REPUBLICAN PRIMARY**

PERSONAL SPENDING: \$2 49 million COST PER VOTE: \$10.64

2008 14th CONGRESSIONAL **DISTRICT CAMPAIGN***

PERSONAL SPENDING:

\$4.62 million

COST PER VOTE:

\$17.17

2012 25th DISTRICT STATE SENATE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY PERSONAL SPENDING:

\$0 COST PER VOTE: \$0

SOURCES: Illinois Board of Elections; Federal Election

PROPOSED REFORMS