

RESPONSE TO “PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS II” RESOLUTION

The notion of an Inspector General is a comparatively modern one. Although George Washington created the concept of an Inspector General to oversee the Continental Army (hence the title), it wasn't until 1978 that Congress wrote the Inspector-General Act to “fight corruption and improve accountability” by creating independent inspectors general in twelve federal agencies. It is only in recent times, that Inspectors-General are being touted as deterrents for corruption and abuse of power by elected officials.

This resolution violates the constitutionally mandated separation of powers. An Inspector General appointed by and on the payroll of the executive branch is not only fraught with political problems but is also constitutionally questionable.

Notwithstanding that most of the recent Chicago city councils have delegated away many of their functions to the mayor by either fiat or inaction, the State of Illinois granted Chicago a city charter with a “weak mayor - strong council” form of governance. In such a system, the council acts as both a legislative and, occasionally, an executive body. Council members must (or should) approve almost every action the mayor takes unless the state legislature says otherwise.

It is interesting to note that the framers of this resolution chose as examples small and struggling municipalities whose states have granted them through their charters the opposite form of governance than has Chicago. In these places, the executive branch has more authority than the legislative branch.

Believe it or not, this is not the case in Chicago ... nor should it be.