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## Introduction

By Robert F. Rich

As we begin the new session of the General Assembly, Illinois faces a dual crisis: we have made little progress in addressing the serious and on-going problems facing our state *and* the policymaking process seems to be polarized and paralyzed. Put simply, the state's key problems have been left unsolved or "band-aids" have been offered instead of long-term solutions. For instance:

- The structural deficit in the state's finances continues to deepen. There is a need for additional revenue and reduced spending, but instead we have relied on user fees or temporary revenue-raising measures.
- A quarter of Illinoisans in their prime working years, ages 18-64, lack health insurance.
- The state's infrastructure continues to deteriorate. Almost 700 bridges in this state have a condition rating worse than "poor."
- Energy costs continue to escalate out of sight.
- Despite increased funding, many Illinois schools continue to underachieve.
- The state's legacy of an affordable college education is at risk because universities must use tuition and fees to absorb rising costs.
- Solutions to these and other problems continue to elude us, even though this state has capacity and a great deal of promise.

Government cannot find solutions if there is not a political atmosphere that encourages discussions and debate of feasible options.

We need to develop a policymaking process that examines best practices from other states and one that brings *all* of the relevant stakeholders to the table. Collaboration on identifying these solutions may be the best antidote to the kind of conflict that only breeds cynicism and distrust in government.

The University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs can be a home for finding these collaborative solutions. We are committed to encouraging non-partisan, evidence-based deliberation about the crucial problems facing this state. We would be pleased to provide a forum for discussions among the key stakeholders about these issues. We envision a collaborative summit designed to identify options for solving the long-term problems facing this state, and we are committed to the necessary follow-up to help find solutions from those options.

There is no reason to believe that the situation in Illinois needs to be the way it is. Illinois has much in its favor. Its economy continues to expand, although more slowly in recent months. The state is a transportation crossroads, an agricultural breadbasket, and is home to some of the world's industrial giants and a robust, diverse work force. Bold proposals have been made and some initiatives enacted that put Illinois out front in terms of granting access to health care and educational opportunities for children. Illinois has been a national innovator and leader and can be again.

One such bold proposal offered by the governor last spring to further address one of the most serious problems facing this state and this nation: access to and affordability of health care. But it was not possible to reach a consensus on how best to approach the issue, like has happened in Massachusetts and California. The unpopularity of the pro-

posed funding mechanism drowned nearly all discussion of the central points of the plan. We missed an opportunity to develop innovative policy that would make Illinois a national leader.

In this report, we offer observations, analysis and some options to consider. Among the suggestions you will find is one for changing the state's income tax structure. Perhaps such a change would repair the state's structural fiscal problem, perhaps not, but it is certainly worthy of fair and reasonable debate by all of the General Assembly. Also, you will find a series of recommendations, based on the best evidence at hand, that could help improve achievement in the state's public schools and the quality of teachers. And you will find a suggestion that it might be prudent for policymakers to allocate resources toward programs that encourage healthy lifestyles and away from paying for care. These suggestions may not be the answer, but these and other proposals certainly deserve discussion.

This second edition of *The Illinois Report* reviews and analyzes nine issues we believe are crucial to the future of this state. As we did in *The Illinois Report 2007*, we present the situation as it now stands, compare against the circumstances in neighboring or peer states and offer some possible solutions. We also include a look at the decision voters will make next fall whether to hold a Constitutional Convention, something our experts believe deserves careful consideration and not a knee-jerk reaction based on today's political climate.

We present this evidence-based, nonpartisan report to provide some of the objective observations that are necessary to make good decisions and find solutions that help Illinois move forward on the path toward



**Robert F. Rich** is in his second tenure as the director of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. He led the Institute from 1986-1997 and returned in 2005. Dr. Rich has joint appointments with the College of Medicine, the Department of Political Science and the College of Law at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the founder and former director of the Office of Public Leadership at IGPA. Dr. Rich is a permanent fellow in the European Center for Comparative Government and Public Policy. He focuses his research on health law and policy, federalism and the role of the states, environmental policy and science policy.

innovation, national leadership and prosperity. We are committed to doing our part in helping to address the dual crisis facing Illinois.

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