



Jesse White

SECRETARY OF STATE

NEWS

ILLINOIS SECRETARY OF STATE

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White Releases Annual Report

SPRINGFIELD — Citing major traffic safety initiatives, a strong effort to root out corruption and restore accountability, a quick and efficient re-plating process based on streamlining the system and efforts to make more transactions available on-line to improve customer service, Secretary of State Jesse White released the office's annual report today.

"When I took office as the Secretary of State just over a year ago, I set high standards for myself and my employees," said White. "I promised to run this office like a business. I'm very pleased with the accomplishments we have made in the first year and the groundwork that has been laid for even greater accomplishments in the coming years."

Shortly after White took office, a tragic accident between a truck and Amtrak passenger train in Bourbonnais claimed the lives of 11 people. The investigation of that accident revealed that the driver of the truck had an established record of using court supervisions in multiple jurisdictions to avoid punishment for poor driving and spurred Jesse White to create the Highway Safety 2000 Advisory Panel to study traffic safety laws.

The panel addressed the problem by drafting legislation, House Bill 2883, that requires all court supervisions to be reported to the Secretary of State's office. However, the group did not stop there. They also helped initiate 15 new traffic safety regulations including 12 new administrative rules that increase standards for commercial truck drivers.

"It's unfortunate that it sometimes takes a tragic accident to

uncover the shortcomings of the system," said White. "What I learned from that accident was that we had to study the entire process by which drivers are licensed and disciplined to improve highway safety."

The largest problem Secretary White inherited was a federal investigation into employees selling licenses for bribes to unqualified drivers. White appointed David Grossman, the Assistant Special Agent in charge of the Chicago office of the FBI, as his Inspector General to root out corruption. By doubling the size of the office, White has allowed the Inspector General to triple the number of cases opened in the first year of his administration.

"Once I took over the Secretary of State's office I warned all employees that I have a zero-tolerance policy on corruption," said White. "I will provide the Inspector General with all the necessary resources to carry out his duties and remove those people who abuse the public's trust."

In his first year on the job, White followed through on a campaign pledge by procuring the necessary funds to manufacture and distribute new license plates. He has streamlined and automated the process in order to re-plate all of the state's 8.5 million passenger vehicles in a 12-month period beginning in 2001. During the last re-plating only 4.6 million sets of plates were produced over a three-year cycle.

For the first time in history, Illinois motorists were given the opportunity to choose the design of the license plate. More than 230,000 people voted for their favorite plate. Seventeen years have passed since the state last issued new license plates and many have become difficult for law enforcement officials to read

In addition to improving road safety, expanding the Inspector General's office and providing new license plates, White cited the following accomplishments in his first year:

- Followed through on a campaign promise when he kicked-off "Project Next Generation" a mentoring program for at-risk youth run through the public library system.
- Targeted new funds for libraries to upgrade their technology and improve Internet access through a new program called Illinois Information Advantage and is seeking greater funding for libraries located in areas with poor tax bases as well as school

libraries throughout the state.

- Formed new partnerships with the Chicago Bears organization and the Payton family following Walter Payton's announcement of a rare liver disease to raise awareness for organ donation and to register more organ donors.
- Honored the memory of one of Illinois' strongest proponents for education and literacy, State Senator Penny Severns, by establishing the Penny Severns Early Childhood Reading Program and the Penny Severns Scholarship Fund.

White believes the Internet offers new opportunities to provide the public with information and services. Already, the Archives Department has become a leader in making its databases available over the Internet to historians, genealogists and others. Last year, the number of on-line reference requests increased by more than 300 percent. Also, customers may access public information or print registration forms for various departments on-line.

White's goal is to eventually make every service available through the Internet that doesn't require on-site testing or a face-to-face transaction. Customers will be able to purchase license plates and renewal stickers as well as select their personalized license plates through the Internet. Also, corporations and lobbyists will be able to register on-line.

"We have accomplished a great deal in my first year as Secretary of State," said White. "We have laid the groundwork for safer roadways, higher ethical conduct from employees and faster, friendlier customer service. I have also followed through on major campaign pledges such as re-plating Illinois vehicles and implementing a mentoring program for students through public libraries."

Secretary of State Jesse White's Annual Report is available on his website at www.cyberdriveillinois.com.

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