

**REMARKS BY TOM TRESSER ON ANNOUNCING CANDIDACY FOR COOK COUNTY BOARD
PRESIDENT – JAK’S TAP, CHICAGO, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2009**

Good morning. Thank you all for joining me to share some remarkable experiences. I think I should've been standing before you in August – but I had my hands full these past ten months trying to stop the Olympics from wrecking our economy and destroying our parks.

My name is Tom Tresser and I've been living in Chicago since 1980. I came to Illinois to from New York City to be a member of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival downstate. I was only supposed to be in Illinois for a summer. But I came up to Chicago on my day off. It was a bright and warm July day and the breeze was blowing in off the lake. People smiled at me! I was warmly received by people in the entertainment field and went back to the Festival singing the praises of the city, its landscape and its people. I did not return to New York at the end of the summer. Instead I slept on a friend of a friend's floor and started to get to know the city and its rich cultural opportunities.

I soon helped start a theater and I became deeply involved in the city's cultural and community life. The city welcomed me. I found openings for creativity, innovation and enterprise. Since then I've founded or led 13 nonprofit organizations or projects in the arts, community development and civic engagement.

There was and is a sense of opportunity and "roll-up-your-sleeves" and get it done attitude that I loved and in which I – and so many others who have planted roots here – have thrived.

But along with this sense of openness and opportunity there has also been an opposite force of political stagnation. Call it the Machine. Call it the Combine. Call them the Regulars.

We all know that in the political realm, they don't want no one that no one sent. I – like probably many here today – have been on the losing end of many political races and issues. I've seen the Machine up close and personal in a number of races where independents and progressive candidates were swamped by the money and manpower of city workers.

I remember one campaign in 1992, when I was doing precinct work on election day for the first Congressional race of Prof. Dick Simpson – I was covering 4 precincts and at each polling place in each precinct there were guys passing literature, talking counts, driving people to and walking people into the polling place. I remember one tall guy in a camel hair coat passing lit for Rostenkowski – "Wow," I said "Are you a volunteer?" "Nah, I work for Streets and San" he said.

Fast forward to 2007. A group of neighbors read that the Chicago Park District has entered into a secret deal with the Latin School to give the school a private artificial turf soccer field in the heart of Lincoln Park. We called this a land grab and looked at it as a taking of public assets for private gain. We formed Protect Our Parks and fought the deal and – against all common sense and all odds – we won and the secret sweetheart deal was torn up.

But the people had to fight to protect the commons and the taxpayers treasure from being doled out to the wealthy, privileged insiders without accounting or recourse. We had to do it because our elected officials looked the other way.

A few of us in the Lincoln Park fight saw that mess as a run up to the Olympic bid – if the city could give away a chunk of Lincoln Park and get away with it, then what couldn't they do elsewhere in the city?

Our prediction proved correct. When the details of the bid were announced public parks were slated to be used for the private party called the Olympics. A group of tireless volunteers gathered from across the city to challenge the bid, I became a lead organizer for No Games Chicago and had the good fortune to work along side activists, social justice champions and concerned citizens from Austin, Lawndale, Washington Park, Lincoln Park, Rogers Park, Hyde Park and places near and far. We did our homework. We did our due diligence – we read studies, we talked to people from other host cities, we looked at newspaper reports from after the games documenting the broken promises and busted budgets. We did the work that our aldermen, civic watchdog groups and the media SHOULD'VE done.

We concluded that the games was simply the wrong project for the wrong city at the wrong time. I was able to go to Lausanne, Switzerland and Copenhagen, Denmark to deliver the No Games message and

materials directly to the International Olympic Committee. This had never been done before. We were often asked "Who is paying you?" We answered that we were self-funded and that no one invited us – we were citizens of Chicago who did not want the Olympics in our city and that they must listen to us. We said that the Mayor and even the President of the United States were wrong on this issue and did not represent the wishes of 84% of the people here.

So now, after the firestorm surrounding the Battle of the Bid has died down, what can we learn from the Olympic fiasco?

(1) ACCOUNTABILITY – Who is looking out for our interests? Not the aldermen. Not the commissioners. Not the media – who stood by and served as cheerleaders for the bid and an echo chamber for PR fluff put out by the 2016 Committee. Only a handful of courageous community groups dared to challenge the bid – Southside Together Organizing for Power, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators, Pilsen-Little Village Environmental Justice, IVI-IPO and the Chicago League of Women Voters all should be acknowledged for speaking truth to power. We seem to be horrified spectators at perpetual accident scene of city and county official misdeeds dereliction of duty.

(2) FINANCING – Who is watching the store? How much tax payer money and public assets are being doled out on a daily basis with no check and balance and no way to stop a bad deal or get our money back from crooked deals. We need to put a freeze on any program that transfers money or property from the public to a private entity. The system right now is impenetrable to scrutiny. Just the other day the City Council Approved giving \$15 million to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange for building renovations. What new mega project is waiting in the wings to reward the insiders at the expense of common sense and the public purse? What new tax will be forced on county residents? What new member of the ruling family's clan will next be discovered on the payroll or milking sweetheart contracts?

(3) CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT – Because our trust in elected officials and the media that is supposed to watch them is so low and deservedly so – we are going to have to be much more active, vigilant and engaged in civic life. We are going to have get much smarter at following the abuse and we are going to have get much more angrier when we find it. We need to do this at the city and county level.

SO – after almost 30 years of active civic life in this great city I've come to the conclusion that I'm tired of chasing bad policy and trying to stop projects that rip up parks, loot our treasury and reward the connected few. I don't want to go through another Protect Our Parks fight to stop greedy unchecked grabs of public assets and I certainly don't want to endure another No Games Chicago struggle to stop a mega-project from completely wrecking our finances while enriching the same crowd of insiders. I would like to help make good policy and be part of a smart and honest government – rather than rail against wrong-headed policy and the litany of public corruption that has become Chicago's and Cook County's unofficial theme song.

So – today I announce my candidacy for the position of President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. No Games called for better schools, better trains, better housing and better health care. Cook County government significantly impacts our regional health care and improving Cook County government is one way to improve health care. The County has long been a target for reform – it has for far too long been an appendage to Chicago's political needs – fueling the Machine with jobs, contracts and cash. This must stop.

If elected I will restore honest dealing, transparency and excellent service to all levels and facets of county government.. We will have a complete accounting of ALL aspects of this massive body – which if it were a state would be our 20th largest in terms of budget.

Neighbors of Cook County -

- Are you mad as hell and don't want to take it any more?

- Are you ready for a fighter who will place your interests above the interests of a few political families who use our government like their own private cash machine?

- Are you ready for excellent service, creativity and innovation in local government and a new spirit of commonwealth where opportunity is made available to all and not just the connected insiders?

If you are ready for real change in 2010 then I ask for your support, your hard work, your dollars and your good ideas to help me become the next President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners!

Thank you!

[Note - This campaign is completely independent of the No Games Chicago organization]

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