

A great opportunity for reform — and a great choice to seek it

In crisis comes opportunity.

And in the great crisis facing our state, comes a great opportunity.

The opportunity to scrub government of the kind of loose rules that make possible the corruption that our governor is accused of.

The opportunity to put meaningful reforms on the books, rather than cosmetic changes with loopholes big enough to drive a semi through.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn on Monday announced he has appointed former federal prosecutor Patrick Collins to lead a panel to recommend new laws and reforms to clean up state government.

Quinn couldn't have made a better choice.

In the U.S. attorney's office, Collins had a seat front and center on corruption in Chicago and Springfield. He put former Gov. George Ryan and his pals behind bars. He worked his way up the ladder of the Daley administration, locking up the mayor's patronage chief.

Those prosecutions underscore Collins' tenac-

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ity and his ability to make cases.

He gets stuff done.

And whenever he brought a prosecution against a politician, the same defense would arise again and again.

Prosecutors were simply criminalizing politics, the defense attorneys would say. The politicians weren't committing crimes. They were just committing politics — as usual.

Expect to hear a variation on that theme when Gov. Blagojevich goes to trial.

Collins didn't buy it and



Patrick Collins

put dozens of people in prison.

Now in private practice, Collins and the panel he leads will have fertile areas to explore for reform, from campaign finance laws to state contracting rules. We trust Collins' panel won't be shy with its recommendations.

This isn't to say that even the best changes will eliminate corruption.

Far from it.

As long as greed exists, there'll be corruption.

But substantive reforms could curb corruption, making it harder and costlier for politicians to rip off taxpayers.

The worst outcome would be for Collins and his panel to announce brilliant reforms to much fanfare, only for their report to be tossed on the dead-on-arrival pile in Springfield — a report filled with quaint notions.

Because understand that many political leaders in Springfield want nothing more than to throw out the governor and put on a show of reform — so they can quickly return to business as usual.

Blagojevich is not the cause of our state's corrupt ways; he is the symptom.

The question is whether Illinois lawmakers will finally resolve to take the cure.

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