



ILLINOIS AND LINCOLN SET THE BAR FOR POLITICAL SLEAZE: PART 1 OF 2

By Dennis Constant

Step aside, Louisiana, and bow to the *real* experts on political hijinks: the boys from Illinois.

Today, May 18, is the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's nomination for president. An entertaining and surprisingly forthright May 16 *Chicago Tribune* editorial described how the *Trib* "spared no newsprint or superlative in promoting Lincoln for president."

The paper had depicted him as a "gentleman of unimpeachable purity of private life ... a man of, at once, great breadth and great acuteness of intellect ... never garrulous, never promising what he cannot perform, never doing anything for show or effect, laboriously attentive to detail, industrious and conscientious...."

The paper worked hard on behalf of Lincoln's Presidential nomination on May 18, 1860. Thousands of delegates and guests crammed into "a hastily built pine-plank convention hall nicknamed the Wigwam," located at the corner of Wacker Drive and Lake Street.

Lincoln was not well known outside of Illinois, but within the state he had already earned the reputation of a shrewd, ruthless, and highly-intelligent politician who hid his high IQ behind a rustic, gaunt appearance.

As pointed out by our foundation's researcher Jerry Kohn, Lincoln was far from the humble "rail splitter" he is often portrayed as, but rather one of the wealthiest and most well-connected attorneys in Illinois. As a state representative and legislative leader, he strongly promoted government subsidies for his friends and supporters. In fact, he almost bankrupted the state.

In 1837, Lincoln and his Whig Party pushed through twelve million dollars in state subsidies—an enormous sum at that time—for what was called "internal improvements." The money was spent, but the projects were never finished. For years the state's taxpayers struggled to pay off Lincoln's debt. As a result of Lincoln's corrupt pork barrel spending, the state enacted a new Constitution in 1848 that expressly prohibited expenditure of tax dollars for any private business enterprises.

Continued in Part 2

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