

Despite a Promise to Retire, White Leans Toward Running Again in 2014

Written by Rich Miller
Sunday, 27 March 2011 05:50



Secretary of State Jesse White has been saying for at least the past two years that this fourth term would be his last. By the end of this term, he'll be the longest-serving secretary of state in the history of Illinois. It seemed like a good way to go out.

"This is my last run for public office," White told the *Chicago Defender* just before the November election.

"I think I am going to spend time working with the Jesse White Foundation," he said. The Chicago city council recently voted to spend \$10 million on a training facility for the Jesse White Tumbling Team. White's foundation is supposed to kick in \$5 million.

The new facility would be part of his significant legacy. Most people wouldn't even drive near Chicago's old Cabrini Green public-housing complex. White went in there and recruited those kids, trained them to do superhuman feats, and not only kept them out of trouble, but showed them how to make a life for themselves and their community.

Young boys who were looking at a miserable existence at the bottom of society's ladder were given a chance to make it in the world. Only a tiny few have disappointed. The overwhelming majority have gone on to be productive, decent citizens. The impact White has had on those kids is truly one of the miracles of our time.

But I'd been hearing for a couple of months that White was thinking about running yet again when this term is up in 2014. I made some calls and was told by a few trusted insiders to just let it go for now. White and his top people were simply experiencing the rush of yet another big victory and would eventually calm down, and White would retire.

So I decided to bide my time and wait him out. But the rumors persisted, and I eventually

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decided that holding off until March was long enough. It had been, after all, more than five months since his latest landslide victory. Surely that was enough time for White to put things into perspective.

I put in a call and asked to speak to the man himself. He called me back and confirmed the rumors I'd been hearing. White said he was "leaning toward" another run in 2014.

White told me he was "encouraged to rethink" his decision after being "inundated" with pleas to run again. White claimed people have telephoned, e-mailed, "stopped me in the street, stopped me in meetings" and asked him to reconsider his decision because, he said, the office is running well and they don't want it to deteriorate again.

Some insiders say, however, that a few of White's top staff members have also been quietly urging him on for their own personal reasons.

Whatever the case, if White does decide to run again, a whole lot of people in both parties are going to be pretty darned depressed. White has proved to be unbeatable in the office. He won all 102 counties in 2002, and his lowest vote share was the solid 55 percent he received the first time he ran in 1998. He has been the top statewide vote-getter in the last three election cycles. But a line has formed around the block for 2014, as most folks in both parties expected that White would keep his word and leave office.

"I feel good," White said, joking that, at 76, he was still a "youthful, young person." He would be 84 at the end of a fifth term in 2019. But the man can literally still do handstands. He's no spring chicken, but he's in better shape than most of the people who want to replace him – and most of the rest of us, for that matter.

White said he hasn't set a timeframe for making a final decision. "I'm leaning toward it right now primarily because of the wishes and desires of the people of the state of Illinois," he said. "Plus, I enjoy public service. I love public service."

Asked about all those potential candidates who've been queuing up to run for the office for the

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past several years, White quipped, “I expect when the time comes, there will be about 25 Democrats and 25 Republicans vying for the job.” That may be an understatement.

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