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Jesse White Becomes Longest Serving Illinois Secretary of State

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White will become the longest serving Illinois Secretary of State on Friday, May 30, surpassing James A. Rose who served from 1897 until 1912. Rose was first inaugurated on January 11, 1897. White was first inaugurated 102 years later on the same day in 1999.

“I am proud to have had the privilege and honor of serving the people of Illinois for the last 15 years,” said White, who is serving his fourth term. “I pledged I would not use this office as a stepping stone to a higher office, and I have honored that commitment.”

While the two Secretaries of State served in different centuries, Rose and White share some similarities. Both were born in Illinois, attended Illinois public schools and began their careers as teachers. Additionally, both served as county elected officials (Rose was Pope County State’s Attorney and White was Cook County Recorder of Deeds).

The Secretary of State’s duties were limited during Rose’s tenure when compared to today. Over the years since Rose served, the office has accumulated additional responsibilities, including: registering businesses, regulating securities, registering lobbyists, maintaining driver records, auditing automobile dealerships, overseeing school bus drivers and administering the Illinois Organ/Tissue Donor Registry.

Since Rose’s tenure concluded in 1912, a few more examples of how the Secretary of State’s office has changed include:

- In 1912 there were less than 200 Illinois public libraries. Today there are about 800 public libraries and more than 5,000 when including academic, school and special libraries.
- Driver’s licenses were not issued by the Secretary of State until 1939. White’s office issues nearly 9 million driver’s licenses.
- The first year the state issued license plates was 1911. Rose issued about 44,600 license plates. Today, Illinois has more than 11 million registered vehicles.
- In Rose’s first two years in office, the Secretary of State’s office collected \$424,101 for the state, an average of \$212,000 a year. In 2013, the Secretary of State’s office collected more than \$2.2 billion in revenue.

During White’s tenure, Illinois roads have become significantly safer, customer service has improved due to streamlined operations and technological innovations, and the cloud of corruption that had plagued White’s predecessor has long been removed.

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