

Announcement Speech of Al Hofeld, Jr. – October 11, 2009

Let me start by saying thank you to all of you for coming out on a cold Sunday afternoon.

And for their support, understanding and hard work to date, I thank my campaign Chairwoman, Jo Ann Robinson, my campaign staff, my mentor, Cliff Kelley, who's here today, and especially my family – my wife, Alison, and my children, Hana, Jonah and Eden.

Wisdom has it that before you run for office, you should know who you really are; you should know what you stand for in the core of your being. Otherwise, without that clear moral or spiritual center, without a genuine and deep commitment to public service, without your being rooted in a fundamental humility about yourself, you easily lose sight of why you're running or why you were elected. And we in Illinois know all too well where that failure of vision and purpose leads - to the same-old self-serving politicians, to arrogance, to the same old corruption, and to demoralized citizens with no faith in their government.

I say to you in all humility that I've been blessed to know who I am - to live my core values - for a long time. For almost 20 years, I've lived and worked full-time with the poor, the homeless, those with HIV and AIDS, the innocent men on death row in Illinois, the men who were tortured by former police commander Jon Burge, county jail inmates who wanted their GED, public housing residents, and the honest families victimized by predatory mortgage lenders and facing foreclosure. My core values – my core experiences in life – are three: (1) compassion (2) a passion for justice; and (3) effectiveness in advocating for justice – achieving it, not just talking about it. And these will also be my three guiding stars as your next State Senator from the Illinois' 13th Legislative District.

I didn't just come to the south side of Chicago or to the 13th District. I came to the South Side in 1990. And members of family members long preceded me; my grandmother graduated from Hyde Park High School in the 1920s, and they lived in Hyde Park when my dad was born. I came here, initially, as a graduate student in theology at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

In Hyde Park, I found a community similar to Evanston, where I grew up. When I entered kindergarten in 1971, Evanston was a mixed-income, multi-racial community with newly integrated public schools. Thanks to my parents' belief that equality was the future, they sent me to those public schools through high school. As a young boy, every day I rode the bus into the heart of the African-American community in Evanston to attend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Laboratory School. I had friends and played sports with kids black and white, rich and poor, from north and south Evanston. At my high school graduation, I delivered a commencement address about Dr. King's dream. I talked about how Dr. King's beautiful dream – a dream that we learn to judge each other “not by the color of [our] skin but by the content of [our] character” - had been realized to some extent in the community that was Evanston.

At the age of 18, my life changed. I saw the movie Gandhi and then studied intensively his life's work and that of Dr. King. I was deeply moved. I heard what they had to say. I understood intuitively the sacrifices they made. I felt the call to do God's will. They introduced me not just

to a spiritual worldview but also to the tradition of social and political activism rooted in faith and individual conscience. They guided me into a life of service to others, especially the poor. They gave me a clear vision of justice.

When I came to the south side in 1990, in the neighborhoods around Hyde Park, I saw the devastating effects of decades of racism and poverty – in those days, you could still see block-after-block of abandoned and decayed buildings, of smashed and burned-out storefronts. The economic and social disintegration I saw profoundly affected me, and I vowed then to work for change.

I spent the next five years working with the homeless. I was a live-in staff person at St. Catherine Catholic Worker, a transitional shelter for homeless people with HIV or AIDS that was located at 65th and Maryland. Next, I worked for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, where I learned the basic lessons of community organizing and how to advocate for changes in public policy. I then founded and directed A HOPE, an outreach and empowerment organizing project with the chronically homeless that won awards as a model program. I gained the trust of people who lived under interstate bridges and in abandoned buildings, Vietnam veterans distrustful of authority, those suffering from depression and substance abuse. I formed support groups for the homeless, and together we organized to improve emergency shelters. Ultimately, we constructed a safe haven shelter and a day center where people could eat, use the bathroom, shower, make a phone call, wash clothes, store their things and receive supportive services.

Both my successes and my frustrations in my work with the homeless led me to the decision to go to law school in order to become a more effective advocate.

But my path through Northwestern law school was always clear to me – because I knew who I was. Instead of using my summers to work at big law firms in hopes of landing a six-figure salary, I worked in the school's legal clinic to exonerate wrongfully convicted men on death row. I worked with Flint Taylor and the People's Law Office on the Burge cases. I travelled to prisons around the state to meet and interview the men tortured by Burge. I worked on Anthony Porter's case – Anthony was the twelfth person exonerated cleared from death row in Illinois after being convicted of a crime he didn't commit. I wrote portions of the emergency stay petition that we filed to save his life 48 hours before his scheduled execution.

In my third year of law school, I began to think of community-based economic development as a way to address some of the root causes of poverty. So, after graduating and taking the bar, I went back to the south side and worked with community organizations and grassroots leaders – including then-State Senator Barack Obama - to organize the South Side Community Federal Credit Union. Located at 55th and Wentworth, the credit union is a not-for-profit, low-income designated, community development financial institution (“CDFI”). The credit union is a direct alternative to the financial exploitation of the black community – to currency exchanges, payday lenders, vehicle title lenders, predatory home lenders and others. It provides low-cost and free financial services, affordable credit and basic financial education. It now has assets of \$4 million and about two-thousand members. I personally raised \$1.7 million for the credit union before it opened in 2003, and, since then, we have brought to the south side millions more in deposits,

grants and investments from banks, foundations and government. This is capital and jobs that otherwise would not have come to the south side.

Since 2003, I've been a public interest litigation attorney, first with the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago, then with the consumer rights firm of Edelman and Combs, and now with my own law firm. At Edelman, we brought a class action against CTA in 2007 when there was a cash fare increase and the newly introduced Chicago Cards that were supposed to save people money on the increase were generally out of stock. In 2005, we worked with CEDA to file an emergency class action against the Illinois Department of Public Aid when it wasn't processing people's applications for energy assistance, and elderly and disabled people had no heat in their homes during October and November. At my own firm now, I'm co-counseling several of the nationwide class actions for racial discrimination and reverse redlining against subprime mortgage lenders such as Countrywide, Option One, First Franklin and others.

But mostly, during the last six years - long before there was an official "housing crisis" - I've been bringing federal cases on behalf of the honest, hardworking families who were the unknowing victims of predatory mortgage lenders. The compelling stories of some of my clients have been videotaped and posted on our campaign website - alhofeldjr.com. I sue subprime mortgage firms, unscrupulous mortgage brokers, and the Wall Street banks that now hold the loans in cases for fraud, racial discrimination, Truth in Lending violations and other illegal practices. I've won again and again, getting the loans cancelled and saving my clients' homes.

This is the work I have done. This is Al Hofeld, Jr. I see myself as a community organizer with a law degree. What I hope you'll understand is that I've already been through the crucible of self-identity; I come to politics knowing whom I serve; it's too late for me to forget where I came from; I've known and loved too many people who were homeless or sick or poor.

So why am I running?

I've been able to accomplish a lot without ever holding elected office. But I learned a long time ago from people like Harold Washington and Leon Despres that, if you love people, if you have a true compassion, then you're compelled to work for justice, and, if you want justice, you have to enter politics. There's really no choice in the matter. I am running because my passion for justice, my conscience and my faith have grown to this point. My decision is a culmination of the work I've done to date. My spirit is boiling over.

What I really want in my heart of hearts, what I pine for in my inmost being, is economic justice. My faith teaches me that it is God's will for all children, no matter their race or class, to have an equal opportunity to develop fully as human beings, to realize their God-given potential of talent and personality. But too many children in this District don't start off with the necessary resources or a real chance to do that. So, those children need us to secure for them the basic opportunities and resources in health care, education, housing and jobs that will allow them to grow and blossom. They need for us to create and provide a climate of peace, not violence. And we - you and me - are God's hands in the world. And we are the government; the government is us. It's our collective responsibility to work for that universal good start in life, for that level playing field. In other words, God's love for all is a mandate to us to work for economic justice.

Our own State Constitution recognizes this common obligation: “We, the People of the State of Illinois... in order to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the people, eliminate poverty and inequality; assure legal, social and economic justice; provide opportunity for the fullest development of the individual – do ordain and establish this Constitution....”

Government is for all of the people, not just the poor. I am running to be State Senator for all of the residents of 13th District.

The District is a microcosm of America. It has the extremes of wealth and poverty, it has people black, white and, at the southern end, Latino; it has Millennium Park in the north and, in the south, schools that can't afford textbooks for their students; it is home to those concerned with property tax relief and good government reforms as well as those who don't have a job or enough food to eat. I am uniquely suited for this particular District because I've been traversing these very different geographies and mindsets for years. I have also lived in the north end of the District – with my dad, as a teenager and as a college student home on breaks. I see and recognize all needs and concerns as legitimate.

This State Senate seat also has a special legacy; just five years ago, it was held by the first African-American President of the United States. We all continue to feel – I feel - the incredible sense of empowerment, affirmation and liberation from having a progressive African-American from the south side of Chicago as our president.

Everyone should know that Senator Raoul was not Obama's chosen successor for this seat. State Rep. Will Burns (D-26) was. I know – and others in this room know – because we were present when Sen. Raoul was appointed to the seat by committeeman in November, 2004. I believe Senator Raoul has done his best, but it's not the best that can be done.

To this campaign, I bring different strengths, a new vision. I'm a proven advocate for people. In light of who I've dedicated my life to, you know I'll be fighting for you. In light of what I've already accomplished without holding elective office, you know I'll be effective. And I'll take the same grassroots approach to politics that I have used in working for justice. I won't just be your representative; I'll be working side-by-side with you, listening, empathizing, reflecting, planning and mobilizing. I'm going to continue being that community organizer with a law degree.

Without knowing much about Sen. Raoul or I, some might assume that, as between the two of us, it's Sen. Raoul who's the community organizer. But, I ask you, as between the two of us, who was it who organized the homeless on the south side? Who was it who worked with people with AIDS on the south side? Who was it who organized the credit union, which brought jobs and capital to the community? Who defended residents of Robert Taylor and Section 8 voucher holders against eviction? Who's been fighting Wall Street to save people's homes in Englewood, Washington Park, Grand Boulevard and Hyde Park? So, as between Sen. Raoul and myself, who, in this campaign, is the community organizer in the Obama tradition? Who is the civil rights attorney here? Which of us, in these respects, most honors the Obama legacy for this seat?

Our campaign gets underway at a time of deep crisis. I don't have to tell you that. We're in a jobless recovery, and joblessness is increasing. We have record foreclosures. At least five children have already been killed this school year. Many Illinoisans despair that political reform in Springfield is even possible.

I want to hear from you, but it seems to me that one of our top priorities is creating jobs. Chicago's official unemployment rate is 11.5 percent, for African-Americans, it's 15.4 percent; for teenagers, its 26 percent. The federal and state stimulus funds aren't working for people of color. African-American contractors so far have received only about 2 percent of total contract dollars awarded by the Illinois Department of Transportation under the stimulus.

Our campaign has proposals for legislation that will help create jobs. We'll release our plan in the coming weeks during the campaign.

But let's be clear: the long-term jobs strategy is a public education system that provides all children – no matter their color, no matter the wealth or poverty of their community - with a first-rate education, the skills and the training that prepare them well for a job with any employer. 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Illinois has not only the most segregated public education system in the nation but also the most unequal. Illinois has the second worst disparity in the country between what minority school districts are able to spend per child and what white districts spend. And Illinois ranks 49th out of 50 states in the amount it spends to fund our public schools. We will not solve our jobs crisis in Illinois until we do justice by our children and create equity in the funding for public education.

I will also fight to stop the economic Katrina that is the foreclosure crisis. Foreclosures are devastating our families and communities, especially our middle-class communities of color. African-American middle-class households are five-times more likely than white households of similar incomes to have subprime mortgage loans. Defaults are occurring three times as often in mostly minority communities. This leads to divorce, children being uprooted from school, families becoming homeless, declines in the home values of whole blocks and neighborhoods, and the accelerated loss of affordable rental housing.

Hurricane Katrina is synonymous with government neglect of poor people of color, and this is similar. The fact is the federal government's loan modification program, however well-intentioned, is too little too late, and Springfield has hardly done enough to stem foreclosures. I know from my work that the vast majority of people who find themselves in subprime loans they can't afford are responsible, honest, hardworking, salt-of-the-earth people who were the victims – not the perpetrators - of fraud. They were unsophisticated people who trusted the loan officers and brokers who then deceived them about the terms, altered their financial information on loan applications and arranged for inflated appraisals – all to make the loan sound affordable to the borrower and appear affordable on paper to the underwriting department, so that the loan would be approved.

Our campaign has a plan to dramatically reduce foreclosures in Illinois. The plan is modeled, in part, on my successful law practice. Our plan, the "Save the Illinois Family Home Now" plan, if

enacted, would save tens of thousands of homes and would largely pay for itself in the second year. We'll release the details soon.

Children killing children is the most profoundly tragic social reality in America today. All of us – from the south side to downtown to Winnetka – should be engaged. We are talking about our children, our most precious and beautiful resource, and our future. Not all of the solutions to violence can be legislated, but don't tell me there's not much more that government can do. We must immediately restore recent cuts in state funding to Ceasefire and expand and replicate Ceasefire. We must quickly obtain federal resources to expand safe passage. We must expand drop-out prevention programs. We need to proactively recruit men of color to teach in public schools where they can be role models to boys and young men (fewer than one in five teachers in CPS is male). We have to reduce the excessive punitive discipline of African-American boys in public schools, which serves to create anti-social behavior. We have to pass HB 48, which in effect requires a background check of every prospective buyer of a concealable handgun. Beyond legislation, we must deal with the belief in class superiority among our young people. We must volunteer in our communities. We must organize and mobilize our minds, bodies and resources to create a structure of hope for our young men at the same time that we provide concrete alternatives – not just peddling false hope - to gangs in the form of jobs and other opportunities.

Finally, it is time to change the political system in Illinois to make it less prone to corruption and more transparent and democratic for citizens. The legislature had a wide open window of opportunity to act, but did little. The campaign finance bill that was passed but vetoed by the Governor was a sham. I support each and every one of the recommendations made by the Illinois Reform Commission, and I will push for the strongest versions of these reforms, including meaningful campaign finance reform to end the corrosive effect of money on our politics.

And I believe that, in tough economic times, in times of budget cuts, our elected leaders should set an example for all of us by sharing in the sacrifices they're asking others to make by, at a bare minimum, forgoing annual salary increases and working days without pay, especially if they have legislated that others must do so. If elected, I will gladly make those sacrifices. I volunteer! Because I believe in public service.

I don't have all of the answers; no one person has a monopoly on ideas. But the organizer in me knows that real creativity takes place when you get concerned people talking together. I have faith in the democratic process. There's a synergy that makes us more than the sum of our parts. And so I'm going to continue my grassroots approach to justice and politics; I'm going to keep on being that community organizer with a law degree.

There's a limit to what a State Senator can do, but I'll constantly push that limit and use the office to the height of its powers. I'll use every forum available to me to advocate for the people. I'll build relationships with leadership in the Senate and organize other legislators; we'll build pragmatic, statewide coalitions of diverse constituencies to win the changes we're fighting for.

It says in the Book of Proverbs, “where there is no vision, the people perish.” To keep ourselves alive, spiritually and physically, we must stay focused on our vision of the way things can be. In the midst of a thousand problems, we must not forget what we hope for. For the sake of all those who suffer, for the sake of our children, we must not stop working for our dreams. We must keep changing.

I see a 13th District whose strength, as Harold Washington knew, lies in the diversity of its people.

I see a 13th District whose people – not its money, not its large corporations, not its politicians - are its greatest value and strength. I see a District in which every human life has dignity and worth.

In concrete terms, that means a district where the ability to pay - how much money you have – isn’t what determines whether or not you receive a quality education or health care.

I have a vision of a district in which every child can concentrate and learn in school because they feel safe.

I have a vision of a district in which all of our young men are loved and see and feel that their lives have meaning, a district in which, in spite of all the obstacles they face and the destructive messages of mainstream culture, they still find hope for the future.

I see a District in which every man and woman who is sick is cared for and experiences the mercy of healing because they have a state government that has made sure that they have health insurance and access to the best medical care.

I see a 13th District and an Illinois where everyone who wants a job - a sustainable, living wage job, a job with dignity and satisfaction - can get one, a District in which every man can feel proud because his job pays enough to enable him to provide for his family.

I have a simple idea, an idea of fairness, according to which jobs and contracts are dispensed fairly to the many qualified people and firms of color.

I see a District in which small, home- and community-based businesses – like the credit union – have access to the capital they need to grow and thrive, in which men and women who are ex-felons can get a job and a second chance at being productive citizens.

I see a 13th District and an Illinois in which every family can afford a home, in which the family home is not a target for exploitation, in which no elderly person, having lived in their home for 40 years, now has to spend their days and nights worrying about when the Sheriff is going to knock on the door and put them out; a District in which people can trust that when they enter the public marketplace the law will not let them be defrauded out of their home. I see a district of mixed-income communities in which everyone thrives, where everyone is integrated and included.

Finally, I see an Illinois whose elected officials cherish public service, cherish the people's welfare and cherish democratic principles above the privileges of power, public officials who say with the prophet Isaiah: "Is this not the fast I choose: to lose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yolk, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yolk? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly...." (Isaiah, 58:6-9).

I see a 13th District with a Senator driven by a passion for justice who advocates tirelessly with and for the people every day he is in office. And I see an Illinois whose citizens once again have faith in their elected officials and their government.

Make no mistake: there's been real progress. We elected Barack Obama President, and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize was an affirmation of the wisdom of the people's choice. But there's so much more to change. We can't stop changing now.

Illinois has the fifth largest economy in the richest, most powerful country in the history of the world. If we can spend \$475 million to build Millennium Park in the north end of this District, then we can increase funding for public education in the south end by that much and more. Let's keep changing. We can't stop now.

If we can mobilize private industry and state and local government to apply for the 2016 Olympics Games, raising and spending \$80 million in the process, we can fund a program to save people's homes. Let's keep changing.

And if we were willing to invest \$4.8 billion – mostly within this District - for the Olympics, we should be willing to invest that much in a jobs plan that puts everyone back to work. Let's keep changing. Don't stop now. Let's keep changing.

But change is not free. Change is not easy. It takes work. It takes all of us working together. It takes pooling our resources. And so I'm asking for your support and involvement, not just your vote. I need you to volunteer, to contribute, to hold coffees and house parties, to proactively spread the word of mouth to your family, friends and neighbors. This is a grassroots campaign. The only way we're going to win is by touching enough people. The only way we can touch enough people is by having enough volunteers. With your help, we can change the 13th District, and we can change Illinois.

Thank you again very much for coming today.