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## **Why I'm in Switzerland (Trying to Meet the IOC)**

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I'm in Lausanne, Switzerland, seven time zones ahead of Chicago, with two other members of the [No Games Chicago coalition](#). Our purpose is to meet with the [International Olympic Committee](#) (IOC) at their headquarters in order to explain why we believe Chicago should NOT be awarded the 2016 Summer Olympics.

We are here at the same time that the delegations from the four candidate cities, including Mayor Richard M. Daley and the leaders of the Chicago 2016 committee, are here to re-state their cases for being awarded the games. We are a self-appointed people's delegation.

It's been a very long journey from home to here. Our traveling team has given up much to make this trip. Since No Games receives no funding, members of the delegation have had to go into debt to get here. Other members of the No Games team have also sacrificed time and treasure and will be working long hours to support the work of the travelers.

As far as we know, no other group of citizens has taken this journey to Switzerland and the heart of the Olympic movement to present their protests directly to the IOC in defiance of the leaders of their city's bid apparatus.



Why go?

Very simply -- to preserve our city's future. To prevent the piling up of massive debt. To prevent the displacement of people from their homes. To protect our parks. To say "Enough!" to the back room deals and pin stripe patronage and to take meaningful action against the small group of arrogant officials who have been running our city as their personal fiefdom for decades.

That's why we're here. That's why I'm here.

To back up a bit, I have to confess that I'm a good government geek. I'm an unreconstructed idealist. A reformer. A believer in independent, honest, grassroots-powered government. I stubbornly believe that government should serve the people and be an instrument for sustainable and equitable opportunity.

I get deeply frustrated and angry with the way Chicago has been run as a private ATM for a small group of politically connected families and their friends.

I'm embarrassed and saddened by the parade of corrupt state and county politicians and convicted Alderman (30 in the past 30 years?), TIF-funded sweetheart deals for fat cats and venal public employees who steal our tax dollars for work they do not do.

I was a co-founder of Protect Our Parks, which was started by a group of citizens outraged at the Latin School Lincoln Park Land Grab. This was a secret deal between the Latin School and the Chicago Park District to transfer a chunk of priceless lakefront parkland a bit north of North Avenue to the school for a song. We successfully sued to void the deal. [You can read about this fight in an earlier post.](#)

One way to look at what was happening with the Latin School controversy was that the deal was another example of the city privatizing public assets under suspect circumstances. The deal was done in secret. The deal traded away priceless public assets for questionable revenue. The deal was deemed unquestionable and was defended by the Park District and 43rd Ward Alderman Vi Daley.

My work for Protect Our Parks was a warm-up for participation in No Games Chicago. I see a number of similarities between the two schemes:

- 1) Top-down dictation. The Mayor and his appointees drive the policy. These initiatives were announced as a given with no public debate. All city agencies fall in lock step, including the Chicago Park District, the Chicago Plan Commission and the City Council.
- 2) Land grab, super-sized. The city was only trading away a few acres of Lincoln Park to the Latin School, but has much bigger plans for the 2016 Olympics. Most of the major venues are slated to be built in our parks, including Lincoln Park, Douglas Park, Jackson Park and Washington Park.

In addition, several miles of the lake front and a number of public harbors will be turned over to the games.

- 3) The finances don't make sense. In the case of the Lincoln Park Land Grab the Latin School was simply fronting the park usage fees they would've paid any way and in return were going to get 20 years of near-exclusive use of the land and could've sold sponsorships and advertising on the facility they built there. In the case of the Olympics, you have a completely unbelievable plan that proposes to spend \$5 billion with funds raised entirely from the private sector. The city has already broken that promise by spending \$86 million to purchase the Michael Reese Hospital site. The city has also pledged \$500 million in guarantees, and the state has promised to throw in another \$250 million. In case anyone needs reminding -- the state is about \$13 billion in the red and the city is running a \$300 million deficit and just announced it was laying off 1,000 employees from the Chicago Public Schools and 1,500 city workers. And don't forget Chicago's stellar record in piling up massive cost overruns for big-ticket construction projects. No, this plan stinks and will certainly end up costing taxpayers a bundle and sinking the city deep in debt.

- 4) Privatize everything. Is *anyone* watching the store as the Mayor sells off or gives away public assets? He sold off the Skyway, downtown parking garages, the parking meters and tried to sell off Midway Airport. He admits the parking meter deal was disaster, but our Alderman slavishly approve every proposal he places before them. If the Olympics come to town, the Mayor and his allies will have a Olympian feast of privatization deals -- including the hiring of thousands of security guards. Of course, there'll be oodles of cash for consulting services, financial advice, engineering work, marketing studies, and plum of plums, billions of dollars in construction contracts. Who will benefit from all these private deals? I'm pretty sure it won't be me or you.

- 5) Cowardice of Chicago's civic sector. Protect Our Parks could find precious few allies who would stand with us to roll back the Latin School Lincoln Park land grab. It's been much lonelier fighting the Olympic bid. Where is Friends of the Parks? Where is the Chicago Rehab Network? Where is the Coalition for the Homeless? Where is the Chicago Center for Neighborhood Technology? What about the Metropolitan Planning Council, the Heartland Institute, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs and the Sierra Club? These groups, and many more, have either endorsed the bid or remained silent. Have they all done due diligence and researched the scope of the games and the impact they would have on Chicago? Have they all independently concluded that the games would be a net benefit for the city? If they have, I'd love to see their studies and reports and read the minutes of their board meetings where they endorsed the games. Or have all these so-called civic watchdogs lost their bark and bite and all just going along to get along? Are they all simply afraid to challenge the Mayor for fear of being punished? I am saddened that so many groups that have done much good for the city have all become cheerleaders or silent accomplices for the bid.

I feel that I have done my due diligence on the 2016 bid. I've communicated with people from other host and candidate cities. I've read academic studies on the real impact of the games and many, many investigative reports and articles documenting the mess the games have left in cities around the world. For example, the games displaced some 30,000 people in Atlanta, Montreal took 31 years to pay off its Olympic debt, Vancouver is on the verge of bankruptcy and the London games are \$8 billion over budget. There's more. Much more.

I've helped organize seven large public meetings about the bid over the past five months, attended by over 600 people. In addition, I've participated in three public forums organized by others. Members of the No Games coalition have organized or participated in many other public forums, attracting hundreds of participants. At no time were the many questions and concerns raised by citizens answered with solid information by the 2016 Committee.

In addition, the No Games [Web site](#) has bountiful information and open forums for questions and comments. Thousands of people have signed our online petition, visited our Web site and left comments and questions.

All this information and conversation and question-asking has convinced me that the bid for the 2016 Olympics is a terrible public policy choice. The games will bring us a mountain of debt and cause massive destruction of our public parks. They will cause years of disruption of the public way and lead to the displacement of poor and working class families from neighborhoods near the venues.

The Olympic games would be the single biggest destructive force to hit Chicago since the Great Fire. I see no civic organization putting out the truth about the bid and the players behind it.

So it became the duty and mission of a small group of social justice champions from across the city to raise the alarm. They are your neighbors and who've been fighting for decades for affordable housing, human rights, environmental justice, green space, nature preserves and good government. I count myself privileged to be among them.

A few of these advocates are now in Switzerland bringing a Chicago shout out from the neighborhoods. We are saying "NO!" to the 2016 bid and all the corruption and bad policy choices that spawned it.

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 For more information on the No Games delegation to the IOC, visit our ["We're in Switzerland!"](#) page on our web site. Check out video updates, subscribe to Twitter updates and much more!