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By Congressman Mike Quigley (IL-05)

This summer, we'll all have the regrettable opportunity to watch what is hopefully the finale of Rod Blagojevich's celebrity circuit – his trial.

Surely, we'd be better served to focus on our economic future and what's at stake in November, but let's be honest: We won't be able to look away as he takes the stand and yet another reality show begins.

Some have suggested that the timing of the former governor's trial will hurt Democratic candidates as voters go to the polls with testimony ringing in their ears, as if Blagojevich represents what all Democrats are, or could turn out to be.

Let's be clear: he's not hurting Democrats. He's not hurting Republicans. He's hurting Illinois, as he narcissistically continues to decay the public's trust in government.

Mr. Blagojevich once represented the district I now have the privilege to serve. As I said on the House floor the night I was sworn in, "The people of my district gave me their trust—I can't tell you how much that means to me." One year later, I am determined never to betray it, as our former governor and so many others have.

In his State of the Union address, President Obama spoke of the "deficit of trust" we face. A recent Pew poll quantified his concern, showing that only 22 percent of Americans trust their government to do the right thing. More locally, a Public Policy Polling survey showed that 57 percent of Illinoisans – of all political persuasions – believe that our state has the most corrupt politicians in the country.

It is nearly impossible to govern when you've lost the people's trust. It is nearly impossible to have a productive policy debate when an unending string of questionable ethics and flagrant showboating dominate our headlines and disrupt progress. And it is nearly impossible to do what is right if your judgment is clouded by political consequences.

Our greatest challenge and mandate in Illinois—and Washington—is regaining the public's trust.

Events like the Blagojevich trial don't make it easy, but the key to rising above the dregs is in understanding that, as public servants, our mission matters.

It means not just paying lip service, but taking financial responsibility, transparency and ethics as seriously as the voters want us to. If we can make the tough decisions and prove these as priorities to the public, trust will follow.

I spent 10 years fighting for reform in Cook County, and I didn't change my DNA when I got to Washington. My outspoken positions haven't always been politically popular in the halls of Congress, but they have been rooted in what I believed was right and necessary.

I introduced a bill that would end the federal government's infringement on states' anti-pay-to-play laws.

States across the country, including Illinois, have passed meaningful reform measures to ensure that publicly funded projects are chosen on merit, not influential political contributions.

To work against that on the federal level strikes at the heart of a government beholden to a select few, leaving the rest of us to wonder who's on our side.

Ironically, it was on this very issue – pay-to-play – that Blagojevich was first indicted.

It is important to remember that on ethics, neither party can claim purity. For every Tom DeLay, there's a Charlie Rangel. For every Eric Massa, there's a Larry Craig. And for every Rod Blagojevich, there's a George Ryan.

Will the timing of the trial hurt voter turnout? Maybe, but no more than unfunded pension liabilities, reckless spending, or anything else if we don't wise up and get serious about reinventing government.

These are not reasons to stay home in November. Instead, they are the impetus to do the opposite: vote and usher in new leaders, leaders who can help us develop a long-term plan for restoring trust and fiscal stability, rather than kicking the can down the road for our kids.

DeLay can dance with the stars, and Rod can get trump-ed on Celebrity Apprentice. Meanwhile, the real reality show in Illinois is one not enough people are watching.

Quigley is the Democratic congressman representing Illinois' 5th District. Before his election in 2009 he served on the Cook County Board.