

Debra L. Olson

## DuPage Board Chairman (Republican)

Website

Email

**Party:** Republican

**Date of Birth:**

**Incumbent:** No

**Occupation:** DuPage County Board Member; Small business Owner

**Address:** 1220 W. Roosevelt Rd.

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

**Age:** 46

**Date of Birth:** 04/29/1963

**Birthplace:** Oak Park, IL

**Family:** Married to Don, we are both lifelong DuPage residents; 4 children ages 18-25; Deb's Mom and Don's parents all live in DuPage

**Religion:** Christian, Member of Wheaton Evangelical Free Church

**Education/Degrees:** B.A., Northern Illinois University: Political Science/International Relations, Pi Sigma Alpha; Wheaton North High School

**Civic Involvement:** 100+ Women Who Care Member; DuPage Homeownership Center Board of Directors, Chairman; Wheaton Chamber of Commerce Member; Wheaton Women In Business Member; Glendale Heights Chamber of Commerce Member; EVOLUTION/L.E.A.P. Percussion Corps Volunteer (affiliated with Boy Scouts of America); Illinois Prairie Path Cleanup Days Volunteer; Martin Luther King Day DuPage Celebration Planning Committee Member; DuPage Federation of Republican Women Board Member; Wheaton Women's Republican Club, Advisory/Executive Board Member; Glen Ellyn, York Township, and Bloomingdale Township Republican Women's Clubs, Associate Member

Prior Community Activities  
Mentor for Students at Northern Illinois University;  
Volunteer Tutor for Local Underprivileged Children;  
Member, Illinois Family Policy Council; Chairman, Koinonia House National Ministries Banquet Committee; Community Outreach Center Women's Luncheon Auction Committee; Volunteer, People's Resource Center; Chairman, Social Concerns Committee – WEFC Church; DuPage United Way - Community Solutions Partnership Board Member; Wheaton-Warrenville South High School Tiger Marching Band Parent Volunteer; Wheaton Warrenville South High School Lacrosse Team Board; Wheaton Post-Prom Organizing Committee Volunteer

**Endorsements:** Please visit my website at [www.DeforDuPage.com](http://www.DeforDuPage.com) for a list of endorsements.

**Offices Held:** DuPage County Board Member (currently in third term) Trustee, DuPage Regional Board of Schools (1999-2002)

Milton Township Republican Precinct  
Committeeman(1992-present)

County Board Committees: I am currently serving as the Chairman of the Public Works Committee; the Vice Chairman of the Strategic Planning Committee; and a member of the Finance, Development, and Environmental Committees; as well as the Insurance Subcommittee. I have previously served as Chairman of Strategic Plan Committee; Chairman of Cost Cutting and Efficiency Sub-Committee; Vice Chairman of Government Efficiency Committee; Member of Judicial and Public Safety, Transportation, Alternative Fuels Vehicles, and Health & Human Services Committees; Member of Community Services Block Grant Advisory Board; Member of the Substance Abuse Task Force

**Other Government Services:**

DuPage County Community Development Commission (2003-present); DuPage County HOME Advisory Board Member (2003-present); DuPage County Trails Maintenance Policy Task Force Member (2003-present); Governmental Agency Partnership Board Member (Multi-community board of fire, police, schools, municipal and other government leaders), DuPage County, 2004-present; DuPage Federation of Human Services Reform Board Member, DuPage County, 2003-present; National Association of Counties (NACo) Member, Community and Economic Development Steering Committee, Past Chairman of Economic Development Subcommittee (2003-present); Tri-Cities Emergency Preparedness Planning Committee (2007-2008); University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Board, DuPage County (2004-2007)

**KEY ISSUES**

**Key Issue 1:**

**Taxes and Fiscal Management**

Politicians promising to be all things to all people are what gets government in trouble. My most important "initiative" will be to keep the budget in check and county government under control. I am distinctly different from my opponents because I have a consistent record of fighting tax increases and reducing spending, and have been recognized as an independent voice for the taxpayers.

Federal, state, and municipal governments are all threatening to raise taxes to balance their budgets. That simply cannot continue to be the answer. Families suffer, and businesses are driven out of the state because they can't bear the weight of taxation in Illinois. All levels of government now must look to collaborate with each other and community partners to provide core services for less, and reduce the tax burden on our residents. We will also have to be vigilant in controlling costs and streamlining services. The Chairman must also have the will to stand against the constant desire of government to expand.

As a three-term County Board member, I have already taken that stand. I have helped build collaborative relationships to construct roads, drainage projects, and

provide court-mandated services for lower cost and in less time. I have voted against bloated budgets, salary increases and perks for elected officials; have been a leader in making cuts, eliminating waste, and downsizing operations. We have lowered the county's portion of the property tax rate and tax levy, bringing county government down to only 3% of your property tax bill. Today, DuPage county government continues to provide effective, essential services, yet is 10% smaller, and has reduced the county's burden on property taxpayers by hundreds of millions of dollars since I was elected.

I have also consistently stood against flawed policies of previous administrations and fought to put county government on the right track. Building a coalition of fellow county board members, I led the proposal and adoption of historic reforms to DuPage County government, reforms that the State still has failed to implement. These reforms have resulted in greater transparency, an open and honest budget process, long-term budgets and capital planning, and more accountability for the dollars we spend.

As County Board Chairman, I will continue to be a leader committed to smaller, limited government, and long-term fiscal responsibility, restraint, and accountability, which I believe is essential for the future of DuPage.

**Key Issue 2:**

Jobs and the Economy

My husband and I are small business owners, so we know first-hand how difficult this economy has made it to make payroll, retain employees and keep the bills paid. We understand that heavy tax burden and excessive regulation diminish competitiveness, profitability and the ability to grow. We also have four young adult children who would like to find well-paying jobs with benefits, which are scarce. DuPage County has long enjoyed a strong economy and low unemployment along with a high quality of life. However, unemployment is now near the state and national levels. The current recession, massive spending and debt of our state and federal governments, and Illinois' added taxes and fees on businesses threaten to force more to move out of Illinois and continue to hinder job growth.

DuPage County government has been, and must continue to, proactively address this situation. However, government does not create jobs, the private sector does. The County Board Chairman must actively engage the business community to foster an environment for stability and job growth.

DuPage is blessed with a strong base of employers of all sizes and types. DuPage is also home to several colleges, including College of DuPage which has 30,000 commuters enrolled each year. For the past several years, DuPage has brought more people into the county for work each day than leave the county to go to their job. We are home to first class hospitals, high-tech research facilities and a National Tech Park, putting us

on the cusp of technological innovation and growing employment opportunities in specialized health care industries. Our proximity to major transportation centers including air, rail, and trucking, make DuPage a strategic location for a variety of businesses and a regional player in transportation projects.

Utilizing these resources, the best way to advance economic development is a three-pronged approach: First – Taking Care of Basic County Functions. As Chairman, I will take the lead in keeping taxes low, working with law enforcement to ensure safe neighborhoods, and long-term planning for infrastructure improvements to keep traffic flowing.

Second – Building Partnerships. As Chairman, I will work with our Regional Superintendent of Schools and our local universities to promote excellent education for students ready to enter the workforce or going to college. Maintaining our commitment to DuPage County's public/private economic development organization Choose DuPage is critical to attracting, retaining, and assisting businesses to provide well-paying jobs and meaningful employment. The workNet DuPage Career Center is also vital in workforce training, development, and assistance connecting to employers. I will work with our local chambers of commerce to support small business creation and success. Working closely with municipalities, PACE and METRA on public transit options will also continue.

And third, I will work to promoting regional projects such as Western Access to O'Hare and the I-355 Corridor Bus Rapid Transit System.

### **Key Issue 3:**

#### Vision for the Future

Dealing with the challenges ahead, the Chairman must be both a strong leader and a consensus-builder. She must have vision for local and regional issues, and be innovative and responsive to effectively do more with less. She must work collaboratively to build partnerships with other governmental leaders to provide better services at lower costs.

As a County Board Member, I know first-hand the issues we face in the years to come. On a local level, our county is largely built-out, putting land-use and redevelopment issues at the fore. Our transportation and stormwater infrastructure is constantly strained. The population of DuPage is aging and increasingly diverse, adding new demands on government. Maintaining strong law enforcement is necessary to deter crime and properly deal with offenders. Regionally we are positioned to both contribute to and benefit from projects and partnerships that can improve our local economy and extend our reach in a global economy.

Our challenges will not be solved with lofty semantics, but with thoughtful approaches to problem-solving and a

get-in-the-trenches work ethic. We are a sophisticated, well-educated citizenry in DuPage with the resolve to get things done. New technological advances are on our doorstep that can lower costs, improve our environment, enhance our quality of life, and change the way we do business. It is up to leaders in DuPage County to access this creativity and utilize these new resources to make government more productive, responsive, and lean. As the DuPage County Board Chairman, I will be that kind of leader.

## **Q & A**

### **What is your position on the county's efforts to enact ethics and transparency reforms? Are they adequate? Why or why not?**

I believe it is incumbent upon all elected officials to be leaders in ethics and transparency standards. Of course, someone who intends to subvert the law will find a way to do it. But that doesn't preclude the need for substantive ethics policies that demonstrate the political will to hold self and others accountable to the public trust. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the saying goes. So while Cook County and the State of Illinois are rampant with pay-to-play and patronage, DuPage has held a higher standard, and is working to do better. With the culture of corruption in Illinois, weak and meaningless ethics reforms are only a sign of unwillingness to break the cycle. We must not allow the Springfield culture to infiltrate DuPage County.

I have been a leader in Ethics and transparency reforms in DuPage County, and as Chairman, will continue to strengthen our policies and welcome the input of others. When first elected to the County Board, I was one of two Board members to vote against rules changes that would have had the potential to give DuPage County government Home Rule status without public referendum, as the state statute requires. There was nothing ethical or transparent about that attempted back-door power grab. Within a short time I proposed a package of sixteen good government reforms, put together a coalition of Board members, and passed 14 of the 16 measures. These resulted in significant changes to County government, including a reversal of incendiary rules provisions, long-term budgeting, greater accountability for the tax dollars we spend, and paved the way for the transparency initiatives that have made DuPage a model for other counties.

I currently have a proposal before the County Board Finance Committee that raises our standards even higher. Together with changes proposed by the Transparency Committee, these amendments will limit campaign contributions from county vendors, add further Whistleblower protections and mechanisms, and require stricter reporting requirements for gifts and meals received by elected officials and employees from county vendors. However, Ethics changes are not enough. We must also have substantive revisions to our Procurement (purchasing) policies. In order to improve purchasing methods to increase the number of vendors bidding on projects, I will also be calling for all bidding of contracts to be done online, as well as modifications to development of bid specifications. This will help avoid contracts getting intentionally "steered" toward a particular vendor. And I believe we need to be more restrictive in our professional services contracts, doing much more to reduce and limit the number of no-bid and sole-source contracts. I have also proposed State legislation that would allow Counties to set more stringent Ethics and campaign finance rules for County candidates and elected officials beyond the limits we can set in our current Ethics ordinance.

For greater transparency, we also need to upgrade and improve our IT infrastructure. Our antiquated IT system prevents us from more sophisticated transparency and accountability initiatives such as system-wide performance measures, searchable databases and more extensive financial reporting.

### **If the economy continues to struggle and cuts to services and/or staffing are required, explain how and where you would make those cuts.**

When I first ran for County Board, I promised that I would reduce spending and make government more efficient. I have delivered on that promise. Since first elected, my record consistently demonstrates that I am committed to smaller, limited government, long-term fiscal responsibility, restraint, and accountability. Unlike the bloated budgets, deficit spending, and huge patronage of Cook County and Springfield, this year alone, DuPage has a balanced budget that cut \$30 million in spending and held off on 58 headcount from department requests, and has \$40 million in cash reserves. I have been a leader on cutting spending,

eliminating waste and duplication, streamlining processes, and more prudently allocating tax dollars. This was accomplished across all departments and in cooperation with the countywide officers. We then sent the tools to the Health Department to do the same. Today, our headcount and our budget are lower than in 2003.

However, cutting alone will not necessarily produce a better result. The DuPage County Strategic Plan is an important guiding document that was developed in cooperation with Countywide Elected Officials, business, community, and local leaders, to play a role in prioritization of issues and goals. Collaborative efforts by all levels of government, along with community partners, will be necessary to provide essential services and reduce costs for all.

I will continue my commitment and leadership in those efforts, working with the County Board and other governmental officials to determine ways to further streamline and consolidate functions, find efficiencies that are mutually beneficial, eliminate unnecessary positions and programs, and save money. For example, the County Board is working with the Chief Judge to investigate the possibility of transforming our county Juvenile Detention Facility into a regional youth facility to fully utilize the space and better cover the costs of operations and staffing. The pre-trial monitoring program has saved the County nearly a million dollars this year – its first year. Other possibilities are cooperative arrangements in back-office functions, utilizing innovative technologies that save energy, time, and money, and upgrading our IT department to enhance our ability to implement performance measures. These are seemingly small tools but can have large pay-offs. Training and empowering our 2000+ County employees to find efficiencies within their operations and create solutions across departments are techniques businesses have used for years to reduce costs and eliminate waste.

Though we must focus on our core mandated functions, we must also not lose sight of the important role County government plays in the quality of life of many of DuPage's residents that otherwise have few or no options. While severe budget shortfalls can necessitate across-the-board layoffs and cuts in services, with our current budget projections, I believe a scalpel approach, along with beefing up efforts to maximize our utilization of resources and community partnerships is more prudent.

In terms of the employee and service costs county government bears, it's important to note that Springfield's promises to reform the pension system county governments are required to participate in have gone unfulfilled, and the state fails to pay for their mandated responsibilities. For instance, while statute requires the state to reimburse counties 100% for probation officers, over the past few years the state has been reimbursing at 68%, and this year has cut it further to 40%. Medicaid reimbursement formulas also short-change DuPage. Continually making up the state shortfalls further increases costs to county government unabated.

As County Board Chairman, I will continue to advocate county governments be properly and promptly reimbursed and counties be allowed to provide alternative pension plans to the state pension system. As County Board Chairman I will build upon the good government reforms and successes I've already achieved. I will prioritize our short and long-term goals for appropriate budgeting and planning. I will further build the partnerships necessary to be innovative in providing essential services for less.

### **State your position on the county's effort to manage tree-trimming and other landscaping issues along the Prairie Path and Great Western Trail by ComEd and its contractors.**

Recent actions by Commonwealth Edison have required the County to initiate a review of our policies and determine the best course of action for the preservation of natural habitat along our trail system.

As a member of both the Environmental Committee and the Trails Maintenance Task Force, I have met with representatives of Com Ed and worked with our County staff and Community partners – leaders of Trails user groups, the Forest Preserve District, the Conservation Foundation, and others – to try to remedy the problem Com Ed has created. Com Ed has a legal responsibility to maintain their transmission lines to ensure an uninterrupted power supply. This includes trimming trees underneath and close to the power lines so they don't damage or take lines down during a storm or heavy winds. Unfortunately, in the process Com Ed has destroyed and disfigured many natural areas along our paths, often leaving adjacent businesses and homeowners owners bereft of the screening between their property and the trails. Leaving four and five foot standing stumps in the wake of their trimming was outrageous.

Com Ed was invited to work with the Trails Maintenance Task Force to devise a plan to restore the areas they had damaged. While their proposal included the creation of two special management areas along the trails, it did not go far enough in addressing the ongoing trimming cycles along the entire path system .

The ICC has refused to weigh-in on this matter, and current state statute is insufficient to deal with this perpetual problem. I believe a program to replace removed and disfigured vegetation with lower-growing native species of plants along the entire trail system is needed, without the surcharge that ComEd has demanded. While the approach of the Task Force and the County has been to maintain a strong working relationship with Com Ed, it has become apparent that we will not be able to come to agreement on a replacement program that will satisfy our requirements for maintaining the natural habitat of our trails. I have joined the Chairman of the Environmental Committee in proposing and supporting legislation that would require Com Ed to replace the high-growing trees they cut down or disfigure under their transmission lines with lower-growing native species. This will reduce the necessity for Com Ed to trim under the power lines, thereby significantly reducing their costs over time. It will also preserve the wooded buffer to adjacent properties, the environmental benefits of green spaces, and the natural beauty and habitat of our trail system.

### **Should the county have an executive managing the day-to-day operations of county government instead of the current format? Why or why not?**

During my first term on the County Board, DuPage employed a County Administrator. That position was eliminated for three reasons – as part of an overall headcount reduction and downsizing of government, to eliminate another layer of management, and to give greater oversight to the Chairman in day-to-day operations. What is critical to the county is that staff have fulltime senior management, accountability and oversight. In a county of nearly a million people and a budget of \$450 million, I believe the Chairman should be at the County full time, should provide that oversight and leadership, and should ensure that staff are responsive to constituents, County Board Members and Countywide Elected Officials. I believe the County Board Chairman must be a strong leader, and should also be more collaborative with County Board Members and Countywide elected officials in policy and decision-making than has been the case in the past. As the only candidate in this race who is currently a County Board Member, I bring the unique perspective of thoroughly knowing the issues we face, the strengths and weaknesses of County government, what we've tried, what has and hasn't worked, and the challenges ahead. I am the only candidate who has demonstrated the leadership, conviction, and collaboration, dealt with the breadth of issues and achieved real results in county government that matter most in the position of County Board Chairman. While the other candidates may feel they would need an administrator who is familiar with county government to assist them in taking the reigns of the Chairmanship, I don't feel that need. Though a professional administrator would be an asset to elected officials and staff, and there would be many benefits to having one, at a time when budgets are tight and revenues are down for the foreseeable future, hiring a County Administrator will be a significant expense. So at this point I would hold off on re-establishing that position until revenues warrant it. As a County Board Member I have made my public service my fulltime job. As Chairman, I will do the same.

### **Should the county limit or ban campaign contributions from companies that do business with the county? Why or why not?**

Earlier this year I authored and proposed a ban on campaign contributions from companies that do business with the County, and since I began fundraising for this race, I have pledged to not take any money from companies doing business with DuPage. None of my opponents has taken that same pledge. If adopted, DuPage will be the first County in Illinois to impose campaign contribution limits of this kind. My proposal is currently under consideration in the County Finance Committee.

Pay-to-play in the state of Illinois is historic and systemic, and DuPage citizens are rightfully angry about the lack of will among state politicians to make sweeping change. Even with two governors in jail, Springfield has failed to substantially and thoroughly reform campaign finance and procurement, including in their most recent legislation. Illinois was one of only four states in the entire country to have no limits on campaign contributions. The latest bill adopted by the state virtually ignores the recommendations of their own appointed independent Collins Commission, and does not go far enough in addressing campaign finance corruption. Congressional candidates have stricter limits on campaign donations than our state representatives and senators! Consequently, it is left to individual counties to make the responsible changes.

Along with my proposal to significantly revise our Ethics and Procurement Policies with restrictions on campaign donations, I have also proposed legislation in our Legislative Agenda that will give Counties the ability to impose stricter campaign finance regulations on County officials and candidates than the meager

and inadequate provisions of the state. Presently, counties can only impose stricter limits on currently elected county officials, so that candidates for office are not subject to the same campaign finance rules or limits to contributions from county vendors. A level playing field for both candidates and elected officials will provide for fairer elections and reduce pay-to-play temptations.