

James B. Burns
Inspector General
Office of the Illinois Secretary of State

James B. Burns is Inspector General for the Office of Jesse White, Illinois Secretary of State. White appointed Burns to this post in April 2000. He has since been reappointed by White and confirmed by the Illinois Senate. Burns followed Secretary White's mandate to establish a strong, independent Inspector General's office for the largest and most diverse Secretary of State's office in the nation.

Upon taking office, Burns immediately began to expand the size of the IG's office, hired professional investigators from a variety of law enforcement backgrounds, and successfully initiated legislation that made the position of Secretary of State Inspector General permanent and broadened its powers to root out corruption.

Some of the highlights of the Secretary of State Inspector General legislation include the mandate that the Secretary of State appoint, with the advice and consent of the Illinois Senate, a qualified Inspector General for the purpose of detection, deterrence and prevention of fraud, waste, mismanagement, misconduct and other abuses in the office. The law also provides the department with subpoena powers, strong whistleblower protections, audit authority and coded/protected positions for the IG staff.

Burns has helped change the culture of the office and restore integrity. In an effort to further combat corruption, Burns has implemented several innovative initiatives, including: the website ReportItNow.net, which allows the public or employees to file complaints online; an office-wide newsletter to communicate key announcements with rank-and-file employees; and an Audit Review Committee to provide a proactive element to evaluate all audit reports and improve systems and programs within the office.

He instituted a computer-based case management system to improve efficiency in day-to-day operations, as well as to provide law enforcement with a means of tracking suspicious conduct patterns. Burns also established a hotline for employees and the public to report improprieties they see within the office.

Burns worked to strengthen the relationship between the Office of Secretary of State and outside law enforcement agencies, including U.S. Attorney's Offices. This resulted in several prosecutions and further restored integrity to the office.

In 1993, Burns was appointed United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois by President William J. Clinton. He managed an office of 250 staff members, including 130 federal prosecutors. He served on the U.S. Attorney General's Advisory Committee and was Chairman of the Subcommittee on Public Corruption. During his tenure, his office prosecuted violent street gangs, public corruption, international drug smugglers, organized crime, white-collar financial fraud, environmental and civil rights violations, government contract fraud, health care and insurance fraud and corruption in labor unions. He held this post until 1997.

Prior to his appointment as U.S. Attorney, he worked in private practice in Chicago where he specialized in civil litigation, regulatory matters, sensitive investigations, and white-collar criminal defense. He is a fellow in the American College of Trial Lawyers.

Burns served as an assistant United States Attorney from 1971 to 1978. He tried dozens of cases as a federal prosecutor, eventually attaining the position of Chief of the Criminal Litigation Division.

Burns earned both his B.A. in history in 1967 and his law degree in 1971 from Northwestern University. At Northwestern, he was an All-American and Academic All-American basketball player. He played one year of professional basketball following his undergraduate work. Long active in the academic, athletic and alumni affairs of Northwestern University, Burns served on the Board of Trustees and the Visiting Committee of the School of Law. He received the Alumni Association's Service Award and the University's Law School Alumni Merit Award. In 1992, the National Association of Basketball Coaches selected Burns for the Silver Anniversary All-American Team, based on outstanding basketball and career achievements.

Burns currently resides in Wilmette, Illinois. He was born in Quincy, Illinois.