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Opinion Editorial
Fitzgerald Needs/Deserves Fair Evaluation
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There have been numerous articles, discussions and analyses of the announcement that the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, Patrick Fitzgerald, was ranked as “undistinguished” on a Department of Justice chart sent to the White House in March 2005. Some have also described his evaluation as one, which rated him as being just “mediocre”. If this wasn’t so critically important to the future of prosecutive activity in Chicago it would almost be comical and some have portrayed the story in a humorous light. This is much too serious to pass off as a joke at this time. However, none of the information available appears to fully explain the criteria utilized to reach the evaluation of Mr. Fitzgerald.

The Chicago Crime Commission is most concerned about this failure to provide a clear, convincing explanation of the methods and standards utilized to formulate the ratings for the United States Attorneys. It would seem that any objective evaluation of the success of the office managed by Mr. Fitzgerald would have resulted in a rating of excellent in all categories. His office has returned numerous indictments in all criminal areas including public corruption, white-collar crime, and organized crime, including street gangs with the guns and drugs they bring to the cases. Those indictments have resulted in significant convictions in almost all cases and there is every reason to believe that there are additional cases in the investigative stages for the future. There is a fear developing that the less than positive evaluation may be used as an excuse to remove Mr. Fitzgerald and sidetrack some of those future potential prosecutions.

The prosecutions and successes have been a shot of oxygen for the citizens of Illinois to begin to breathe air a bit freer of the stench of corruption that has polluted their daily lives for too long. However, there is more work to be completed and more air to freshen before Mr. Fitzgerald should be permitted to adjourn and move on to other challenges. The Chicago Crime Commission strongly suggests that other evaluations of Mr. Fitzgerald should be undertaken by peer and community groups. Any independent, unbiased assessment of the management and performance of Mr. Fitzgerald provided to the Attorney General or the President should provide a more appropriate evaluation.

The Chicago Crime Commission also suggests that it would provide solid arguments for the position that Mr. Fitzgerald has just begun tearing down old methods and needs additional time to complete the overhaul of corrupt systems that still exist in Illinois. Any attempt by the current administration to change the leadership of the Chicago office of the Department of Justice should be met with an overwhelming objection from the public at large and support from all members of our community for the continuation of the excellent work by Mr. Fitzgerald and his staff.