

Ty Basham

TOI Scholarship Essay

### **The Role of Township Government in Today's Society and in the Future**

About two years ago, right before Thanksgiving, a family walked into the Limestone Township Office in a panic. They walked in holding a utility shut-off notice; their power had just been shut off, and they were about to celebrate a holiday in the dark. If that family went to anyone else, like the state or federal government, they would not get the help they needed in time. They'd just be buried in paperwork. Because they made contact with the local township supervisor, he was happy to help. Derek Roemer wasn't just there to hold their hand; he gave them an emergency assistance grant right then and there. By the time they were able to drive back home, he had their power up and running.

Derek Roemer shared that story during our recent interview to show me why we need Township Government. They are here to help the locals when the big governments can't. They are for the people.

I'm a senior at Illini Bluffs, but I work for the Village of Bartonville Public Works. My position at the Village of Bartonville allowed me to see how some government works. I work with the Fire Chief every day. I see them run off to fires, and I get to be in the crews and trucks that help keep the village running. However, after talking to the Township Supervisor, Derek, my eyes were opened to the reality of what it takes to solve problems. The village may handle a lot

of the infrastructure, but the township is the one that keeps the community together and safe. They are our invisible safety net.

Nowadays, 99% of kids or young adults don't even really know the difference between the Village and the Township. I sure didn't until I talked to people who worked in the township. Supervisor Roemer explained how the township has three main jobs: assessing property values, taking care of roads, and providing “General Assistance” to people in need. We usually only notice their road crew when they plow snow or patch holes, but Roemer explained how the general assistance is just as critical because it's the main local welfare system to react faster than the state or anyone else ever could.

Roemer shared some facts with me that I had no idea about. Such as, did you know that Limestone Township is one of two townships out of the 1,425 in Illinois that owns and operates a public pool? They also do things like senior bus trips and recycling programs that fill tons of gaps that governments miss. The Township provided personalized solutions for people who live in areas that the big governments miss or forget about.

As the Township looks at the future, Roemer talks about how they are under attack. He explained to me how their scariest challenge in the next 10 years is consolidation. There are elimination bills constantly coming up in Springfield. The state thinks that bigger government can absorb the duties of townships in order to save money. But as a worker in the village and for my own business, Ty's Tide Washing, I know that “cheaper” isn't always better. I'm sure there is a spreadsheet that might tell us it's more efficient to cut it, but the numbers don't have feelings.

How are they supposed to instantly care about these families, such as the ones who had no power for Thanksgiving? How are they supposed to connect with all the locals on a personal level?

This is why I am going to Heartland Community College and then to a university to specialize in construction management. During Roemer's Interview, we then began to talk about "blue-collar" skills in the government. He told me that the best road commissioners, most of the time, actually worked on road crews. He believes the best government officials, such as the road commissioners, come from a combination of field experience and school smarts.

This is my end goal. By getting a degree in construction management and keeping my foundation in the trades, I want to be that kind of leader—the one who understands the big spreadsheet and how to work with asphalt. Township government isn't just some old system; it's the most responsive layer of government we have. Whether it's clearing neighborhoods of snow or helping neighbors in a crisis. The townships ensure that nobody gets left behind. I want to be the boss who has this kind of mentality in my future career. I hope to be the kind of person who can respond and act on these problems to help my community.