

# BOOK TALK

with author *Thom Reilly*

## The Failure of Governance in Bell, California Big-Time Corruption in a Small Town

by *Thom Reilly, Arizona State University*

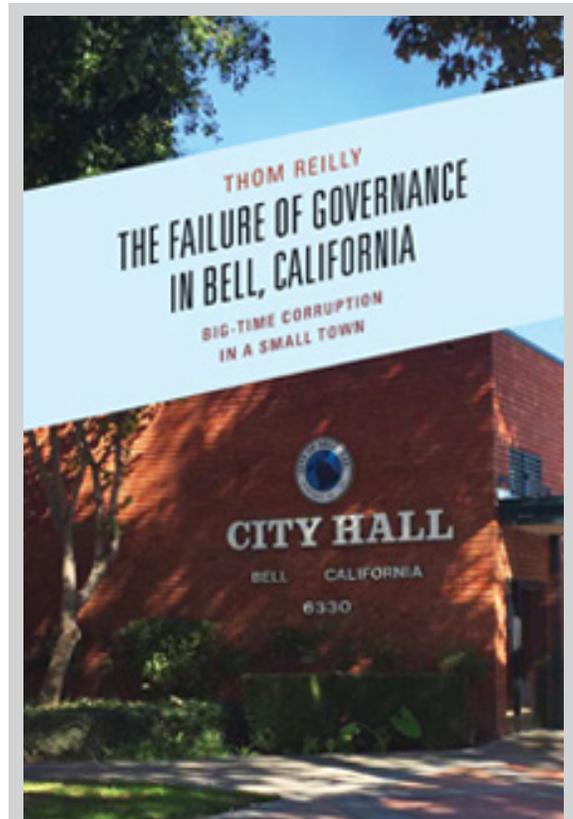
**Thursday, June 23**

**Historic 5th Street School  
Auditorium**

**401 S 4th Street  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89101**

*6pm book discussion*

In the late 2000s, the small Southern California city of Bell erupted in a scandal that revealed a truly astonishing level of municipal corruption— described by Los Angeles District Attorney Steve Cooley as “corruption on steroids.” *The Failure of Governance in Bell, California: Big Time Corruption in a Small Town*, by Arizona State University Professor Thom Reilly – himself former county manager of Clark County, Nevada – details how Bell was rendered vulnerable to such massive malfeasance by a disengaged public, lack of established ethical norms, absence of effective checks and balances, and minimal coverage by an overextended area news media. It is a grim and nearly unbelievable story. By considering factors arising from both theory and practice, Reilly makes clear why the sad saga of Bell, California, represents both a case study and a warning.



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**Dr. Thom Reilly** is the director of Morrison Institute for Public Policy and professor in the School of Public Affairs at Arizona State University. He is a former county manager for Clark County, Nevada (the Las Vegas Valley), and a current Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA). He and his work have appeared on NPR’s “Here and Now,” CNN Money, Wall Street Journal Radio, Fox Business News, and in The New York Times, The Guardian, Law 360, Governing, Businessweek and The Associated Press. He received his master and doctorate in public administration from the University of Southern California (USC) and has a bachelor’s in social work from the University of Memphis.

*This event is sponsored by*

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## Early reviews

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“Reilly’s excellent account of corruption in local government is written with the expertise of a scholar who is fluent in theory and the acumen of a practitioner who has witnessed such behavior up close and personal. This book replete with scandalous details, as well as insightful interpretations and suggestions for reform, will have broad appeal with the general public, for local administrators and in the classroom.”

*U.S Rep. Dina Titus, 1st District of Nevada;  
emeritus professor of political science, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

“Far beyond wildly unimaginable fiction, this reality-based book is an importantly great read on public affairs. It tells the story of a decade of Big Time Corruption in Bell, California – years of self-serving exercise of power shared among officials in deliberately flagrant violation of legal standards and other fundamentals of public service. Beyond that, Bell is also a sad case of sustained failure of professional, civic, legal, academic, and other institutions upon which society depends for responsible public affairs. As a former professional manager of Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada, and now a leading public-policy academician, Thom Reilly provides an in-depth analysis of the sordid details and broad schemes of this massive corruption. His deeply informed analysis of *The Failure of Governance in Bell, California*, warrants study by civic leaders, political officials, professional local-government managers, and students who hope to enter these public-service roles. It provides swift and hopefully lasting learning about abhorrent practices of all-too-easy corruption, thereby elevating understanding of necessities of elevated aspirations and practices of responsible government and other public affairs.”

*Chester A. Newland, Senior Professor of Public Administration,  
University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law;  
Duggan Distinguished Professor of Public Administration Emeritus, University of Southern California*

“Thom Reilly depicts the almost unbelievable levels of greed and corruption that brought an entire municipal government to its knees. His incisive narrative not only carefully details the many enabling conditions that allowed this brazen looting of a small, vulnerable community to occur, but also skillfully incorporates an analysis of cultural norms and governmental structures that historically have been designed to deter corruption. Virtually every page prompts substantive discussion topics for the reader. This is a must-read not only for students of government, administration and public policy, but for every concerned citizen. The account of the systematic and unchallenged dismantling of checks and balances and external safeguards against graft serves as a cautionary tale to anyone who thinks it couldn’t happen in their community.”

*Kathryn Landreth, former United States Attorney for the District of Nevada*

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