

The News-Gazette.com

All but one active gubernatorial campaign in debt

By Tom Kacich

Sunday January 31, 2010

Seven of the eight active candidates for governor go into Tuesday's election with a substantial campaign debt, somewhat ironic given the fact that most of them are hammering past and current state leaders about overspending.

In some cases, it's just wealthy candidates self-funding their campaigns and calling it a loan. If they win the election, there's always a chance they'll get some of their money back.

That category includes Republicans Andy McKenna of Chicago (whose wife has loaned his campaign \$2.5 million in the last three months), Adam Andrzejewski of Hinsdale (\$685,000) and Bill Brady of Bloomington (\$202,000 in personal loans since last June).

Two GOP candidates' campaigns have incurred smaller loans: \$35,000 by Jim Ryan and \$84,000 by Dan Proft.

Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn and Republican state Sen. Kirk Dillard have campaign debts that could become bothersome. Or not.

Dillard owes three campaign supporters a total of \$634,814. Quinn has racked up \$550,000 in loans this month alone, more than half to Chicago politicians – Alderman Ed Burke and former Illinois Senate President Emil Jones – who don't fit the governor's reform image.

The governor's salary in Illinois is \$177,412 a year.

"If you're spending your own money and you've got it, well, everyone's got to have a hobby," joked Kent Redfield, a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

But the big loans to other candidates are another story, he said.

"I think that people should look at where people get their money and what kind of relationship they're constructing, and how prudent they've been in terms of running a campaign," Redfield said. "You can get some sense about their ambitions by their willingness to go into debt and what kind of a debt."

Quinn's, especially, ought to raise eyebrows. He has received \$100,000 from Jones' campaign fund, \$100,000 from Burke's campaign fund, \$100,000 from another fund headed by Burke and another \$50,000 from the 14th Ward Regular Democratic Organization, also headed by Burke.

"Those are not what, when you think of Chicago reformers, those aren't the people who come to mind," Redfield said. "It tells you something about ambition and who they're willing to deal with."

The people willing to make big loans to Quinn and Dillard probably don't expect to be repaid, Redfield said.

"Dillard is not a wealthy man," he said. "If he works up a big debt in the campaign and doesn't win, I think most of that will just get written off."

"And I really don't think that Ed Burke expects to get paid back if Quinn loses. These are investments. They may be investments in policy, or they may be more than that. Look at our past two governors and you know that sometimes it's not about policy."

The eight active campaigns have a total of \$4.8 million in debts, more than half of which is McKenna's. His \$2.5 million in loans is less than the \$4 million Republican gubernatorial candidate Ron Gidwitz loaned his campaign in 2005 and '06. In the same campaign dairy magnate Jim Oberweis left himself with a \$1.97 million debt. Neither won the nomination that year.

Democrat Dan Hynes is the only gubernatorial candidate this year who hasn't gone into debt.

Pay cut

One of the Democratic candidates for the Champaign County Board in District 9 will take a pay cut if he is elected. Christopher Alix is currently one of three appointed trustees on the Urbana & Champaign Sanitary District board. That position pays \$6,000 a year. County board members are paid \$45 per meeting per day, or as much as \$1,800 a year.

Alix said he would, if elected, resign from the sanitary district board because he believes it would be a conflict of interest. "I'm not doing it for the money," Alix said of his county board campaign.

The king of quotes

Reporters all over the state will mourn the day next year when state Rep. Bill Black, R-Danville, retires from the Legislature. He is by far the most quotable lawmaker in a House that decades ago had a generous number of them. Last week, when I talked to Black about his endorsement of Kirk Dillard for governor, he came up with a great one that was, unfortunately, not quite relevant to the story. But it deserves an audience of more than one.

Speaking of his willingness to consider a state tax increase but not until significant budget cuts are made, Black said:

"I'm not giving that voracious appetite in Springfield more money until it does gastric band surgery because they'll spend every dollar we give them and after that they'll burp and take a nap and then ask for more and more and more and more."

Liataud to McKenna

James Liataud of Champaign, the owner of the Jimmy John's sandwich shops franchise, dropped another \$10,000 into the Andy McKenna gubernatorial campaign last week, putting his total commitment to McKenna at \$60,000.

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