

## Money a factor in race for Ill. Senate president

By CHRISTOPHER WILLIS

Associated Press Writer

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill.

In the battle for the job of Illinois Senate president, John Cullerton has a lot more ammunition than his opponents.

Cullerton has raised \$802,240 in political money, nearly as much as all his opponents combined, new campaign finance reports show. Now the Chicago Democrat can dole that out to colleagues in hopes of winning their support, and he can argue that his fundraising skills will help Democrats maintain their Senate majority.

No. 2 on the money list was Sen. James Clayborne of Belleville. He pulled in a little over \$328,000.

Some experts who monitor money in Illinois politics are startled by how much the candidates are raising as they win control of Democrats in the state Senate.

"It is big money. We haven't seen a real leadership contest on the Democratic side in quite a while," Cindi Canary, head of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, said Tuesday.

She said the emphasis on fundraising could further concentrate power in the hands of the legislative leaders -- often a sore spot among rank-and-file lawmakers who say the governor and leaders usually make the key decisions.

The current Senate president, Emil Jones of Chicago, announced recently that he's retiring when his term expires in January. With no clear successor in place, a herd of senators has expressed interest in replacing him.

Money alone won't determine the winner. Regional and racial coalitions matter, too, and so do friendships.

But fundraising is an important tool for the candidates to prove they're serious. They don't spend the money on ads for themselves. Instead, they transfer it to Senate candidates -- the people who will vote on a new president.

They hope to deliver two basic messages:

-- I'm helping you now, so please help me when it's time to choose a new president.

-- I'll be able to raise the money we'll need to keep the Senate in Democratic hands for years to come.

"This is all about creating relationships or a sense of obligation. They're also trying to demonstrate fundraising abilities for their caucus," said Kent Redfield, an expert on political money at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"Everybody is trying to show they can deliver."

That can mean accepting big money from people and groups who stand to benefit from the senators' actions.

Cullerton, co-chairman of the Senate's civil law committee, has taken tens of thousands of dollars from law firms, pharmaceutical companies and medical organizations with an interest in malpractice law. The vice chairman of the insurance committee also got big donations from insurance companies.

And Clayborne, head of the energy and environment committee, accepts major donations from gas companies, energy associations, electric companies and more.

Neither Cullerton nor Clayborne returned messages left at their offices Tuesday.

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On the Net:



-- State Board of Elections: [www.elections.state.il.us](http://www.elections.state.il.us)

-- Campaign for Political Reform: [www.ilcampaign.org](http://www.ilcampaign.org)

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