



Stroger squirrels away \$500,000 in campaign contributions

By Ted Cox | Daily Herald Staff

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Cook County Board President Todd Stroger is spending campaign money like someone either ultra-confident of victory or who's out to lose in the Feb. 2 Democratic primary.

According to campaign-finance disclosures posted in the early morning hours Thursday - after a midnight deadline had passed - Stroger squirreled away \$500,000 in two certificates of deposit at the Amalgamated Bank in Chicago last August, even as his opponents were gearing up to spend hundreds of thousands on TV ads and other campaign expenditures.

"It certainly looks like he is more interested in putting money away in the bank than running for office," said Kent Redfield, a veteran campaign-finance watchdog and political professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield. "This is certainly not the picture of someone whose biggest concern is, 'What am I going to do after I win the election.'"

According to the disclosure, Friends of Todd H. Stroger for President of the Cook County Board had \$640,403 on hand midway through last year. The campaign added but \$103,905 in 2009, well behind contributions for competitors Chicago Hyde Park Alderman Toni Preckwinkle, Circuit Court Clerk Dorothy Brown and Metropolitan Water Reclamation District President Terrence O'Brien.

While those three also were spending hundreds of thousands in the second half of 2009, Stroger was taking out two CDs worth \$500,000 and declaring but \$91,754 in other expenditures. The CDs were listed as an "investment."

According to Redfield, if Stroger loses, he would be able to keep all the money in his campaign fund, but with provisos. He would not be able to simply pocket it, buy a car for his family or pay off his mortgage or anything else that would create an income-tax liability.

Yet Redfield said Stroger would be able to pay relatives a salary, buy things for friends, give the money out to other politicians or even donate it to charity.

Brown posted her required finance disclosure shortly before the midnight deadline Wednesday. It said Friends of Dorothy Brown had \$208,808 on hand midway through last year and added \$322,115. She spent \$343,822, leaving her \$187,101 at the end of the year. One \$60,000 expenditure was repaying a campaign loan to herself.

The Stroger campaign did not return phone calls and e-mails asking about the president's plans for the invested \$500,000.

Whatever his thinking, it left his primary opponents flummoxed. "We've raised more money than anybody else the last year - over a million dollars - and we're spending it as fast as it comes in the door," Preckwinkle said. "So I can't figure it out."

Daily Herald Politics and Projects Editor Joseph Ryan contributed to this report.