



Governor candidates have no qualms cashing big checks

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After a year in which Illinois politicians passed landmark laws to rein in moneyed interests, candidates for governor are having no qualms about cashing big checks while they still can to keep their campaigns running.

Nearly half of the \$13 million raised so far in both the heated Republican and Democratic primaries for governor has rolled into campaigns in big checks of \$25,000 or more, a Daily Herald review of recent disclosure reports finds.

In all, at least 108 checks of \$25,000 or more were cashed, with several candidates taking single payments of as much as \$250,000 from an interest group or person.

It's not just big checks. Some candidates get a third, or even half their campaign funding from one organization or big-money donors.

Campaign finance watchdogs blame the game, not the players.

Meanwhile, they wait for the limits approved last year to finally take effect in time for the 2012 state elections.

Under those limits, individuals would only be allowed to give \$5,000 to a candidate, and unions and companies would be cut back to \$10,000 per candidate, per election cycle. Until 2012, however, Illinois remains one of the few states where donors can give as much as they want to any candidate, as long as it is periodically disclosed.

"It is very difficult in a completely unregulated system to say unilaterally, 'I'm not going to raise money,'" says Kent Redfield, a retired political science professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield who specializes in campaign finance issues and has helped craft reform legislation over the years.

And despite the economic recession that has sent unemployment to double digit levels, Redfield said there will always be a pile of cash for politicians.

"There are a lot of people with money who have an interest in who becomes the next governor of Illinois," he said.

In this campaign season leading up to the Feb. 2 primary, the ones who still have the money appear to be big unions, business owners, financial mavens and personal injury lawyers - the same ones who have been underwriting political campaigns for decades.

Take a look at Gov. Pat Quinn.

The Chicago Democrat with a lifetime in the business of politics is receiving major support from the Service Employees International Union, which represents 165,000 Illinois workers in fields ranging from home health care to child care and security.

The union has so far donated at least \$1 million in cash to Quinn and another \$200,000 in polling and research work. That amounts to about a third of the \$3.8 million the governor had raised heading into the weekend.

SEIU spokesman Ray Quintanilla says the union is backing Quinn with so much cash because he "has consistently stood up for working families and has demonstrated the courage, leadership and vision to help get Illinois through its current fiscal crisis and get our economy back on track."

Yet, that isn't the only big money Quinn is getting.

About \$2.5 million of Quinn's campaign fundraising has been in the form of checks of \$25,000 or more - making up more than 60 percent of his war chest.

Among the major contributors are personal injury lawyers, who donated at least \$225,000 in large checks.

Illinois Comptroller Dan Hynes, Quinn's challenger, has a similar record.

The three-term statewide official has raised about \$3.2 million since July. Of that, more than \$1.5 million has come in from checks of \$25,000 or more, or about 50 percent.

Like Quinn, Hynes' biggest backing comes from unions.

His major support comes from several trades that work on road construction and other projects funded by the state, including the various local divisions of the Laborers International Union and the International Union of Operating Engineers. The laborers have chipped in at least \$750,000 to Hynes campaign. The engineers put in about \$250,000.

Additionally, teachers unions have started to send large checks to Hynes with endorsements having recently rolled out. The Illinois Education Association just sent him \$100,000.

Charles McBarron, a spokesman for the Illinois Education Association that represents suburban and downstate public teachers, said the union's 133,000 members are dramatically affected by government regulation and funding.

"We believe it is important that we have a voice," he said.

On the Republican side, the picture is the largely the same, although some of the big money is coming from big business rather than large unions.

However, two candidates are laying their own wealth on the line. Opponents of campaign finance limits argue the laws handcuff candidates who face such challengers with their own deep pockets.

Take Andy McKenna, the former state GOP boss now running as an "outsider." He has put \$1.8 million of his own cash into the race. But he has also raised another \$2.6 million. His total war chest exceeds both candidates on the Democratic side.

Much like the Democrats, 40 percent of the cash McKenna has raised comes from big donations. At least 29 checks to his campaign are for \$25,000 or more.

McKenna's biggest contributors include Richard Duchossois and his son, who run Arlington Park racetrack in Arlington Heights. The pair gave the Chicago candidate \$125,000.

McKenna's other top backers include a host of business and finance titans, including the founder of Jimmy John's sandwich franchise and a Goldman Sachs investment banker.

Another top fundraiser in the GOP field is state Sen. Kirk Dillard, who has pulled in nearly \$1.5 million. About \$1 million came in large donations, including two \$250,000 checks from separate supporters.

Jack Roeser, a longtime conservative player in Illinois politics, signed one of those checks, which officially

shows up as a campaign loan. Roeser is against gay rights and runs a taxpayer advocacy group that pushes teacher pension reforms.

When asked why he would personally cut such a large check to Dillard, the 86-year-old Roeser said he informed the veteran Hinsdale lawmaker, "I don't want one bloody thing from you except good government."

Others in the crowded six-candidate field have raised far less money, but still rely on big donations as well.

Former Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan raised \$538,000 with 42 percent coming in large checks. A managing partner in the retail insurance brokerage firm Willis HRH, which landed the naming rights to the old Sears Tower, gave Ryan \$52,000.

Hinsdale businessman Adam Andrzejewski raised \$100,000 in cash and put in \$1.1 million of his own money. Nearly half of the \$100,000 came from one donor.

Chicago conservative commentator Dan Proft raised about \$275,000 and put in \$17,000 of his own money. He received two \$25,000 checks, one from the president of a Waukegan shipping supply company and another from major GOP donor James Pritzker, who heads an investment firm and is a member of the famous family that built the Hyatt hotel chain.