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'Jeans Day' revelations may unravel Brown's campaign

by **KATIE SMITH**

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Dorothy Brown said Tuesday her campaign for Cook County Board president has moved past last week's bad publicity surrounding her "Jeans Day" program, but political experts said the flap did serious damage to her candidacy.

Jeans Day, a voluntary program for employees in the circuit clerk's office, charged \$2 to wear jeans. When it came to light last week, it was met with criticism and questions. Brown said the program's proceeds went to charities and employee-appreciation programs, but hasn't provided proof of where all the money went.

"We've really moved beyond that issue," Brown said, defending it as a "great program that just really was unfortunately publicized."

Dick Simpson, a professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Chicago, said Jeans Day only added to a list of questions raised about Brown's ethical conduct. "She will continue to lose ground," he said. "But she is still a major contender."

Another political observer agreed.

Kent Redfield, who teaches political science at the University of Illinois at Springfield, said: "People are highlighting [the program] because it fits into what appears to be a larger pattern of soliciting donations from employees. There's been a long tradition of elected officials essentially shaking down their employees for campaign contributions."

Early last month, polls showed that Brown led the four candidates in the Democratic race, but the most recent Tribune poll, released last week, showed Ald. Toni Preckwinkle leading Brown by 12 percentage points.

Preckwinkle also leads the candidates in campaign donations, with more than \$230,000 in reported in the past week. Brown's records show she received about \$30,000 in the same period.

Redfield said the attention to Jeans Day hurt Brown's chances and has helped Preckwinkle. "It helps Preckwinkle in terms of running as a reformer to have one of her opponents criticized insofar as old politics," he said.

Also in the race are Terence O'Brien, chairman of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, and incumbent board president Todd Stroger, who trails in the polls. The Republican candidates are John Garrido, an attorney who also is a Chicago police officer, and former state legislator Roger Keats.