

Crain's Blogs

Greg Hinz



Words fly over who's more anti-Stroger

Posted by Greg H. at 9/9/2009 4:20 PM CDT

The question of whether to restrict Cook County Board President Todd Stroger's extraordinary veto power has the fur flying in Springfield, with two legislators who are running for higher office squabbling over ownership rights.

At issue is a proposal to take away a requirement in state law that a four-fifths vote of the Cook County Board is needed to override a presidential veto.

Mr. Stroger has used that power — other counties require only a three-fifths vote — to protect the penny-on-a-dollar hike in the county's sales tax that he pushed through last year. But the tax has become extraordinarily unpopular, particularly in suburban and mostly white neighborhoods.

Sensing a hot issue, state Rep. Julie Hamos, D-Evanston, who is running for Congress in the suburban 10th District, on Wednesday sent an e-mail to supporters announcing that she's sponsoring a bill to cut the Cook standard to three-fifths.

"I will work with my colleagues to develop broad-based support for this bill, and I look forward to working with House leadership to bring it to a vote," Ms. Hamos wrote. "But we need you to make it happen."

The e-mail then directs voters to a petition on Ms. Hamos' campaign Web site.

The only problem is that a similar measure has been sponsored for each of the past three years by another state rep, Chicago Democrat John Fritchey, who currently is running for a Northwest Side seat on the Cook County Board. Mr. Fritchey was not exactly thrilled that Ms. Hamos didn't consult with him.

In an e-mail to his supporters, Mr. Fritchey noted that he and Congressman (then County Commissioner) Mike Quigley announced such legislation years ago. The bill passed the Senate, but has been stalled in the House, where Speaker Michael Madigan just happens to have lots of county patronage workers in his 13th Ward Regular Democratic Organization.

In a follow-up phone call, Mr. Fritchey termed Ms. Hamos' e-mail "an opportunistic move."

"She's never been involved in this issue," even failing to sign on as a co-sponsor of his bill this year, Mr. Fritchey said. "She had five months to get involved with me on this issue this year, then she gets passionate about it right after she announces for Congress."

No response yet from Team Hamos. I'll let you know if they get back to me.

Meanwhile, it looks like campaign season has begun.