

Big Money in Smaller Races, Part II

The influence of big money in 15 contested State House primaries

Wednesday 05/01/2018

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Public interest Advocate

With the news about today's subject matter hearing for [HB 5531](#)—the bill introduced by Representative Kelly Cassidy in the Illinois House of Representatives to create a statewide Small Donor Match program—Illinois PIRG Education Fund decided to expand its previous analysis on campaign contributions to more State House races.

This analysis relied on campaign contribution disclosure filings to determine the reality of the “unofficial” primary that did not end on March 20: the “money primary.”

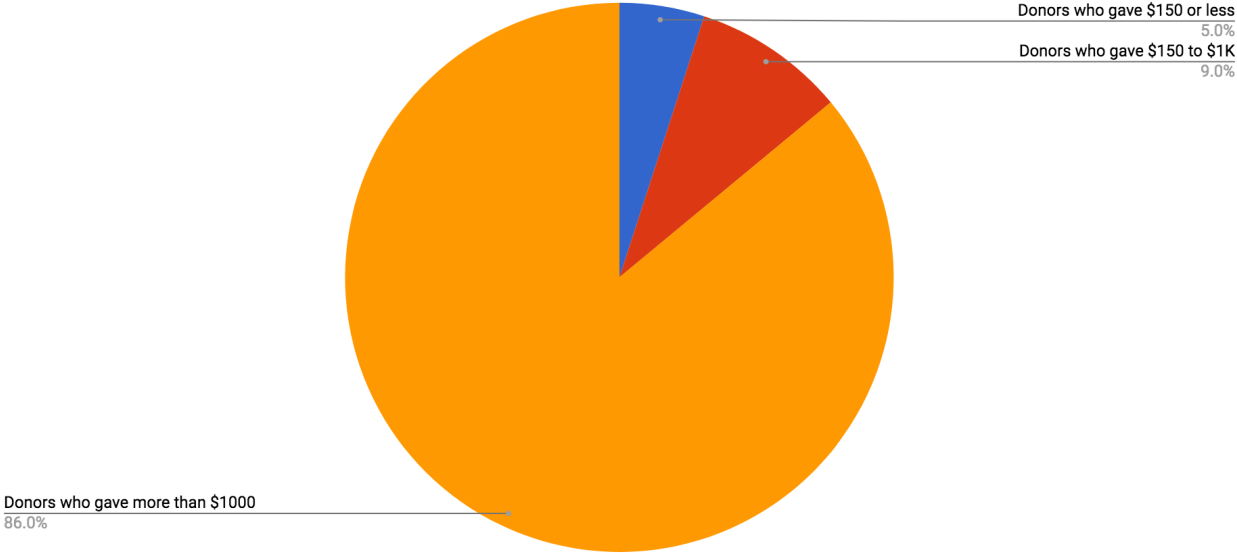
“Money primary” refers to the increasing importance placed on a candidate's access to major money in fundraising for their campaign in order to stand out from the rest of the pack—and sometimes, just to remain part of the pack.

While the scale of campaign financing is an important part of any election analysis, it is only part of the story. Just as significant, is the type of donors contributing to these staggering numbers. Not only is more money going into elections, but campaign finance is increasingly dominated by “big money” from a small group of wealthy donors.

And with an unprecedented number of state legislators in IL not seeking reelection this year, there are more contenders than ever competing for the donations of this wealthy elite. With that in mind, Illinois PIRG Education Fund revisited its look at campaign contributions in state races, this time focusing only on just State House districts, with a more expansive list of races.

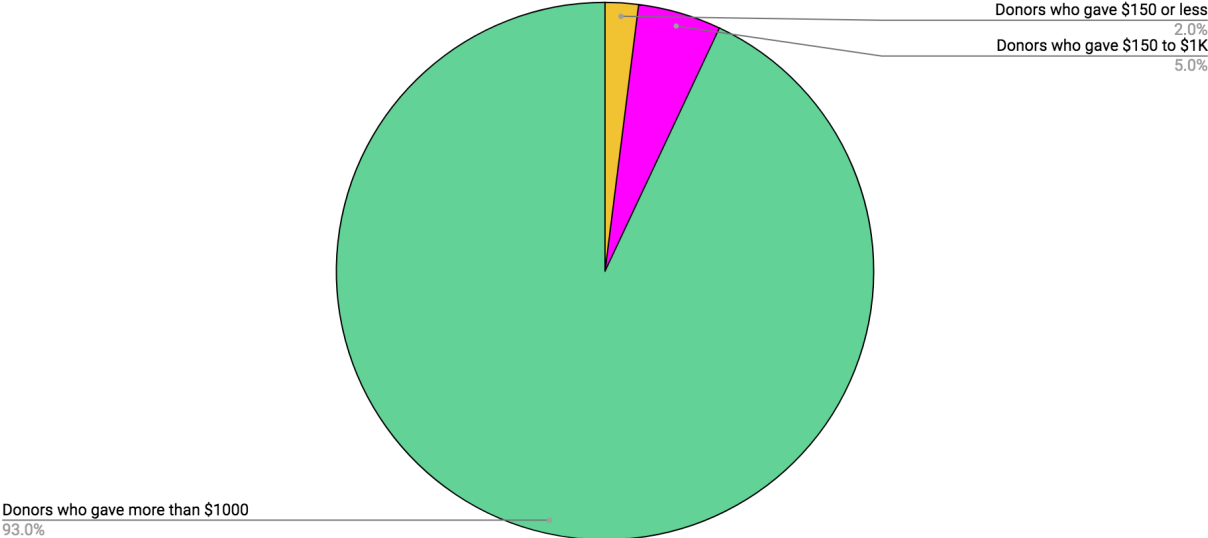
We found that in the 15 contested party primaries analyzed, **86 percent of money raised came from donors giving \$1,000 or more, while only 5 percent came from donors giving less than \$150.**

Donor Distribution Across 15 Contested Primary Races



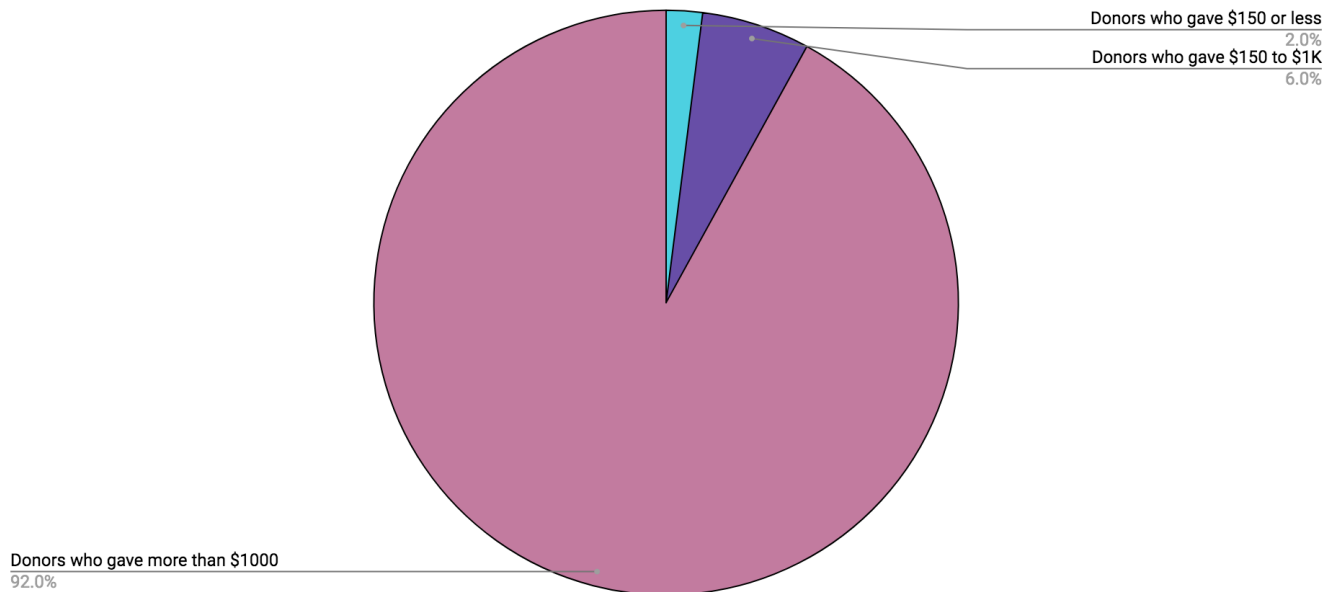
Candidates with the most money in the contested races of these 14 districts received **93 percent of their campaign contributions from donors giving \$1000 or more, and just 2 percent from donors giving \$150 or less.**

Candidates with Most Money in 15 Contested Primary Races



While the candidate with the most money does not always win, a parallel pattern of data was apparent when examining the campaign contributions of only the candidates who were ultimately victorious in their primary contests. Candidates who won in these 15 races received **92 percent of their campaign funds from big donors giving \$1,000 or more, and only 2 percent from donors giving \$150 or less.**

Candidates Who Won



Finally, 12 of the 15 contested races in the 14 districts were won by the candidate with the most resources. All 3 of the races analyzed where the candidate with less money ultimately won took place in southern Illinois.

The Races

For this report, we looked at Representative Districts 4, 5, 17, 25, 42, 59, 82, 89, 93, 101, 110, 112, 115, and 118. We selected only contested races in State House districts. We attempted to choose districts that had competitive races and represented diverse districts—including urban, suburban and rural—and from various regions in the state. We chose from contested primaries in both parties, and included races both with and without an incumbent running for reelection. Of course, this relatively small sample of districts is not necessarily representative of all statehouse races.

All contribution data came from the time frame of January 1, 2017 to March 20, 2018, to only account for contributions through the March 2018 primary. Data for smaller, non-itemized

contributions was pulled from quarterly reports from 2017 through the first quarter of 2018, as the only reliable means for which to ascertain campaign contributions. Thus, any non-itemized contributions received post-primary by any candidates' political committees were included (mostly relevant regarding the candidate who won).

It is important to note that the percentage of small donors increased slightly from our previous report (which found that in the contested party primaries for 10 state legislative districts, **91 percent of contributions came from donors giving \$1,000 or more, while only 3 percent came from donors giving \$150 or less**). This increase is consistent with the fact that more data on contributions under \$150 made since January 1, 2018 became available with the April release of D-1 quarterly reports for the first quarter of 2018.

Included in Appendix A are tables, organized by district, that summarize the aggregate of contributions received by each candidate that were either \$150 or less, or \$1000 or more.

Small Donor Matching Program

Candidates who lack access—or whose platform does not appeal—to the small pool of big-money donors face challenges in running a competitive campaign, even if they otherwise would have support from a large portion of the electorate.

As seen by the data, the the majority of most candidates' campaign funds came from donors who gave \$1000 or more. This greater emphasis on larger contributions means that candidates are sorted and filtered not only by votes in the actual primary elections, but also by candidates' ability to raise big money from a small, elite pool of donors. This can result in candidates dropping out of a race, and removing themselves as an option for voters, before any voting even happens.

There are successful, proven models to combat this “money primary” by empowering small donors so that their voices play a more central role in our democracy. For example, in New York City's 2013 City Council campaigns, small donors were responsible for 61 percent of participating candidates' contributions, when funds from a matching program were included. All but two of the winning candidates participated in the program, showing that candidates can raise the money they needed to win without looking for large-dollar contributions.

Seeking to replicate these successes across the country, good government groups have called for small donor empowerment reforms. With such reforms, candidates would be able to run

competitive campaigns with a strong grassroots base of support, even if they do not have big money support.

In 2015, when an advisory question appeared on the Chicago municipal ballot, 79 percent of voters supported enacting a small donor matching program. On May 16th, 2017, the Illinois Senate passed a [Small Donor Matching Bill \(SB 1424\)](#) with bipartisan support. This bill creates a small donor matching system for Illinois' state-level elections. The legislation has now progressed to the Illinois House of Representatives. [HB 5531](#) is essentially the same bill in function, although it was introduced separately; and despite today's strong show of community support at the House Elections & Campaign Finance Reform committee's subject matter hearing, HB 5531 likely will not pass out of the House this session.

Although it is true that money alone does not win elections, and that the candidate with the most money does not always win, the Illinois campaign finance system requires that candidates seek the vast majority of their financial backing from a small pool of wealthy donors. This makes a strong case for the need to change how campaigns are funded, for a better, more robust, participatory democracy.

**Contact Hannah Kim, Illinois PIRG Education Fund Advocate at hkim@illinoispirg.org with any inquiries.*

**APPENDIX A: Tables with Summary Data of All
Monetary Contributions by Donor Size**



State House District 4 – Democratic Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Delia Ramirez

State House District 4 Democratic Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Delia Ramirez	\$42,090.22	13.84%	\$221,741.89	72.93%
Iris Millan	\$7,709.00	4.21%	\$151,000.00	82.52%
Alyx Pattison	\$22,193.67	9.58%	\$150,801.64	65.08%
Anne Shaw	\$57,145.00	20.36%	\$122,636.64	43.69%

State House District 5 – Democratic Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Lamont Robinson, Jr.

State House District 5 Democratic Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Lamont Robinson, Jr.	\$3,810.00	0.37%	\$1,003,407.02	97.75%
Dilara Sayeed	\$20,462.32	9.68%	\$156,711.05	74.16%
Kenneth Dunkin	\$0.00	0.00%	\$11,000.00	100.00%
Felicia Bullock	\$6,271.00	67.31%	\$9,316.00	0.00%

State House District 17 – Democratic Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Jennifer Gong Gershowitz

State House District 17 Democratic Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Candance Chow	\$21,961.00	8.71%	\$179,250.00	71.13%
Peter Dagher	\$5,553.58	25.17%	\$11,971.58	54.25%
Alexandra Eidenberg	\$24,138.31	23.51%	\$50,156.00	48.86%
Jennifer Gong Gershowitz	\$10,580.52	1.42%	\$698,259.47	93.63%
Mary Rita Luecke	\$26,546.26	20.34%	\$61,166.88	46.86%

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State House District 25 – Democratic Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Curtis Tarver II

State House District 25 Democratic Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
William Calloway	\$0.00	0.00%	\$4,250.00	100.00%
Grace Chan McKibben	\$17,056.00	21.17%	\$40,276.97	50.00%
Angelique Collins	\$1,475.13	10.95%	\$12,000.00	89.05%
Adrienne Irmer	\$18,772.70	19.62%	\$46,100.00	48.18%
Anne Marie Miles	\$2,125.00	17.08%	\$5,300.00	42.60%
Flynn Rush	\$665.00	0.73%	\$84,400.00	92.89%
Curtis Tarver II	\$28,952.00	19.61%	\$75,554.74	51.18%

State House District 42 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Delia Ramirez

State House District 42 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Ryan Byrne	\$960.00	17.32%	\$4,284.18	77.27%
Amy Grant	\$5,114.00	6.84%	\$60,075.00	80.38%
Burt Minor	\$5,061.15	22.77%	\$6,600.00	29.70%

State House District 59 – Democratic Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Daniel Didech

State House District 59 Democratic Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Daniel Didech	\$910.00	0.34%	\$253,403.51	94.80%
Susan Malter	\$3,988.35	4.51%	\$73,870.00	83.47%

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State House District 59 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Karen Feldman

State House District 59 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Marko Sukovic	\$4,570.00	23.21%	\$12,720.00	64.60%
Karen Feldman	\$1,680.00	1.93%	\$80,080.81	92.11%

State House District 82 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Jim Durkin

State House District 82 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Jim Durkin (incumbent)	\$5,870.96	0.25%	\$2,247,841.49	96.43%
Michael Straub	\$4,050.62	2.33%	\$152,673.83	87.94%

State House District 89 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Andrew Chesney

State House District 89 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Steven Fricke	\$9,239.00	18.25%	\$34,829.05	68.78%
Andrew Chesney	\$3,782.42	2.72%	\$116,452.09	83.82%

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State House District 93 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Norrine Hammond

State House District 93 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Norrine Hammond (incumbent)	\$13,156.51	2.24%	\$516,534.92	87.93%
Joshua Griffith	\$635.00	1.89%	\$30,469.62	90.53%

State House District 101 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Dan Caulkins

State House District 101 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Dan Caulkins	\$4,915.00	6.25%	\$68,848.00	87.55%
Todd Henricks	\$5,646.00	18.68%	\$14,000.00	46.33%
Randy Keith	\$4,238.00	3.13%	\$128,372.89	94.84%

State House District 110 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Chris Miller

State House District 110 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Chris Miller	\$1,159.59	2.54%	\$36,990.84	81.01%
Terry Davis	\$1,675.00	12.34%	\$6,000.00	44.20%

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State House District 112 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Dwight Kay

State House District 112 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Dwight Kay (R)	\$8,015.00	14.34%	\$37,525.00	67.15%
Wendy Erhart (R)	\$2,845.00	3.93%	\$67,549.37	93.27%

State House District 115 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Marsha Griffin

State House District 115 Democratic Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Marsha Griffin	\$69.10	0.13%	\$51,362.99	97.50%
Tamiko Mueller	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

State House District 118 – Republican Primary

Who you'll see on the ballot: Patrick Windhorst

State House District 118 Republican Primary	Total for Contributions at \$150 or less	% of Contributions at \$150 or less	Total for Contributions at \$1000 or more	% of Contributions at \$1000 or more
Patrick Windhorst	\$7,359.00	4.76%	\$138,865.62	89.83%
Wes Sherrod	\$310.00	1.41%	\$21,683.18	98.59%
Samuel Stratemeyer	\$301.00	0.09%	\$328,416.61	99.91%