



Incumbency Helps Hoyer Raise Funds; Funds Help Hoyer Stay in Office - Southern Maryland Headline News

Originally posted on: August 29, 2009

By GRAHAM MOOMAW

COLLEGE PARK (August 28, 2009) -- To the casual observer, Rep. Steny Hoyer appears to be one of the most secure members of Congress and his accumulation of a massive war chest could look like overkill.

Hoyer, a 14-term Democratic incumbent from Southern Maryland, raised \$668,462 during the second quarter of 2009, bringing his total for the year to just over \$1.26 million, according to documents filed with the Federal Election Commission.

To campaign finance experts, it's not overkill. It's par for the course.

"Despite the fact that they (incumbents) seem incredibly secure to us, they generally do not feel that way," said John Samples, director of the Center for Representative Government at the Cato Institute, a public policy think tank.

Even with no serious challenger in sight, incumbents tend to "run scared" in order to ensure against any threats that may emerge. Any drop in fundraising totals or margin of victory could be seen as signs of weakness by potential challengers.

"The money matters less in terms of attracting challengers," Samples said. "The most important thing is whether they think he's beatable."

The only potential challenger to file with the FEC is Charles Lollar, a Republican from Charles County. Democrat Thomas Defibaugh Sr. of Glen Burnie, has declared his candidacy with the State Board of Elections but has yet to file with the FEC.

Lollar has not officially announced his candidacy and has yet to launch a major fundraising push, said a spokeswoman.

"Our plan is to not allow money to be the deciding factor," said Holly Robichaud, Lollar's spokeswoman. She said of Hoyer and his fundraising prowess that "you could pretty much say he's got a for-sale sign on his forehead."

Thomas Mann, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, another think tank, said that in addition to raising money for their own safety, strong House incumbents also use their funds to help colleagues within their party.

"More recently, they have been expected to raise and transfer to their party campaign committees large sums to be used in competitive districts," Mann said. "As majority leader, Hoyer is expected to raise millions of dollars for his party's congressional elections."

Hoyer seems to be living up to the task. So far this year, he has transferred \$385,000 to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the self-described "campaign arm" for House Democrats. Hoyer has also contributed \$25,000 to the New York State Democratic Committee, \$10,000 to the Maryland Democratic Party and \$42,000 to 11 specific Democrats' campaigns.

Money isn't the sole determining factor for elections, but it does tend to give incumbents a tighter hold on office, said Dave Levinthal, communications director at the Center for Responsive Politics. His organization tracks campaign financing.

"Incumbency is a very difficult obstacle to overcome for any challenger," Levinthal said. "With incumbency comes dollars."

Collins Bailey, a Republican who ran against Hoyer in 2008, said that the money isn't as important as the message. Bailey won almost 25 percent of the vote last year, despite raising only \$26,870 to Hoyer's \$3.6 million.

To the contrary, Bailey sees Hoyer's long history as a well-funded, perennial politician as a disadvantage for the incumbent because he senses a possible voter backlash against Washington in 2010.

"I believe in a citizen Congress," Bailey said. "Go up there to do the people's business and come on home."

Bailey said he plans on challenging Hoyer again in 2010, and he thinks his limited-government message will resonate with disaffected voters.

"The American people are smart . . . they get it," said Bailey. "It's the elected officials who have been there for years that don't get it."

Despite Bailey's optimism, others believe that Hoyer is firmly entrenched in the 5th District for reasons beyond mere fundraising ability.

"Hoyer has a solid Democratic district and is very popular with his constituents," said Mann. "The money he raises is not his most valuable asset in winning re-election."

Capital News Service contributed to this report.