

Chopping into Forest Preserve: Stroger insists it 'repay' \$11 mil. to ease county deficit

Chicago Sun-Times, February 1, 2007, by Steve Patterson

Cook County Board President Todd Stroger wants to take as much as \$11 million from the Forest Preserve District he controls to help balance the budget of the separate county government he also controls. Stroger told environmentalists of his plan Wednesday, and they blasted it as irresponsible, as did Commissioner Mike Quigley, who said he'll use his role as Forest Preserve finance chairman to block the effort.

'Is it worth it?'

But Stroger says he simply wants to collect on \$16 million the larger county government gave the Forest Preserve years ago, helping it bail out of financial troubles, and he appears to have a majority of the board's support to do it. Some, though, say the county bailout was a gift, while Commissioner William Beavers and others say it was a loan they want repaid to help balance a \$500 million deficit in the county's \$3 billion budget.

"[Stroger] wants to take 25 percent of the Forest Preserve's operating budget to fix 2 percent of the county budget deficit," said Benjamin Cox of Friends of the Forest Preserves. "Is it worth it?"