

News Release

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Supreme Court Fundraising Tops \$11 Million Report Details Growing Reliance on Lawyer Money— Defense Firms Dominate -- 25 Donors Supply 24% of Money

Austin, Texas: A new study reveals that the nine current members of the Texas Supreme Court raised a total of \$11 million in their most recent general election campaigns between 1994 and 1998. Texans for Public Justice classifies and analyzes thousands of donors by their business and ideological interests in [*Checks & Imbalances: How Texas Supreme Court Justices Raised \\$11 Million*](#).

“It’s business as usual at the Texas Supreme Court,” said Texans for Public Justice Director Craig McDonald. “Corporations and their high-powered law firms pour in millions of dollars and the court cranks out pro-business opinions.”

Among the report’s major findings is that the justices’ dependency on lawyers for money has escalated. The justices elected in 1994 collected only 35 percent of their cash from lawyers. The four justices who stood for election in 1998 raised 57 percent of their money from lawyers. This indicates how the Judicial Campaign Fairness Act, enacted by the legislature in 1995 in an effort to limit contributions from the law firms and lawyers who practice before the court, has had little or no impact on the court’s fundraising practices.

“Ninety-six percent of the judges’ campaign money comes from checks of \$100 or more and 99 percent of attorneys say contributions influence judicial opinions,” said Cristen Feldman, Director of TPJ’s Court Reform Project. “Texas has got to take special interest money out of its judges pockets. Everyone who goes to court deserves a fair shake—not just the big donors.”

Among the findings of *Checks & Imbalances*:

- The average war chest of the justices was \$1.4 million, or almost three times the average war chest of their opponents. Justice Hecht amassed the largest war chest (\$2.1 million). Justice Baker amassed the largest advantage, raising \$334 for every \$1 his challenger raised.
- Lawyers and law firms supplied \$5.2 million (48 percent) of the justices’ money. Business and defense attorneys accounted for 79 percent of the total amount from lawyers. Plaintiff lawyers accounted for 13 percent of that total.

- Contributions to the court were highly concentrated. The justices took \$2.6 million (24 percent of the total raised) from just 25 sources of cash.
- The Energy and Natural Resources sector—led by the Bass family—was the most important source of money after lawyers (\$1.4 million contributed). The top individual donor was diversified oil man Louis A. Beecherl, Jr. (\$58,486 contributed). PACs and individuals affiliated with Texans for Lawsuit Reform and the Texas Civil Justice League supplied 15 percent (\$1.6 million) of the justices’ money.

Fattest War Chest		
		Total
Rank	Justice*	Raised
1	Hecht ⁱ ('94)	\$2,052,989
2	Enoch ⁱ ('98)	\$1,511,691
3	Abbott ⁱ ('98)	\$1,432,751
4	Phillips ⁱ ('96)	\$1,386,903
5	O'Neill ('98)	\$1,214,450
6	Owen ('94)	\$1,171,665
7	Hankinson ⁱ ('98)	\$1,153,747
8	Baker ⁱ ('96)	\$1,097,980
	TOTAL	\$11,022,176

Biggest Money Lead Over Opponents		
		Winner:
Rank	Winner*	Loser \$ Ratio
1	Baker ⁱ ('96)	334:1
2	Phillips ⁱ ('96)	69:1
3	Hankinson ⁱ ('98)	68:1
4	Enoch ⁱ ('98)	18:1
5	Abbott ⁱ ('98)	7.6:1
6	O'Neill ('98)	1.4:1
7	Hecht ⁱ ('94)	1.3: 1
8	Owen ('94)	0.9:1
	TOTAL	2.7:1

(i = incumbent)

Texans for Public Justice is providing assistance in a federal lawsuit filed on April 3rd by two consumer organizations and several private attorneys challenging the constitutionality of Texas judicial selection process.

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[Texans for Public Justice](#) is a non-profit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization that tracks the role of money in Texas politics.