



★ TEXAS SUPREME COURT ★ DOLLAR DOCKET

In Texas, 48% of judges and 79% of lawyers say contributions significantly influence judicial decisions. - Texas Supreme Court poll

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Covering the TAB:

Secret Business Donors Demand Impunity, Again

Appealing to a court in which it holds a major equity stake, the Texas Association of Business (TAB) is seeking to quash legal probes into its \$1.9 million “issue ads,” which helped tip the balance of power in the Texas House in 2002. Business interests on TAB’s board have contributed \$1.6 million to Texas’ current high-court justices, supplying a whopping 15 percent of their total war chests.

Trying to parry a criminal probe and civil complaints by arguing that its ads were not political, TAB has been bounced out of six courts—including the U.S. Supreme Court. Now TAB attorney Andy Taylor is counting on the home-court advantage to salvage his failed play book—at least in the civil suit. Last month TAB asked the Texas Supremes to nix a lower court order for TAB to disclose how many—but not which—corporate donors bankrolled the ad blitz. The order is stayed as the justices consider TAB’s appeal.

The Dollar Docket

Cases heard by the Texas Supreme Court in January and the corresponding contributions to justices from the parties and/or attorneys.

January 14, 2004

<i>R.R. Street & Co. v.</i>	\$13,600
<i>Pilgrim Enterprises</i>	\$129,000
<i>Bostrom Seating, Inc. v.</i>	\$0
<i>Crane Carrier Co.</i>	\$8,900

January 28, 2004

<i>1st Valley Bank of Los Fresnos v.</i>	\$192,567
<i>Martin</i>	\$0
<i>1464-Eight v.</i>	\$52,675
<i>Joppich</i>	\$0
<i>Schneider National Carriers v.</i>	\$311,028
<i>Yates</i>	\$6,750

Grand Total for January: \$634,720

Top TAB Law Firms

Firm	Total To Justices
Vinson & Elkins	\$288,485
Baker Botts	\$223,277
Fulbright & Jaworski	\$188,088
Thompson & Knight	\$103,575
Andrews & Kurth	\$98,610

Other Top TAB Donors

Donor Source	Total To Justices
USAA (insurance)	\$53,225
Reliant Energy	\$44,300
Exxon-Mobil	\$42,650
HillCo (lobbyists)	\$40,000
Halliburton	\$36,200

While TAB's issue-ad donors are secret, so far the justices' are not. Over the past decade, 46 of the 109 business interests with current seats on TAB's board contributed to the justices.

The top court donors on TAB's board were defense law firms with frequent business before the court. Energy interests dominate the court's other top TAB-linked donors, while TAB's own PAC gave the justices \$21,250.

Three current justices got at least 20 percent of their money from TAB sources, led by new Justice Scott Brister (26 percent).

Justice	All Money Raised	TAB-Tied Money	TAB-Tied Share
Brister	\$126,300	\$33,300	26%
Hecht	\$2,609,065	\$327,668	13%
Jefferson	\$1,170,046	\$202,128	17%
O'Neill	\$1,470,993	\$182,250	12%
Owen	\$1,377,376	\$190,532	14%
Phillips	\$1,358,737	\$196,442	14%
Schneider	\$964,820	\$188,811	20%
Smith	\$60,590	\$7,950	13%
Wainwright	\$1,083,567	\$249,402	23%
TOTALS:	\$10,221,494	\$1,578,483	15%

If the courts let TAB snub Texas' prohibition on corporate contributions, some corporations will seek a competitive advantage by secretly bankrolling the state's judicial candidates. This will eliminate any accountability for the campaign dollars that grease Texas dockets once and for all. •