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Between 1992 and 1997, the seven winning candidates for the Texas Supreme Court raised nearly $9.2 million. Of this sum more than 40% was contributed by parties or lawyers with cases before the court, or by contributors linked to those parties. The perceived impropriety of judges soliciting and accepting large campaign contributions from attorneys and parties who appear before them has been the subject of numerous newspaper and magazine articles, as well as television broadcasts. In 1987 and again in 1998, 60 Minutes aired segments that examined whether justice was for sale in Texas, and Frontline explored the same question in 1999.

In the early 1980s, plaintiff lawyers were the largest contributors to Texas judicial candidates, but in the late 1980s and 1990s, they were replaced by civil defense attorneys, doctors, insurance companies, and other business interests. In recent years, major contributors to judicial candidates have included the Texas Association of Business and Chambers of Commerce, the Texas Trial Lawyers Association, the Texas Medical Association, Texans for Lawsuit Reform, the insurance industry, energy and natural resources companies, and the Republican and Democratic Parties. Texans for Public Justice, a legal watchdog group founded in 1997, tracks campaign contributions to public officials in Texas, including appellate judges, and has issued a number of reports that examine the relationship between campaign contributions to judges and judicial decisions. Their most recent report, “Courtroom Contributions Stain Supreme Court Campaigns”, reveals that supreme court candidates receive two thirds of their campaign contributions from lawyers and litigants who appear before them. Other reports include “Checks and Imbalances”, “Payola Justice”, and “Lowering the Bar”.

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Source: American Judicature Society