

HOW CAN WE KEEP OUR COURTS IMPARTIAL?

Experts predict that, unless reforms are made, candidates for judicial seats will have to continue raising record-breaking amounts of money, and that special interests will spend even more. But judicial elections don't have to be so expensive—or so political. You can get involved:

- Educate yourself about ways to reform judicial elections by visiting the Web sites listed in this brochure;
- Watch for proposals that make their way to the General Assembly for consideration;
- Call for debates and forums on judicial elections in your community;
- Vote!

What is at stake? No less than the legitimacy of our judicial system. When the public believes that their judges can be bought, that they're beholden to campaign donors, or that their decisions are influenced by special interests, our respected system of justice is jeopardized. Get involved in the effort to keep our courts fair and independent.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Judicial Impartiality: The Next Steps

www.thenextsteps.org

(614) 466-3456

The League of Women Voters of the United States

www.lwv.org

Justice At Stake Campaign

www.justiceatstake.org

Brennan Center for Justice

www.brennancenter.org

The Constitution Project

www.constitutionproject.org

THE LEAGUE

For more than 80 years the League of Women Voters has been a leader in working to ensure that all citizens have a free role in making democracy work. Year in and year out, the League provides many kinds of voter service and education projects, such as:

- ✓ Voter registration drives
- ✓ Publications and brochures
- ✓ Nonpartisan candidate forums
- ✓ Printed voter guides
- ✓ Online voter information and voter guides
- ✓ Nonpartisan issue forums
- ✓ Presentations on radio, on television and to school groups

Working independently and with other civic groups that share our interests, the League is dedicated to helping citizens become informed and active participants in government at all levels. For further information:



Toll-free • 1-800-LWV-OHIO



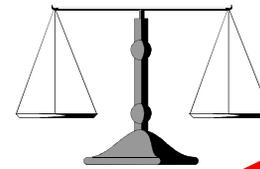
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**HIGH \$TAKES\$
BIG MONEY**



Changing the Way Ohio Elects Judges



**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF OHIO EDUCATION FUND**

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Program on Law & Society of the Open Society Institute
with thanks to the League of Women Voters Education Fund
For information on availability of this brochure
in alternative formats, call 1-800-LWV-OHIO
or e-mail lwvoinfo@lwvohio.org*

Do you know that more than half the money spent on state supreme court races nationally in 2002 was spent right here in Ohio?

Since Ohio's Supreme Court elections of 2000, when special interests began politicizing the process with mud-slinging ads, the state has earned a national reputation for high-stakes, big-money judicial elections.

In 2002, four candidates vying for two Supreme Court seats raised more than \$6 million for their campaigns. Meanwhile, special interests dumped unknown sums into negative television advertising suggesting that judges would vote certain ways on certain issues if elected.

Ohio's system of judicial elections is broken and in need of reform. A poll commissioned by the League of Women Voters of Ohio in October 2002 found:

- **Two-thirds** of voters agree that the state's judicial campaign finance system needs reform;
- **One in three** believes that campaign and fund-raising rules for judicial candidates should be stricter than those for other candidates; and
- **Four out of five** (83 percent) believe that campaign contributions influence judges and candidates—more than any other factor.

Clearly, the public perceives that justice is for sale in Ohio, no matter how upright and ethical our elected judges may be.

CAN THE PROCE\$\$ BE FIXED?

In March 2003, the League of Women Voters of Ohio and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio convened a one-day forum on judicial impartiality. The John Glenn Institute for Public Service & Public Policy, the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, and the Ohio State Bar Association co-hosted the event, which brought judges, attorneys, and legislators together with business, labor, and citizen groups for a discussion of what can be done to assure a truly independent judiciary.



“The campaign finance reform crusade continues and includes an independent and fair judiciary. We’ve got to limit special interest influence over our courts.”

—Senator John McCain (R-AZ)

JUDGE\$ AND POLITIC\$: NOT A GOOD MIX

Politics shouldn't play as big a role in judicial elections as it does in legislative- or executive-branch campaigns. Ohioans vote for a senator or a governor who shares their political views; lawmakers and other politicians are elected to represent their constituency. But judges are different because their job is to interpret the law in the fairest and most impartial way.

No one wants to go before a judge whose mind is made up on the outcome of a case before it's even heard, or who represents the viewpoints of campaign donors. Judges must remain independent of politics and outside influence—and must be seen by the public as remaining independent. But as spending in recent elections shows, just the opposite is becoming the norm.

WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL IT MAKE?

Discussions have continued in working groups since the forum, with a number of proposals on the table. Many of the measures under discussion may require legislative action before they become reality. It is important for citizens to understand how various reforms would affect judicial elections in Ohio. Among the proposals being discussed:

- **Lengthening judicial terms:** If judges' terms increase from six years to 10, 12, or 15 years in length, they would not have to raise as much money as often to run for office, and they would be further removed from special-interest influence.
- **Raising qualifications:** Currently, judges need only have practiced law for six years to run for judge. Requiring more experience, including classes on judicial conduct, could result in more candidates of high caliber.
- **Expanding the reach of voter guides:** Voters typically don't get enough information about candidates for judicial office before they go to the polls. Wider distribution of nonpartisan voter guides could help voters make better decisions on Election Day.
- **Financing campaigns with public money:** Candidates would not have to rely so heavily on campaign donations if tax dollars could be used to help them get their message out to voters.
- **Requiring disclosure of contributions:** If disclosure laws mandated faster reporting, comprehensive information (such as the donor's employer), and disclosure of third-party contributors, voters would have a better understanding of the special interests seeking to influence elections.