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TN Supreme Court justices give generously to Democratic candidates, records show

By Chris Butler / July 25, 2014 / 7 Comments



By Chris Butler | Tennessee Watchdog

NASHVILLE — The three Tennessee Supreme Court justices up for retention like to give lots of money to Democrats, including Phil Bredesen, who appointed all three to the court, and even Al Gore.

Tennessee Forum President Susan Kaestner announced Thursday she and members of her nonprofit organization had closely scrutinized the justices' personal campaign contributions — ranging in the thousands of dollars — most of which went to Democrats.

Additionally, Kaestner released an email she said originated with the Davidson County Democrat Party urging Democrats to vote to retain justices Gary Wade, Connie Clark and Sharon Lee.

“Remember when Democrats don’t vote, Republicans are elected and we ALWAYS support the Democratic ticket!” reads an email Kaestner attributes to party chair Gary D. Bynum.

Tennessee Watchdog couldn’t independently verify the contents of the email as no one at the Davidson County Democrat Party immediately returned our message Thursday.

The three justices are currently crisscrossing the state repeating the mantra that politics and money have no place tainting the Aug. 7 retention election or their ability to independently interpret the law.

The race, the three justices have said many times over, must remain nonpartisan.

As Tennessee Watchdog previously reported, Tennessee Forum officials say the three justices’ values no longer reflect those of red state Tennesseans and they don’t deserve retention.

“I think it’s really important for voters to know that each of these judges did contribute to Phil Bredesen’s campaign for governor and then were appointed to the court,”



Susan Kaestner

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Kaestner told Tennessee Watchdog Thursday. “That’s the kind of thing that suggests cronyism and partisan political activity.”

Kaestner said a review of state and federal campaign finance records turned up the following:

- Clark has given \$5,435 to political candidates over the years. About 80 percent of those donations have gone to Democrats, including former Democratic Senate Speaker John Wilder, former Senate Democrat Caucus Chairman Joe Haynes and former State Rep. Rob Briley. The candidate receiving the largest total contributions from Clark was Bredesen. Clark’s time on the Tennessee Democrat Party Executive Committee doesn’t help her nonpartisan credentials, Kaestner added.
- Wade has donated more than 70 percent of his money, at least \$27,311, to Democrat candidates, including former Vice President Gore, former U.S. Rep. Harold Ford, Jr., current Democrat Party chair Roy Herron and the Democratic National Committee. Wade also gave at least \$3,000 to Bredesen, according to the Tennessee Forum.
- Lee gave more than \$8,000, and 92 percent of that went to Democrats, including Harold Ford, Jr., 2010 Democrat gubernatorial candidate Mike McWherter and Herron. Lee gave Bredesen’s campaign more than \$3,000, according to the Tennessee Forum.



Chief Justice Gary Wade

The justices’ campaign representatives, Carol Andrews, Victoria McCullough and Brenda Gadd, as well as members of Keep Tennessee’s Supreme Court Fair, didn’t immediately return requests for comment Thursday.

Tennessee Watchdog reported last week the Tennessee Democratic Party accepted nearly \$5,000 from the three justices for voter contact services, [according to online campaign finance records](#).

[Also, as previously reported, all three of the justices gave nearly \\$12,000 overall for professional services to McCullough](#), whom Tennessee Watchdog previously identified as having strong partisan ties to President Obama.

McCullough worked for Obama’s White House doing public engagement from 2011-2013 and was a regional field director for Obama for America from 2007-2008, according to LinkedIn.

Lee and Clark, records show, gave a combined \$7,500 to campaign manager Gadd, also identified by Tennessee Watchdog as someone with strong Democratic Party ties.



AP file photo

SOROS: The liberal magnate is jumping into the Tennessee Supreme Court judges retention race.

[Justice At Stake, funded by left-wing activist and billionaire George Soros, has involved itself in the retention election on the justices’ behalfes.](#)

Contact Christopher Butler at chris@tennesseewatchdog.org or follow him and submit story ideas on [his official Facebook page](#).

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Chris Butler

Chris Butler is the Tennessee bureau reporter for Watchdog.org. Chris has previously worked at newspapers in Florida, Texas and his home state of Louisiana and has awards from the Louisiana-Mississippi Associated Press as well as the Louisiana Press Association. He earned his bachelor's degree from Louisiana Tech University and his master's degree from the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

chris@tennesseewatchdog.org



7 Comments

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Bright Quang · 12 hours ago

Dear Alexander Salazar:

I am appreciating for your art-exhibiting invitation so much, but this time I am unable to join with you. As you know that I am put a label of mental case on my head by the power. And therefore, I can not tour to anywhere in the United States of America and the world in order to exhibiting artwork and introducing books of mine because I am worrying to the American powers that they will use mental case in order to kill me if they tell me terrorist or rob airplane.

We are in touch

Bright Quang

www.brightquang.net

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GinnyCW · 2 days ago

When Soros gets involved, you KNOW they're bad. How does one feel about this? "While about 500,000 of his fellow countrymen, women and children, almost all of them Hungarian Jews, were being exterminated by Nazi Germany, Soros, a Jew himself, called it "the happiest time of my life". <http://humanevents.com/2011/04...>

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Tom · 2 days ago

Hopefully ideological extremes will lose on this one and judges will be retained. If democrats were in control of the state and judges in question were republicans I would still vote to retain. One party total control is dangerous.

2 · Reply · Share



OG · 2 days ago

The effort to replace these justices and Appellate Judges is an effort to control the

judiciary by filling it with people who have political indebtedness that must be paid back through judicial decision-making. That is totally contrary to the intent of the Founding Fathers. (See Federalist Paper #78 (Hamilton) and #47 (Madison) as examples). Since most Americans have no faith in politicians, believing them to be beholden to PACs and donors, it makes little sense to inject that kind of distrust into the judicial branch. Faith in the judicial system cannot exist if run by politicians. I will vote retain.

3 ^ | v | • Reply • Share >



Steven Seiler • 2 days ago

What ever happened to neutral ?

2 ^ | v | • Reply • Share >



Tom • 3 days ago

Uh, republican judges give to republicans and democrat judges give to democrats. So what's your point. Personally, I don't want one ideology to control the court system and I resent your attempt to do so. I'll vote to retain.

1 ^ | v | • Reply • Share >



Scott Hanson → Tom • 2 days ago

Don't worry. I canceled out your vote by voting to replace them.

2 ^ | v | • Reply • Share >

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