



Judicial Reform Press Conference Statement
February 11, 2009

My name is Maxine Barkan. I represent the League of Women Voters of Texas. The League is a nonpartisan organization whose membership will be celebrating our 90th year promoting good government. Of the three branches of state government, the judicial branch that affects the lives of millions of Texans seems to be the one least understood by the public. The Texas judicial system has not changed since it was first established in the Texas Constitution in 1876. For example, Texas is one of six states that still elects judges by party affiliation. Party affiliation injects politics into the selection of judges.

Special interests are contributing millions to candidates and political parties to try to influence judicial decisions. The cost of judicial campaigns is skyrocketing, and there are misleading and partisan attacks on judges' decisions. Judges should be able to be independent, impartial, and uphold the law. Many states have brought their judicial selection systems into the 21st Century. Thirteen states conduct nonpartisan judicial elections, and thirty-three states have adopted some form of a nonpolitical,

nonpartisan system to appoint judges as recommended by a nonpartisan independent commission. After a period of service, usually about six years, judges can run for reelection and be retained or rejected based on their records. This system has been in place for over fifty years in some states.

Legislation has been filed to adopt the appointment/retention system in a number of Texas legislative sessions. It has been supported by prominent Texas jurists. These bills have never passed. The League of Women Voters has supported this vital reform since 1965. The League of Women Voters Education Fund has conducted many statewide forums and provided basic information through the media and in League publications to help educate the public.

Many Texans go through the courts every year. Judicial selection reform is needed to assure the public that the judicial system is fair, impartial, and nonpolitical.