

News Release

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Incumbents Wield Preemptive Fundraising Power 1998's Sitting House Members Rarely Challenged - Incumbents Over \$4.00 for every Challenger Dollar

Austin: A new study reveals that the 132 Texas House incumbents seeking reelection in 1998 raised a total of \$14.9 million, blowing away their primary and general election challengers who raised a total of \$3.6 million (a 4.1:1 ratio). Texans for Public Justice's report, [*The Gated Community - How Texas House Incumbents Locked Out Challengers in 1998*](#), reveals that 80 incumbents who did not face a challenger in the 1998 primary or general election raised a total of \$6.2 million.

"The campaign finance system is rigged to benefit incumbents. If you keep the lobby happy, those special interests will dig deep to keep you in office," said Texans for Public Justice director Craig McDonald. "The spoils go to those who already hold political power. Few challengers can begin to compete in a system that pays such rich dividends to incumbent war chests."

While the number of unopposed House incumbents increased by 31 percent from 1996 to 1998 (from 61 to 80 members), the amount of money that unopposed incumbents raised increased by an astounding 71 percent (\$3.6 million to \$6.2 million).

The *Gated Community's* major findings include:

- The total amount raised by 150 1998 House general election winners was \$17.8 million, a 22 percent increase over the \$14.6 million raised by 1996 winners;
- In the 1998 primary elections, only 19 (14 percent) of the 132 House incumbents seeking reelection faced a challenger (just five challengers defeated an incumbent);*
- In the 1998 general elections, only 36 (28 percent) of the 127 remaining House incumbents faced a challenger (challengers defeated just two of these incumbents);
- The 52 incumbents who faced a challenge in the 1998 primary, general election or both, raised \$8.7 million, while their 71 opponents raised only \$3.6 million;
- The 80 incumbents who faced no primary or general election opponent raised \$6.2 million;
- The average amount raised in each of the 52 contested general elections was \$280,000. The average winner raised \$190,000, more than doubling the average losing warchest of \$90,000.

"The fundraising gap between incumbents and challengers, along with overall political spending will continue to rise dramatically unless reasonable contribution limits are adopted," said McDonald. "But don't look to incumbents to limit their own contributions."

"With spending on the rise, full disclosure becomes more important than ever. Average Texans need to know how much is being spent -- or bankrolled -- by their elected representatives. We need more sunshine, and we need it on the Internet. This information should be available to all Texans at the click of a mouse," said McDonald. "What are the incumbents hiding behind the walls of their gated community?"

The 1997-1998 fundraising data analyzed in *The Gated Community* comes from information that candidates file with the Texas Ethics Commission. Comparative 1995-1996 fundraising data comes from the Texas Ethics Commission and *Mortgaged House*, published by Texans for Public Justice in 1998. Additional election and candidate information came from the Secretary of State.

Copies of *The Gated Community* are available through Texans for Public Justice, PH: 512-472-9770 or at <http://www.tpj.org>.

** An earlier version of this release stated there were only 129 incumbents seeking reelection, of whom only 2 were defeated in the primary.*

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[Texans for Public Justice](#) is a non-profit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization that tracks the role of money in Texas politics.