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RE: COURT WATCH'S REPORT ON 2008 JUDICIAL CAMPAIGN

GREENSBORO. Today Court Watch released its 7th bi-annual report on North Carolina's contested judicial elections. This 63 page report covered all the contested judicial races in the November 2008 election, including one Supreme Court race, five Court of Appeals races, 12 Superior Court races, and 39 District Court seats. The report includes a list of major contributors to candidates in each contested race. The report also includes candid letters written by four professional campaign consultants.

Some of the report's **observations** were that:

- The public financing provisions in appellate races worked smoothly, with 11 out of 12 candidates qualifying for public campaign funds. This made the campaign spending of the competing candidates relatively equal.
- The state sent to all 3,600,000 households in the state both a Primary and a General Election Voter Guide.
- The cost of running an effective statewide Supreme Court and Court of Appeals campaign keeps rising. While many professional campaign consultants believe that at least \$500,000 is required to run a meaningful campaign, neither Supreme Court candidate spent over \$350,000, and no Court of Appeals candidate spent over \$253,000.
- In the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals races, many voters didn't know who the candidates were. There were 972,625 voters who voted in the Treasurer's race who didn't vote in the Supreme Court race (the next contest on the ballot).
- The Supreme Court and Court of Appeals races were officially nonpartisan (party affiliations were not on the ballots). However many voters learned of the candidates' party identity anyways.
- Most voters who did vote for appellate candidates didn't know the candidates well, and tended to vote for reasons unrelated to the candidate's experience or competence. These reasons included party affiliation, name recognition, gender, race, and ballot position. Candidates tried to promote these factors to their advantage whenever possible.

- In this election, party affiliation and name recognition were more important than gender or race. Sam J. Ervin, IV probably defeated Kristin Ruth because of superior name recognition.
- More sitting (incumbent) judges were removed from office by challengers than usual.
- No judicial candidate won by greatly outspending his/her adversary.

Some of the report's **recommendations** were that:

- All judges (especially Court of Appeals judges) should be appointed instead of elected, because so many voters don't know who the candidates are.
- If the state keeps electing its judges, the public financing law should be changed so that all qualifying appellate candidates have access to at least \$500,000 in campaign funds.

Court Watch of North Carolina, Inc. is a citizen watchdog group based in Greensboro. In addition to publishing judicial campaign reports like this one, Court Watch has conducted judge evaluations which have rated three-fourths of the state's trial judges. Court Watch can be reached at (336) 275-2346. A copy of the full 2008 Judicial Campaign report is available at www.courtwatchnc.org.

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