

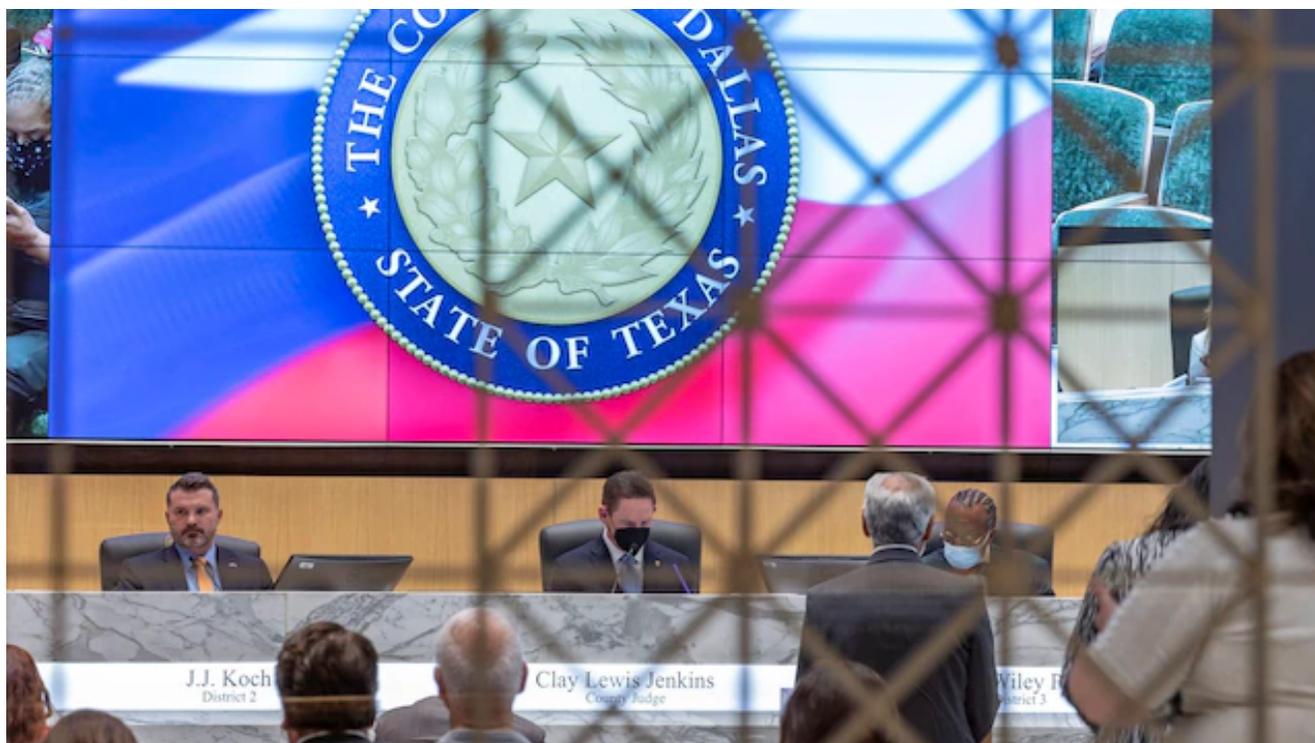


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# Dallas County judge candidates raise more than a million dollars in campaign funds

The 2022 Dallas County judge race has become a battle of the checkbooks, with candidates neck-and-neck in total fundraising dollars.



The county judge is responsible for overseeing Commissioners Court meetings, holds a vote on the five-body Court and is head of emergency and disaster relief. (Brandon Wade / Special Contributor)



By [Josephine Peterson](#)

1:22 PM on Aug 9, 2022 CDT



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The race for Dallas County judge has brought in more than a million dollars in campaign funds, meaning more money than ever has been raised in the fight for the top county office.

Incumbent Judge Clay Jenkins, a Democrat, and first-time candidate Lauren Davis, a Republican, have both stashed more than \$500,000 in their war chests. But, according to the most recent campaign finance report, there's been a stark contrast in recent collections.



In the latest campaign financing filing, Davis raised more than seven times what Jenkins raised. From Feb. 20 to June 30, Davis reported \$441,112 in campaign contributions, while Jenkins reported \$59,375.

Davis' latest donations have closed the gap and even surpassed Jenkins' total fundraising efforts. Throughout their respective campaigns, Davis has a lead of \$573,000 in reported donations to Jenkins' almost \$515,000.

Voters will decide the winner Nov. 8.



Davis has raised more funds faster, having only started reporting in December 2021, while Jenkins began reporting campaign contributions for the seat as far back as January 2021.

While this race is drawing in more funds than any other Dallas County race this year, Jenkins broke the fundraising record for a single candidate seeking the seat in 2010, when he raised close to \$600,000 for his primary campaign, according to previous reporting by *The Dallas Morning News*.

Cal Jillson, a political science professor at the Southern Methodist University, said campaigns across Texas are seeing record-breaking donations. This amount is going to be the new normal for county judge races, he said.

“In Texas, a \$400,000 race is not at all expensive,” he said. “Many state legislator seats cost more than a million dollars, and a state senate seat can cost five or 10 or more.”

## **Who’s donating?**

The county judge seat is the top position in county government. The elected official oversees Commissioners Court meetings, holds a vote on the five-body Court and is head of emergency and disaster relief. Jenkins has held the seat since 2011.

Contributions for the race show support from different sectors of the public. There is no limit on personal political contributions for local and statewide races in Texas.

Jenkins' top donors throughout the campaign season have been nonprofits, attorneys — Jenkins [is a personal injury attorney](#) — and worker unions. A total of 34 donors have given his campaign \$5,000 or more for a total of \$216,000.

His largest donations to date have been two \$25,000 checks.

One of these donations came from Amy Fikes, former vice president of the Leland Fikes Foundation, a Texas healthcare nonprofit that frequently gives to Democratic candidates.

The second \$25,000 donation was from Patsy Woods Martin, a former executive director of Annie's List — an organization promoting women to run for office — who sits on the board of directors of Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

Attorney David Clouston with the downtown Dallas law firm Sessions, Israel & Shartle gave a total of \$15,000 in the current cycle.

The United Association Local 100 Plumbers and Pipefitters donated \$15,000 to Jenkins in two contributions.

Almost half of Davis' total funding — \$195,000 — comes from 16 donors who gave \$5,000 or more. Many are current or former heads of businesses, much like Davis herself. Davis and her husband, Ben Davis, own a chain of upscale barbershops, The Gents Place.

Lauren Davis is the Republican candidate for the 2022 Dallas County Judge race. (Courtesy of Lauren Davis)

Michael Colby was the biggest donor in either campaign, giving Davis a total of \$100,000. Colby is the former president of Goosehead Insurance.

Her next largest donations have been from four \$10,000 contributors: Excel Orthopedics's CEO Andy Hewes, CEO George Ryan of the tax consulting and service firm Ryan LLC, CEO Kirk Wilson of the management and consulting firm T Wilson Associates, and Cyrena Nolan, who was listed as a corporate governor for Nolan Gulf Ventures as recently as last year. Nolan Gulf Ventures' registered address is the same as Fort Worth's real estate company Nolan Brothers.

## **What are the candidates buying?**

Since January 2021, Jenkins has outspent Davis by about \$90,000.

More than a third of his February to June \$57,250 expenses — almost \$23,000 — were reported as “salaries, wages, and contract labor.”

Other notable reported expenses include a \$5,000 donation to the Texas Democratic Party, more than \$6,750 on advertising and printing, and \$12,000 to Dallas political consultant Megan Rodman.

Almost all of Davis’ February to June — \$100,138 of \$119,062 — expenses went to advertising, according to the latest finance reports. About \$79,000 of those ad expenditures were reported as an advertising expense to a political campaign company, Axiom Strategies, for its direct mail service.

Other notable costs include \$6,356 to the fundraising website Anedot for payment processing, Davis said, and a \$3,376 donation to the Dallas County Republican Party. Her campaign also spent almost \$4,700 on office furniture and supplies.

With less than 90 days to the election, both campaigns still have funds in their war chests, but Jenkins has saved more than twice as much as Davis for the last leg.

Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins during the first county commissioners meeting at the newly renovated Dallas County Records Building in Dallas on Aug. 2, 2022. (Brandon Wade / Special Contributor)

A snapshot of Jenkins' finances on June 30 shows he has more than \$581,500 in the bank, while Davis has almost \$237,000.

Any funds collected in a political race and not put to use can roll over into a future race, or in any way related to serving in office or campaigning.

Asked if she was concerned about the amount of money her opponent has in the bank, Davis said, "No, I'm more concerned about my opponent bringing national issues and partisan politics to our County Judge position that should simply be serving the people, regardless of party."

Jenkins' campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Jillson said it can be hard to unseat an incumbent in a local election without a scandal.

“In this county judge race in Dallas County, I think the money is not going to make or break either campaign,” he said.

With Jenkins’ generally liked pandemic response under his belt, Jillson said the incumbent doesn’t need to focus on campaign fundraising as much as Davis does.

“[Jenkins] doesn’t have much to gain in name recognition from advertising,” the SMU professor said. “Whereas Lauren Davis has everything to gain.”

Davis said her campaign has consistently heard that Dallas County residents are unwilling to re-elect a career politician.

“I believe voters are investing in a Dallas County turnaround story,” she said in an email.

## **Countywide races**

Contributions in other county races have reached staggering figures as well.

Dallas County’s sole Republican Commissioner J.J. Koch reported more than \$147,000 in donations this filing period and has about \$306,000 in the bank for his District 2 race against Democratic candidate Andrew Sommerman, who reported he’s taken in about \$4,700 this filing period and has as much

left over in his coffers.

Democratic Commissioner Elba Garcia is running for District 4 and reported almost \$43,000 in contributions. Her Libertarian opponent, Timothy Miles, opted for modified reporting, which limits the candidate to accepting no more than \$930, but does not require finance reports.

The Dallas County District Attorney race is a repeat of 2018, between Democratic incumbent John Creuzot and former Republican DA Faith Johnson. From February to June, Creuzot raised \$87,000 and Johnson raised \$158,000.

As of June 30, Creuzot's campaign bank account held more than \$218,000, and Johnson's held \$132,000, [nowhere near the more than \\$400,000 she reported in the 2018 race.](#)

Dallas County residents interested in registering to vote for the November election can mail in an application found at the [Dallas County Elections Department website.](#)



[Josephine Peterson](#), Dallas County reporter. Josephine covers Dallas County. She returned to her hometown to join The Dallas Morning News in 2022 after previously working at The Tacoma News Tribune in Washington and The News Journal in Delaware. Josephine is a graduate of University of Missouri and American University. In her free time, Josephine enjoys kayaking with her dog, Dougal.

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