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Opinion

Op/Ed: As distrust in SCOTUS grows; Roberts must employ values he learned in LaPorte.

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The annual report of payments received by justices on the [Supreme Court](#) is surprising and troubling.

“There’s one person who can end this before the sun sets, [John Roberts](#),” Sen. [Dick Durbin](#), D-Illinois, told Morning Joe on June 22. “Write a code of ethics for the Supreme Court.” Durbin is chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which has jurisdiction over the court and is considering legislation.

Chief Justice John Roberts spent approximately 10 years of his education in LaPorte, where he graduated from La Lumiere School in 1973. Roberts was co-captain of the football team, where he learned high moral leadership and was co-editor of the school's newspaper where he perfected his hard-working personality. He worked summers at a steel mill in Burns Harbor, Indiana.



Chief Justice of the United States John Roberts arrives before President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress at the Capitol, Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2023, in Washington.

Chief Justice Roberts changed his report from previous years regarding his wife's work. In the new disclosure, Jane Roberts received a base salary and commission from recruiting firm Macare in 2022. Previous filings had disclosed only a salary from the firm. Jane Roberts has also reportedly been paid over \$10 million by a plethora of law firms, at least one that soon after would appear in front of the court according to a report by [Insider](#).

Term limits for SCOTUS?: 'No accountability': Nancy Pelosi calls for term limits for Supreme Court justices

There is a mandatory report judges must file outlining their outside income for the public to see, including amounts earned by their respective spouses. However, this report does not require a spouse to disclose the consequential aspects of their expenditures including client names.

[ProPublica disclosed in June that in 2008 Justice Samuel Alito was flown by billionaire Paul Singer to Alaska on a private jet](#). However, he did not report this on his annual financial disclosure. Furthermore, Singer's hedge fund came before the court and Alito did not recuse himself. The fund came before the court "at least 10 times" as reported by ProPublica.

Alito states he spoke to Singer "on no more than a handful of occasions" — but we now know including during a \$100,000 private jet chartered fishing trip to Alaska.

[Justice Clarence Thomas](#) has delayed his reporting so that his acceptance of extravagant vacations and Nazi relics from Republican donor Harlan Crow is still unreported in his submissions, but [they are revealed in the media](#).



years, a [Washington Post investigation](#) found.

Congressman Hank Johnson, D-Georgia, and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-Rhode Island, have reintroduced the Supreme Court Ethics, Recusal, and Transparency Act, a bill requiring justices to adopt a code of ethics.

After Durbin, the Judiciary Committee's Chair, requested the chief justice appear in front of a panel in order to address ethical reforms, Justice Roberts declined and called such testimonies by justices "exceedingly rare ... in light of the separation of power concerns and the importance of preserving judicial independence." While the idea of an independent judicial body has been crucial to justice in the United States, it has become clear the court has set aside its role in maintaining law and order within itself and that its role must be reinforced by other branches. Durbin asserted, "The Supreme Court needs to clean up its act and fast" and if the court continues to not act, "Congress must."

Does SCOTUS have ethics problem?: [Alito took private jet trip for Alaska fishing trip in new Supreme Court ethics revelation](#)

Troubling data has been seen relating to Justice Neil Gorsuch as well. In 2017, Gorsuch and his wife closed on a house, with the buyer of the purchase left undisclosed. It has been revealed Greenburg Traurig, a multinational law and lobbying firm, has been involved in at least 22 cases presented or seen before the court.

After disclosure reports were filed by the justices and posted June 7, Thomas and Justice Samuel Alito Jr. have asked for extensions, leaving questions in the air about why this might be.

Other disclosures were filed by the rest of the court as well.

- The newest to the bench, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson disclosed gifts she received — a \$1,200 congratulatory flower basket and high-priced clothing from Oprah Winfrey.
- [Justice Elena Kagan](#) outlined a parking space she owns which accounts for her rental income.
- [Justice Sonia Sotomayor](#) included a trip to Scotland and nearly \$150,000 from book deals.
- Justices, Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett all reported extra income from teaching.



Currently, public trust in the Supreme Court is at an all-time low of 40% according to NBC, and “continues to decline amid ethics concerns.” A [Quinnipiac University poll out June 21](#) reported an even lower 30% approval with 59% disapproval — a 2-1 margin and the lowest rating since its polling began in 2004. In 2000, the Supreme Court’s positive rating was 62% according to Gallup.

The more Chief Justice Roberts and his colleagues actively allow the high court to have considerably low ethical standards, the more they encourage other justices to continue this deception in the future and the public will doubt their objectivity.

Robert Weiner is a former Clinton and Bush White House spokesman who also served as a senior staffer for the House Government Operations and Judiciary committees, Congressman John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper and Ed Koch, Sen. Ted Kennedy and Gen. Barry McCaffrey. Annie Cayer is a policy and research analyst at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change.

This article originally appeared on Indianapolis Star: [Indiana values should be used by Roberts to police ethics of SCOTUS](#)

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