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Tenn. Judges: Merit selection should stand

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The state's 29 current appellate court judges are in agreement that Tennessee's merit selection process should stand, one Supreme Court judge says.

Justice William Koch told the Tennessee Business Roundtable that while the system, also known as "The Tennessee Plan," is imperfect and may need some tinkering, it is a better solution than statewide elections for judges — an idea some are promoting.

The current merit selection process, by which a selection panel sends a list of three candidates to the governor and he selects one, expires June 30. Lawmakers must reapprove it or come up with a different solution.

Koch told the business leaders he is concerned about the effect that campaign money would have on judges' impartiality, were the state to require judges to run for election.

"All 29 of us believe in merit selection as an appropriate, effective and efficient way to select and retain judges," Koch says. "The cost of these races has turned from a trickle into a firehose."

The business roundtable is having its annual meeting downtown this afternoon. Speakers are to include Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey and Gov. Phil Bredesen, as well as former U.S. Sen. Bill Frist.