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## HOUSTON CHRONICLE ARCHIVES

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### 2 area judges considered for Texas Supreme Court

By R.G. RATCLIFFE, Houston Chronicle Austin Bureau Staff

LUBBOCK - The way was officially cleared Saturday for Gov. George W. Bush to make his third appointment to the Texas Supreme Court, and two Houston judges are in the running.

Judge Harriet O'Neill of the 14th District Court of Appeals and state District Judge Dwight Jefferson, both of Harris County, are among at least four state jurists who are under consideration for appointment to replace Supreme Court Judge John Cornyn.

Cornyn had announced last month that he would resign to run for the GOP nomination for attorney general, and he made that resignation effective on Saturday to coincide with his appearance before the Texas Federation of Republican Women convention.

"In my opinion, there is no more important need today than for a new attorney general," Cornyn said in his resignation letter to Bush.

Cornyn said he had no legal obligation to resign, but he said he did not want questions raised about his ruling on cases while conducting political activities.

"Having dedicated most of my professional life trying to restore public confidence in the judiciary, I will not take a chance on seeing that confidence shaken now," Cornyn said.

Other Republicans in the race include former state GOP Chairman Tom Pauken and Railroad Commissioner Barry Williamson. Democratic Attorney General Dan Morales is being challenged in his party primary by Court of Criminal Appeals Judge Morris Overstreet.

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Cornyn said Bush has not told him who would be appointed to replace him, but he said he understands O'Neill and Jefferson are under consideration along with Judges Sarah Duncan of the 4th Court of Appeals in San Antonio and Deborah Hankinson of the 5th Court of Appeals in Dallas.

Prior to receiving Cornyn's official resignation, Bush was not legally free to make an appointment. Whoever Bush appoints will have to stand for election next year to complete Cornyn's term. Cornyn's six-year term does not expire until 2002.

Bush previously has appointed Judges Greg Abbott of Houston and James Baker of Dallas to the court. Each won election to the court in 1996.

Republicans now control seven of the nine court seats.

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