

High Court Spending Continues Record Soar

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The flood of money continues, as outside groups have spent \$18.1 million on reported independent expenditures and secret phony issue ads in the Supreme Court race, more than three-and-a-half times the previous record.

MADISON - Two weeks away from the April 4 elections, candidate and group spending in the race for Wisconsin Supreme Court stands at more than \$20.2 million – smashing state and national records for spending in a judicial contest.

Outside group spending for Daniel Kelly now exceeds that for Janet Protasiewicz by \$4.2 million.

About 30 outside electioneering groups have spent \$18.1 million on reported [independent expenditures](#) and secret phony [issue ads](#) in the race, more than three-and-a-half times the previous record. Groups backing Kelly or

opposing Protasiewicz have doled out \$9.9 million. Groups backing Protasiewicz or opposing Kelly have spent \$5.7 million. (About \$2.5 million in group spending was directed at the two candidates who lost in the primary.)

The top-spending groups behind Protasiewicz were:

[A Better Wisconsin Together Political Fund](#) , \$5 million on television and online ads and mailings;

[Wisconsin Conservation Voters](#) , \$785,836 on campaign literature and brochures and payroll expenses;

[Organizing Empowerment PAC](#) , \$532,500 on phone and other voter mobilization activities;

[Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin](#) , \$476,755 on radio and digital ads, canvassing, and mailings;

[One for All Committee](#) , \$450,000 on videos and online advertising.

The top-spending groups behind Kelly were:

[Fair Courts America](#) , \$4.6 million on television and radio ads and mailings;

[Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce \(WMC\)](#) , \$3.1 million on broadcast advertising;

[American Principles Project PAC](#) , \$795,894 on digital ads;

[Wisconsin Alliance for Reform](#) , \$600,000 on television ads;

[Americans for Prosperity](#) , \$374,531 on online advertising, mailings, and canvassing.

Both WMC and the Alliance for Reform spent most of their money on television ads. In two instances – [here](#) and [here](#) – the groups used the same television ads, which accused Protasiewicz of handing down a light sentence for a man convicted of kidnapping and raping a 15-year-old girl.

The most recent reports filed by the candidates showed they spent a total of \$2.12 since they entered the race last year, through Feb. 6. Spending was led by Protasiewicz who has doled out \$1.37 million, which is nearly six times the \$237,719 spent by Kelly.

Whoever wins will determine the ideological balance of the court, which is currently controlled 4-3 by conservatives. Protasiewicz, who is viewed as a liberal, and Kelly, a former conservative Supreme Court justice, are vying to replace a retiring conservative justice.

Protasiewicz and Kelly moved on to the April ballot because they were the top finishers in the Feb. 21 primary, knocking off two other candidates who had spent a combined \$507,699 through Feb. 6.



The next batch of fundraising and spending reports by the candidates are due March 27 and will likely show that several million dollars more in candidate spending. (Other news outlets, such as WisPolitics, have reported higher figures than the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign. Our numbers are based only on figures already reported to the state by candidates and independent expenditure groups or that we could estimate from so-called “issue advocacy” groups.)

But spending to date has already surpassed the record \$10 million spent in 2020 on a Wisconsin Supreme Court race as well as the national record of \$15 million spent on an Illinois judicial race in 2004.

For more information about all of the groups involved in the 2023 Wisconsin Supreme Court race, please visit the Democracy Campaign's [Hijacking Campaign 2023](#) feature. For more information about candidate fundraising and spending and their top contributors, please go [here](#)

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