

Record \$93M in Spending by Outside Groups in Wis in 2022

Written by Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, Matt Rothschild
Monday, 05 December 2022 15:08

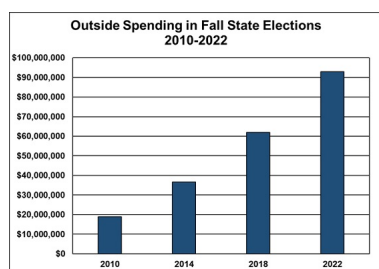
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Report finds spending by special interest groups in this fall's legislative races in Wisconsin and for the governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, and treasurer shattered the old record by 50 percent.

MADISON - Spending by special interest groups in this fall's legislative races in Wisconsin and for the governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, and treasurer shattered the old record by 50 percent, a preliminary review by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign found.

The \$93.01 million spent in 2022 by outside groups crushed the previous record \$61.86 million set in 2018 for mid-term fall races that also featured both legislative and statewide contests in Wisconsin. And the 2022 spending figure was 154 percent higher than the \$36.63 million spent by outside groups in 2014 and nearly five times higher than the \$18.9 million spent on Wisconsin legislative and statewide races in 2010. (See [chart](#) below.)



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None of these spending figures includes outside group spending in federal races for the U.S. House or U.S. Senate.

The lion's share of the outside money in 2022 – \$78.9 million – was spent on the governor's race.

Six dozen special interest groups threw their money around to praise or smear candidates.

Thirty-five groups spent \$48.25 million to benefit Republicans, 36 groups spent \$44.06 million to benefit Democrats, and one group spent \$686,660 to bolster the independent candidate for governor.

These electioneering groups fall into two categories – express advocacy groups and phony issue ad groups. Express advocacy groups, which make [independent expenditures](#), must report their spending to the state. That's because their broadcast and online advertising, mailings and other electioneering activities use the magic words “vote for” or “vote against” or their equivalents.

Phony [issue ad](#) groups, which can also raise and spend unlimited amounts of money on elections, do not have to report their spending because of federal court decisions and lax campaign finance laws. These groups smear or praise candidates but without explicitly telling viewers who to vote for or against.

The top-spending groups, which doled out all or most of their money in the governor's race, were:

[Democratic Governors Association](#) spent an estimated \$20.1 million using a phony issue ad group called the [Alliance for Common Sense](#) which blanketed the airwaves with television ads attacking GOP candidate for governor Tim Michels on education, abortion, guns, and media reports about sexual harassment complaints filed by

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female employees of his construction company;

[Republican Governors Association](#) spent an estimated \$15.3 million using three entities – [Right Direction Wisconsin PAC](#)

, [ACC Wisconsin 2022 PAC](#)

, and

[State Solutions](#)

– mostly on television ads throughout the state that attacked Evers on crime and tax issues from July until Election Day;

A Better Wisconsin Together spent an estimated \$6.8 million using an [express advocacy group](#) and an

[issue ad group](#)

with nearly the same name, making it particularly difficult to track spending by the issue ad group because it can keep its spending secret. All told, A Better Wisconsin Together spent money on television and digital advertising in 23 legislative races to support Democratic candidates, as well as the contests for governor to back Evers and attorney general to support incumbent Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul;

[Americans for Prosperity](#) spent \$6.53 million on a host of electioneering activities, including canvassing, mailings, door hangers, and digital and radio ads to support Michels, GOP attorney general candidate Adam Jarchow, and Republican candidates in 19 legislative races;

[Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce](#) (WMC) spent an estimated \$4.52 million using an [issue ad group](#)

and an

[express advocacy group](#)

. Most of WMC's issue ad spending was for television advertising that backed Republicans and smeared Democrats in the race for governor and two legislative contests. The group's ads in the governor's race attacked Evers on education, crime, and tax issues, and also blamed the incumbent for inflation. Early in the year, WMC spent about \$25,000 on a digital ad to support GOP candidate for governor Rebecca Kleefisch, who lost to Michels in the August primary.

To see how much was spent by all of the outside groups involved in Wisconsin's 2022 fall legislative and statewide races, please see the [table](#) below. For more information about the

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groups and their electioneering activities, please visit our [Hijacking Campaign 2022](#) feature and click on their names.

A final report on the total cost of this year's legislative and statewide elections will be issued early next year after the groups and candidates file amendments and year-end fundraising and spending reports.

Table
Spending by Electioneering Groups in the 2022 Fall Elections

Group	Amount
Alliance for Common Sense (Democratic Governors Association)*	\$20,500,000
Right Direction Wisconsin PAC (Republican Governors Association)	\$9,293,039
A Better Wisconsin Together**	\$6,794,866
Americans for Prosperity	\$6,531,490
Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce*	\$4,524,998
Fighting for Wisconsin	\$4,378,114
ACC Wisconsin 2022 PAC (Republican Governors Association)	\$4,025,754
Wisconsin Conservation Voters IE Coalition	\$3,818,779
Club for Growth Action	\$3,552,571
Future Forward USA Action*	\$3,400,000
Wisconsin Freedom PAC (Republican Attorneys General Association)	\$3,110,213
Freedom Wisconsin PAC	\$2,564,000
State Solutions (Republican Governors Association)*	\$2,066,000
DAGA People's Lawyer Project (Democratic Attorneys General Association)	\$1,892,534
Sunrise in America Political Fund	\$1,866,844
The Wisconsin Initiative*	\$1,700,000
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Wisconsin Political Fund	\$1,616,721
Republican Accountability PAC	\$992,584
Restoration PAC	\$935,000
Wisconsin RINO Hunters	\$686,660
American Federation for Children IE Coalition	\$678,095
Wisconsin Alliance for Reform*	\$600,000
Jobs First Coalition Political Fund	\$529,201
Voces de la Frontera Action	\$463,892
National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Action Fund	\$420,659
Badger Values PAC	\$407,483
Wisconsinites for Liberty Fund	\$407,279
For Our Future	\$390,595
Power to the Polls Wisconsin	\$389,443
Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Wisconsin State Council	\$29,647

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WFP National PAC (Work Families Partnership)	\$334,575	
Women Speak Out PAC	\$322,872	
Wisconsin Realtors Political Fund	\$320,000	
Family Friendly Action PAC	\$290,412	
Republican State Leadership Committee	\$284,192	
Project Democracy	\$278,650	
The Lincoln Project	\$254,450	
American Principles Project PAC	\$227,428	
Wisconsin Family Action	\$225,875	
Election Integrity PAC	\$208,344	
Speak Free or Die	\$155,000	
Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOCC) PAC	\$141,880	
BlackPAC	\$136,045	
Make Liberty Win	\$135,491	
New Prosperity Foundation	\$111,964	
Working America	\$109,190	
Empower Wisconsin*	\$100,000	
American Majority Action	\$94,736	
Human Rights Campaign Equality Votes PAC	\$94,626	
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Working Families Fund	\$92,585	
New Prosperity Foundation IE Committee	\$85,500	
Volunteers for Agriculture (Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation)	\$84,050	
National Nurses United for Patient Protection	\$69,427	
WorkMoney Inc.	\$68,939	
Free and Fair Elections USA	\$67,740	
Blue Sky Waukesha	\$61,215	
Community Change Voters	\$61,149	
NextGen Climate Action Committee	\$60,228	
Leaders Igniting Transformation Action Fund	\$56,167	
Patriots for Wisconsin	\$49,983	
SEIU Committee on Political Education	\$49,606	
Citizens Action of Wisconsin	\$45,691	
Progress North	\$44,331	
AFT-Wisconsin (American Federation of Teachers)	\$29,612	
Rise, Inc.	\$15,373	
Organizing Empowerment PAC	\$14,000	
Rising Leaders PAC	\$10,000	
Democratic Party of Wisconsin	\$5,560	
Gun Rights America	\$4,701	
Wisconsin Right to Life PAC	\$1,360	
TOTAL	\$93,006,147	