

Special Interests Set Record Spending as Protasiewicz, Kelly Advance in High Court Race

Written by Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, Matt Rothschild
Wednesday, 22 February 2023 16:45



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MADISON - Special interest groups have already set a spending record for outside electioneering activities in a Wisconsin Supreme Court race, topping \$5.6 million as of Wednesday morning.

Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Janet Protasiewicz and former Supreme Court Justice Dan Kelly were the top finishers in Tuesday's four-way primary. The pair will go on to face off on April 4 for a 10-year seat on the high court.

To date, 16 groups have reported spending \$5.63 million, breaking the previous record \$5.03 million set in the 2020 Wisconsin Supreme Court race. In that contest, Kelly, who was appointed in 2016 to fill the unexpired term of a retiring justice, had to run for election to keep the seat. Kelly lost to Jill Karofsky.

This time around, outside groups supporting Kelly outspent those for Protasiewicz by more than five to one.

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Four groups have spent \$2.59 million on outside activities, like mailings and broadcast and digital advertising, to support Kelly. Five groups have spent about \$493,250 to support Protasiewicz. The remaining seven groups have spent \$2.55 million to oppose or support the other two candidates, Waukesha County Circuit Judge Jennifer Dorow and Dane County Circuit Judge Everett Mitchell, who did not make it through Tuesday's primary.



In addition to group spending, the four candidates in the race spent a combined \$1.76 million through Feb. 6, according to their most recent campaign finance reports.

Both the groups and the candidates have reported spending a combined \$7.39 million. The record for candidate and group spending in a Wisconsin Supreme Court race is \$10 million set in 2020.

Candidate spending through Feb. 6 was led by Protasiewicz, who has doled out \$1.18 million, more than double that of the other three candidates combined.

Protasiewicz is viewed as the liberal in the race and Kelly is a conservative. If Kelly wins, he will preserve the 4-3 conservative bloc on the court because the retiring justice, Patience Roggensack, is a conservative.

Two of the 16 outside special interest groups have spent the bulk of the \$5.63 million doled out as of Wednesday morning.

They were:

[Fair Courts America](#), \$2.37 million. This is a Downers Grove, Ill. group funded by rightwing billionaire [Richard Uihlein](#). The group has sponsored radio and television advertising to back Kelly;

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[A Better Wisconsin Together Political Fund](#) , \$2.15 million. This Monona-based independent expenditure committee was created to support Democrats and left-leaning candidates for statewide office and the legislature. The group sponsored online and television advertising to oppose Dorow.

For more details about all of the outside electioneering groups, visit our [Hijacking Campaign 2023](#) feature. For candidate fundraising and spending information, visit our [Campaign 2023 – Supreme Court](#) feature.