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**A Supreme Court race for the record books**

By WisPolitics.com

The spring election isn't over until April 4. But already spending in this year's state Supreme Court has demolished the state and national judicial spending records.

The most expensive state Supreme Court race in the United States had been an Illinois contest in 2004, when $15 million was spent.

The most expensive Supreme Court campaign in state history was the 2020 race in which candidates and groups combined to spend some $10 million, according to the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

As of March 17, the tally was at least $30 million and climbing, according to numbers from WisPolitics.com.

And it's tilted very much in favor of the liberal candidate, Milwaukee County Judge Janet Protasiewicz. Until mid-March, conservative former Justice Daniel Kelly had yet to even air an ad.

That finally changed on March 17, when Kelly unveiled his first TV ad of the campaign, knocking Protasiewicz for letting “dangerous criminals back into our streets.”

WisPolitics.com tracked more than $21.3 million in spending post-primary through March 17. Of that, just $6.3 million had gone to backing Kelly. That didn't include Kelly’s first buy, details of which were still trickling in March 17.

That's a lot of green, even if it was St. Patrick's Day.

All of that for a 10-year seat on the state's highest court.

Why so much spending?

A few reasons:

--The race will determine philosophical control of the court, which  
has been in conservative hands for more than a decade. Conservative  
Patience Roggensack is retiring. So the 4-3 conservative edge could  
flip.

--A liberal court could reinstate abortion rights, overturn a  
GOP-dominated legislative map and bring back voter rights favored by  
Dems, who worry about another close presidential election in 2024.

--The race has national implications, as Wisconsin is a purple state,  
a perennial presidential swing state and a favorite among big Dem  
donors.

It all adds up to big, big money.

Republicans appear to be fearing the worst, with Democrats trying to subdue their confidence and concentrate on the task at hand.

The race could also affect the outcome of a vacant state Senate seat in suburban Milwaukee. That seat was once held by Republican Alberta Darling, and Republican Rep. Dan Knodl is competing against  
environmental attorney Jodi Habush Sinykin on April 4 to fill out Darling's term.

Democrats are hoping for an upset in the GOP-leaning seat because of the Supreme Court race turnout and the abortion rights issue.

Republicans would still control the state Senate if they lost the seat, but it would be another blow to longtime Republican dominance in the Milwaukee suburbs.

For more, go to [www.wispolitics.com](http://www.wispolitics.com)

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