**2025 state Supreme Court race already taking shape**

By WisPolitics.com

It’s never too early to start talking about an election. Especially when considering what could be at stake.

While much of the attention in Wisconsin is focusing on the run-up to November 2024, moves are already being made for the 2025 state Supreme Court election.

That includes former Republican attorney general and current Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge Brad Schimel starting to put out feelers about a run for the Supreme Court in spring 2025.

Seventy-three-year-old liberal Justice Ann Walsh Bradley — still getting a taste of what it’s like to be in the majority for the first time in 15 years — has already said she plans to seek a fourth 10-year term in 2025. And why wouldn’t she? Liberals are on a winning streak in state Supreme Court races, the state Democratic Party is coming off an election in which it proved to be a financial powerhouse for Janet Protasiewicz .

Plus the power of incumbency is huge in Supreme Court races.

Over the last six decades, Louis Butler — appointed to the court by then-Democrat Gov. Jim Doyle — is the only sitting justice to have lost a race. Whether Bradley would serve the full 10-year term is the subject of much speculation. The state Constitution only allows one Supreme Court contest a year. So if Bradley won in 2025 and decided to step away at some point, the earliest her governor-appointed replacement could face the voters is 2031, insiders note. And that time on the bench would be a huge boost for an appointee — should that kind of transition come to pass.

But before insiders get carried away with their parlor game of what ifs, conservatives would like a shot at flipping back control of the court by beating Bradley. Enter Schimel. A source with knowledge of
the former AG’s thinking says Schimel has been traveling the circuit in recent months with an eye toward a possible Supreme Court bid. And conservatives say there are some obvious reasons why he’d be a strong candidate. He’s run statewide before and won. He’s got a fundraising network. And he’s got conservative bona fides that would make the base happy. Yes, he’d be more of a partisan candidate than any other Supreme Court contender going back to possibly Bill Bablitch, who was a sitting Democrat state senator when he was elected.

But the April race blew away any remaining facade of state Supreme Court contests being nonpartisan with Protasiewicz’s approach to the campaign, some say. She rewrote the playbook on how to approach a race to ensure your base is fired up, and you can expect Republicans to go with a similar plan in the future.

Meanwhile, insiders note Schimel’s biggest drawback is simple. While he’s run statewide, he also lost statewide. And there are plenty of political opinions that he laid out between his time in the AG’s office and as the Waukesha County DA that could be used against him. Most of the other names being tossed around come out of Waukesha County. That includes 2nd District Court of Appeals Judge Maria Lazar,
a former Waukesha County Circuit Court judge who worked at DOJ under Schimel. She tells WisPolitics she’s flattered about talk of her running “but I’ve made no decision.” Insiders note the ties between
Schimel and Lazar and question whether both would get into the race.

Fellow 2nd District Court of Appeals Judge Shelley Grogan appeared headed for a state Supreme Court bid after she knocked off an appointee of Dem Gov. Tony Evers in 2021 as she won an appellate spot.
But she burned some bridges in conservative circles this past spring with the way she went after Waukesha County Circuit Court Judge Jennifer Dorow as a surrogate for former Justice Daniel Kelly. Dorow went into that race with a lot of buzz among conservatives over her handling of the Waukesha Christmas Parade trial.

But the attacks from Grogan and other Kelly supporters, along with those fired by liberals ahead of the primary, took their toll, some say. Some believe Dorow was taken aback by the attacks, possibly giving her second thoughts about another run in the near future. Democrats also say there was a lot more in her background that never got brought up on the campaign trail because Kelly made it through to the eneral. Besides, insiders note, Dorow has a reelection bid for her circuit court seat on her plate in spring 2024.

The conservative field to take on Bradley will shake out by this summer, some expect. More than likely, you’ll see an announcement by someone before the fall election really kicks into high gear. Then they’ll recede from the spotlight a bit to line up donors and hit the ground running after the dust settles from the November 2024 election.

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