Conservative Justice Bradley to run again as liberals take over chief's position

By WisPolitics.com

The April 1 election of Susan Crawford to the state Supreme Court already is making waves on the high court.

Liberals, upon maintaining 4-3 control, quickly moved to install Ann Walsh Bradley as the new chief justice for a short stint before yielding to Jill Karofsky. Crawford, a Dane County judge, won the retiring Bradley's seat and a 10-year term with a double-digit win over conservative Brad Schimel, a Waukesha County judge and former Republican attorney general.

Meanwhile, conservative Justice Rebecca Bradley -- no relation to Ann Walsh Bradley -- told WisPolitics she plans to run for reelection in 2026 to “ensure that there is a voice for the constitution and for the rule of law to preserve that in the state of Wisconsin.”

And at least two liberal appeals court judges are considering a run next year in a race that will be a key hold for conservatives as they look for a path to win back the majority after the April 1 loss.

“I’m concerned for what an extremely radical court is going to do over the next three years, and I will be spending the next several weeks assessing what happened on Tuesday and figuring out a path to achieving a court that is not led by and dominated by the radical left, that gets back to deciding cases under the law and respecting the constitution,” Bradley told WisPolitics in a phone interview. “I will be looking at that carefully.”

Crawford’s win cements the liberal majority through at least 2028, and conservatives will only have a chance to flip back control in three years if they hold Bradley’s seat next year and Annette Ziegler’s in 2027.

Liberals have now won four of the past five Supreme Court races and will be looking to pick up another over the next two years that could serve as a buffer ahead of the 2028 race, when Rebecca Dallet would be up for another 10-year term.

1st District Appeals Court Judge Pedro Colón and 4th District Appeals Court Judge Chris Taylor both told WisPolitics this week they’re considering runs next spring. Both considered and ultimately turned down a chance to run this year.

“I’m seriously looking at it,” Colón said. “I think I have the ability to do it. Given this week’s results, the outlook is difficult, as with every race, but very promising.”

When Taylor passed on a 2025 run, she didn’t elaborate on her reasons other than the decision came after conversations with family and friends.

She told WisPolitics her family situation has changed with her kids a year older and her husband now working in town, making a run more feasible.

“Any person who’s a mom running for statewide office has to consider the impact on her family. That’s been a big change,” Taylor said. “I also think there’s a real hunger for people to run who have actually stood up for the people of this state and stood up for their values, whether it be fair maps, people’s constitutional rights, a number of issues that I’ve certainly worked on.”

Insiders have mentioned two other appeals court judges as potential candidates. 1st District Judge Sara Geenen, who beat incumbent Judge William Brash in 2023, said through a spokesperson that she’s not interested in running next year. Meanwhile, 4th District Judge Rachel Graham is up for reelection to the Madison-based court next year, which would be a significant deterrent to running for the Supreme Court.

In looking at next year’s race, Dem court observers note Colón and Taylor don’t fit the mold of successful liberal Supreme Court candidates during the past seven years. Crawford, Karofsky, Dallet, and Janet Protasiewicz were all sitting judges when they ran for the court and had a background with prosecutorial experience.

Colón and Taylor are both former members of the state Assembly who were appointed to the circuit court. Dem Gov. Tony Evers appointed Colón to the 1st District in 2023, and he faced no opposition in winning a full six-year term last year. Taylor, a former policy and political director for Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, was unopposed when she ran for the 4th District in 2023.

Neither has worked as a prosecutor, and that is one reason some insiders believe other candidates will weigh a run next year.

Leading the court for two months will be Ann Walsh Bradley. Karofsky will succeed her as chief justice on July 1 and then serve out the remainder of the two-year term through April 30, 2027.

Bradley succeeds Annette Ziegler, reelected as chief justice in mid-March two years ago shortly before liberals flipped control of the court in the April 2023 election.

Bradley’s ascension to the post on May 1 will be the first time a liberal has served as chief justice since Shirley Abrahamson had the role. The position had traditionally been designated to the court’s most senior justice. But a constitutional amendment in 2015 gave justices the power to elect a leader, and conservatives quickly installed former Justice Pat Roggensack in the post.

Ziegler succeeded Roggensack in the post in 2021.

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