$107 million later ...

By WisPolitics

At least $107 million was spent overall in the state Supreme Court race -- shattering the previous national record set only two years ago in Wisconsin, according to a WisPolitics tally.

About $24 million of that came via Elon Musk and related PACs, the tally showed. Dems had their rich donors, too, but they didn't don a cheesehead and campaign in Wisconsin the weekend before the election, insiders point out.

And the end result is a state Supreme Court that will tilt 4-3 to the liberal side -- the same as it has been since Janet C. Protasiewicz was easily elected to the Wisconsin Supreme Court over former Justice Daniel Kelly on April 4, 2023 and took office on August 1, 2023.

A waste of money, some might say.

Well, Dems and many voters backing Dane County Judge Susan Crawford say otherwise -- contending it's worth it to block the tactics of Musk and Donald Trump's agenda in Wisconsin. Republicans, who had been outspent two years ago, evened the financial playing field and had
what they thought was a better candidate in former GOP Attorney General Brad Schimel. But they still came away with a loss of about the same margin -- 10 percentage points

Crawford's victory also may lead to pro-Democratic rulings on abortion, Act 10 and maybe congressional redistricting -- similar to the decision that led to legislative remapping and narrower legislative majorities for Republicans. Republicans now have six of the eight House seats in Wisconsin.

Conservatives used to fully control the Wisconsin statehouse and the high court. They passed a lot of their agenda. Now, Democrats are aiming to do the same on their side.

In addition, all of that money resulted in a record Wisconsin turnout for a spring race. You guessed it -- the previous record was from the 2023 court race.

With the final precincts still coming in as of this writing, turnout in the state Supreme Court race was inching toward a record 50% of the state’s voting age population.

The turnout of more than 1.8 million voters in the spring 2023 race amounted to 39% of the state’s voting age population. That had been the previous high for a spring election that didn’t also include a presidential primary.

The April 1 turnout, meanwhile, also topped the more than 2.1 million people who turned out in the April 2016 election as Dems and Republicans both had open races for their presidential nominations.

All of that money turned into TV ads for sure but also resulted in meaningful contacts with voters via door-knocking, texts, emails and direct mail. Voters responded.

So you could say that a midwestern swing state of some 5.9 million people had an outsized impact on the national narrative.

And there's more elections to come -- another court race is just around the corner.

Now, conservatives will be tasked with defending the seats of Justice Rebecca Bradley, who is up for reelection in 2026, and Chief Justice Annette Ziegler in 2027. They would need to win both just to have a shot at retaking the majority in 2028, when liberal Rebecca Dallet would be up for a second 10-year term.

Crawford’s victory marks the fourth win in the last five Supreme Court races for liberals. Before that streak began, conservatives had a 5-2 majority.

And next fall will come the midterms, when seats in the U.S. House, the Wisconsin Assembly and about half of the state Senate will be on the ballot.

Is the court race a harbinger of what's to come in the next big election, in November 2026? One insider pointed out that the big Protasiewicz win in 2023 was followed by a Trump victory in 2024.

So maybe not. Campaign vets say the national political landscape, candidates, campaigns and indeed, money, do matter.

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