

Election-denying donors pour millions into key Wisconsin supreme court race

Written by WisDems Press, Hannah Menchhoff
Wednesday, 15 March 2023 10:03 -



MADISON, Wis. — According to a [new analysis from the Guardian](#), election deniers are among Dan Kelly’s biggest supporters in the race for Wisconsin Supreme Court, with groups involved in efforts to overturn the 2020 election dropping over \$3.9 million to support the far-right candidate Dan Kelly.

Kelly’s backers include Stop the Steal backer Dick Uihlein, who donated to groups involved in the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol and poured his personal fortune into promoting election misinformation following the 2020 election. Fair Courts America and Restoration PAC, two PACs bankrolled by Uihlein, have already [spent millions](#) to prop up Kelly’s campaign.



It’s no surprise that election deniers have swarmed to support Kelly. Kelly was paid nearly [\\$120,000](#) to work on “election integrity” issues for the state and national Republican Parties. Kelly’s work included advising the Wisconsin GOP on their efforts to thwart democracy and overturn the results of the 2020 election by appointing a slate of fake presidential electors.

The Guardian: [Election-denying donors pour millions into key Wisconsin supreme court race](#)

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More than \$3.9m has poured into the Wisconsin supreme court election from individuals and groups involved with promoting election disinformation and attempts to overturn the 2020 election, according to an analysis of campaign spending by the Guardian.

The contributions, in support of the conservative candidate Daniel Kelly, come amid a race that has broken national campaign spending records. According to a campaign finance tracker by the Brennan Center for Justice, political ad orders for the liberal county judge Janet Protasiewicz and conservative Kelly have reached at least \$20m in anticipation of the 4 April general election.

[...]

Among the election-denying funders behind Kelly’s run are anti-abortion thinktanks and Super PACs, conservative billionaires and a constellation of groups funded by the Wisconsin shipping supply tycoon Richard Uihlein.

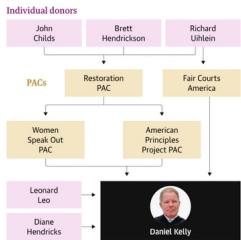
Meanwhile, prominent election denier Charlie Kirk of the rightwing Turning Point USA has voiced support for Kelly’s campaign. Kirk has been blamed for funding the travel of a large number of the Capitol rioters on January 6.

“There is an organized group of insurrectionists who are trying to actively fund candidates for elected office, including judgeships,” said Jeremi Suri, a professor of public affairs and history at the University of Texas-Austin.

The funding comes after prominent election deniers lost their efforts in the 2022 midterms to oversee elections in swing states including Arizona, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

“I don’t think the insurrectionists have given up,” Suri said. “They’re still looking for candidates, and they’re particularly interested in someone like Kelly, who, if he can get on the supreme court, will have a 10-year term and will be pretty much unaccountable.”

The flow of over \$3.5m to judge Daniel Kelly’s campaign



Guardian graphic.

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Looming behind the biggest campaign splurges is Richard Uihlein, heir to the Schlitz beer fortune and founder of Uline, a shipping supply company based in Wisconsin. Uihlein has gained notoriety for his financial support of groups involved with the 6 January 2021 Capitol riot and thinktanks that stoked unfounded fears of election fraud during and following the 2020 election – including the Conservative Partnership Institute and the Federalist Society.

Campaign finance reports show the group Fair Courts America, Inc, which is largely bankrolled by Uihlein, spent at least \$1.5m in independent expenditures on pro-Kelly television ads before the 21 February primary. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, Fair Courts America has booked more than \$3.9m in ads scheduled to run by 4 April.

Uihlein's influence in the Wisconsin supreme court race extends beyond Fair Courts America. Restoration Pac, a funding vehicle that Uihlein has poured millions into, finances other pro-Kelly groups, including Women Speak Out Pac. Reports show Women Speak Out Pac has spent more than \$100,000 on the primary and general election so far.

American Principles Project Pac, which has reported contributing more than \$66,000 on pro-Kelly digital advertising before the primary, is also funded by Restoration Pac.

Although Uihlein dollars figure prominently in the Wisconsin supreme court race, the billionaire is one of multiple mega-donors behind Restoration Pac. The Florida private equity billionaire John Childs contributed at least \$800,000 to the Pac in 2022, according to filings with the Federal Elections Commission (FEC). Childs has also contributed to America First Action, the Super Pac that supported Trump's 2020 run for office.

The Texas billionaire Brett Hendrickson, who has contributed to the campaigns of the Missouri congressman Eric Burlison, Senator Ted Budd of North Carolina and the Illinois congresswoman Mary Miller, has also contributed to Restoration Pac. Burlison, Budd and Miller have all aligned themselves with Trump in questioning the results of the 2020 election.

According to campaign finance filings, the Federalist Society chairman, Leonard Leo, contributed \$20,000 to Kelly's campaign – the maximum amount an individual donor can contribute to a supreme court campaign in Wisconsin. In addition to his work with the Federalist Society, Leo has ties to the Concord Fund and the 85 Fund, groups that have pushed the widely disputed independent state legislature theory that claims state legislatures have full jurisdiction to conduct federal elections.

Also donating the maximum \$20,000 to Kelly's campaign was Diane Hendricks, chairwoman of the multibillion-dollar building company ABC Supply. According to the FEC, Hendricks has also donated at least \$4m to Trump's 2020 America First Pac, and more than \$500,000 to Trump Victory and Make America Great Again, Again! Inc.

The deluge of cash from the same groups that financially supported election denialism and Trump's failed bid to overturn the 2020 election also played an outsized role during the 2022

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elections. Billionaire venture capitalist Peter Thiel and Trump-allied conservative strategist Larry Ellison, for example, reportedly spent more than \$40m during the 2022 election cycle.

A bombshell report in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel raised questions about Kelly's own participation in 2020 attempts to overturn the presidential election. Kelly, the report found, had provided special counsel to the Republican party, advising on the subject of fake electors. He has also been paid close to \$120,000 for his work on "election integrity" by the Republican National Committee and state GOP.

Given that the winner of the supreme court race will help decide the future of legal abortion in Wisconsin, money has poured into the race on both sides of the abortion fight. Planned Parenthood PACs promised more than \$1m for Protasiewicz and the anti-abortion Women Speak Out PAC has spent at least \$100,000 on pro-Kelly materials. The anti-abortion groups and funders behind Kelly's campaign have also taken part in efforts to cast doubt on the 2020 election results – highlighting the common cause rightwing Christian activists have found with election deniers.

On a 21 February episode of the Charlie Kirk Show, Julaine Appling – president of the Christian, anti-abortion Wisconsin Family Council – endorsed Kelly while invoking fears of electoral fraud.

"Just take the ballot harvesting," said Appling. "That was something that the liberals were pushing and pushing and doing these bizarre things during the 2020 election that were clearly outside the law."

Wisconsin Family Action, Inc, which Appling also heads, has reported about \$6,000 in independent expenditures to support Kelly's election.

Kirk, who founded Turning Point USA and played a prominent role in mobilizing protestors for rallies that preceded the insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, concurred.

"Dan Kelly is the best of all of them."