

One Wisconsin Now: Pro-Schimel attack ads fueled by opioid money

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Ad Buy From Group Fueled With Big Pharma Money Hits as Wisconsin Attorney General Under Increased Scrutiny for Legal Inaction

MADISON, Wis. — As Attorney General Brad Schimel continues to sit on the sidelines and not pursue legal action to hold the manufacturers of highly addictive opioids accountable, his special interest allies are getting in the game. As reported by WisPolitics.com, the Republican Attorneys General Association (RAGA) has launched paid attack ads against Schimel's announced Democratic opponent. According to the most recent filing with the Internal Revenue Service, Purdue Pharma, donated over \$290,000 to RAGA in 2016. "Is it just a coincidence that as Brad Schimel takes shots for sitting on the sidelines as other Attorneys General take action against opioid manufacturers a big pharma fueled group shows up with ads attacking his announced Democratic opponent?" asked One Wisconsin Now Executive Director Scot Ross. "Doubtful."

RAGA's latest filing with the IRS reveals they received 6 contributions from Purdue Pharma in 2016, totalling \$290,475. In addition to being one of the largest contributors to RAGA last year, Purdue Pharma is a leading manufacturer of the prescription opioid OxyContin, reaping billions of dollars in sales and profits since its introduction in 1995.

The state news service WisPolitics.com reported on Monday that the Republican Attorneys General Association has launched a digital advertising campaign accusing former federal prosecutor Josh Kaul, Schimel's announced Democratic opponent, of being a "liberal." According to Ross, the timing of the ad campaign is suspect. Schimel has recently been under scrutiny for his continued refusal to take legal action against manufacturers of opioids, even as Attorneys General in other states, including most recently fellow Republican Mike DeWine in Ohio, have gone to court to sue major opioid manufacturers for engaging in tactics they allege have helped create a crisis of addiction.

Schimel proclaimed in 2014 that combating opioid addiction would be a top priority if elected. But in a [2016 newspaper story](#) in which the issue of legal action against opioid manufacturers was raised, Schimel demurred, claiming pharmaceutical manufacturer's unsavory marketing practices were too far in the past. He made those comments a month after receiving a contribution from Purdue Pharma PAC, its only PAC contribution made in Wisconsin.

But Schimel's defense of his inaction is significantly undermined by the Ohio lawsuit's allegation that opioid manufacturers continue to create environments conducive to addiction. In addition, that other states like Kentucky recently settled a lawsuit against opioid manufacturers and Mississippi has ongoing litigation suggests the conduct at issue is not restricted to Ohio. Furthermore, news reporting on unsealed court documents from West Virginia show that a major opioid manufacturer fought efforts to limit the distribution of its drugs and the resulting explosion of addiction in that state.

For his part, Scott Walker, who as Governor has the power to direct the Attorney General to explore legal action, received a \$10,000 contribution from Purdue Pharma co-founder Mortimer Sackler in 2012.

Ross concluded, "Brad Schimel has shown that he's nothing if not transactional. And it sure looks like the special interests have taken note."