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Screnock knocks Dallet as activist; she slams rival as tool of special interests

Posted on Wednesday, Feb 21, 2018

Sauk County Judge Michael Screnock slammed Supreme Court rival Rebecca Dallet as an activist who would seek to legislative from the bench in the pursuit of political issues she supports.

Meanwhile, Dallet, a Milwaukee County judge, portrayed Screnock as a comparatively inexperienced judge who is a tool of special interests who spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to get him through the primary.

“I will stand up for our values and I will make sure that the court is protecting the rights of the people of our state and not protecting the rights of special interests or political allies,” Dallet said in a phone interview.

The liberal One Wisconsin Now, which tracks media buys, tallied $584,000 spent by the WMC Issues Mobilization Council on broadcast, cable and satellite TV praising Screnock in the lead up to the primary and the conservative Wisconsin Alliance for Reform dropping another $75,000 on radio and TV. Campaign finance reports filed with the state Ethics Commission also show the state GOP spending at least $142,000 to back Screnock.

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Screnock said outside groups would not have spent that kind of money on the primary if it featured three candidates committed to upholding the rule of law and not advocating from the bench. Instead, he said Dallet and Middleton attorney Tim Burns made clear in the campaign they would have a political agenda if elected justice.

“What you see from that investment is the reality that people do not want to see that on our Supreme Court,” he said.

With 99 percent of precincts reporting, Screnock was at 246,853 votes, or 46 percent, while Dallet was at 190,908 votes, or 36 percent, according to unofficial returns collected by The Associated Press. Burns was at 95,043 votes, or 18 percent.

Combined, the two candidates who were viewed as progressives collected a majority of the vote in Tuesday’s primary.

Two years ago, Justice Rebecca Bradley collected 44.6 percent of the vote in a three-way primary for her seat. But she then took 52.4 percent in the April election in fending off Appeals Court Judge JoAnne Kloppenburg.

That April ballot also included the presidential primaries, where more 98,344 more voters cast ballots in the GOP race than the Dem contest. Bradley beat Kloppenburg by 95,515 votes.

Screnock noted there was not much on Tuesday’s ballot besides the Supreme Court race and expected other local races would boost turnout come April.

“I’m not at all concerned that the aggregated numbers tonight would translate into an uphill battle for my campaign headed into the next election,” he said.

The state GOP, meanwhile, has already started knocking Dallet following a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel report that aggregated donations to Dem candidates and the state party from a Madison businessman who has been caught up in a sexual harassment complaint. The complaint accuses Mark Bakken of firing a female employee in retaliation for complaining about her treatment by a different executive. Bakken has said he fired her for poor performance.

Bakken has given Dallet $20,000, the maximum donation for a Supreme Court candidate.

Dallet campaign manager Jessica Lovejoy said the Milwaukee judge takes the allegations seriously.

“We will continue to monitor the progress of the case and if it turns out that Mr. Bakken did anything inappropriate we will take further action,” Lovejoy said.