

# WisDems: Illinois billionaires spending millions to “spawn, nurture” Kevin Nicholson

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Dick and Liz Uihlein are spending millions to buy a U.S. Senate seat for Nicholson, because he’s taken on their “policy beliefs” and anti-working families agenda as his own

MADISON — In case you missed it, new reporting from the New York Times exposes the ultraconservative motivations behind Illinois billionaires Dick and Liz Uihlein’s efforts to “spawn, nurture” Republican Kevin Nicholson as their bought-and-paid-for U.S. Senate candidate from Wisconsin.

Since 2017, the Uihleins have already deployed \$26 million to prop up the campaigns of hardline Republican candidates across the country, including Alabama Senate candidate and alleged child sexual predator Roy Moore.

Wisconsin’s own Kevin Nicholson has benefited from nearly \$5.5 million in TV and radio spending from Uihlein groups. And according to Federal Election Commission filings, Uihlein has donated nearly \$20 million across 10 groups supporting Nicholson, since the start of 2017.

The Times’s reporting paints a grim portrait of the Uihleins “testing...whether big money...can spawn, nurture and deliver a...candidate” — Kevin Nicholson — who will put billionaire donors and corporate special interest first at the expense of hardworking Wisconsin families.

Here’s what you need to know from the Times’s story:

Kevin Nicholson wasn't "viable" until the Uihlein's came along, and started spending millions to buy him an election. The Uihleins' Wisconsin "pick, Mr. Nicholson, was a virtual unknown until Uihlein millions made him viable overnight, starting with a \$2 million donation in March of 2017 to a new 'super PAC' seeking to elect him. At the time he had not even announced his candidacy."

Kevin Nicholson's candidacy is a test "of whether big money... can spawn, nurture and deliver a winning candidate." Kevin Nicholson "was a virtual unknown until Uihlein millions made him viable overnight, starting with a \$2 million donation in March of 2017 to a new 'super PAC' seeking to elect him...perhaps testing the concept of whether big money — theirs — can spawn, nurture and deliver a winning candidate."

The Uihleins have already spent \$26 million on their hand-picked extremists this cycle, alone. "Liz and Dick Uihlein...[have] joined the upper pantheon of Republican donors alongside names like Koch, Mercer and Adelson. They have spent roughly \$26 million on the current election cycle...working outside the party establishment to advance a combative, hard-right conservatism."

The Uihleins are particularly focused on the Wisconsin Senate race, where they've spent \$11 million for Kevin Nicholson — and against Tammy Baldwin. "Mr. Uihlein's donations this cycle include \$11 million to three political action committees, mainly to support Kevin Nicholson, a Wisconsin candidate for Senate who fits the outsider mold the Uihleins prefer... The Uihleins have made big donations to various super PACS and other groups that support him and attack his opponents..."

The Uihleins are focused on bankrolling candidates who they say "share our policy beliefs" — including candidates who endorse "broad access to assault weapons and who assail transgender rights." "Mr. Uihlein...underwrites firebrand anti-establishment candidates who typically defend broad access to assault weapons and assail transgender rights. He has also bankrolled partisan newspapers and backed Roy Moore in Alabama even after he was accused of sexual misconduct with underage girls...[T]he couple said, "We care about our community and our country and choose to personally support candidates that share our policy beliefs."

Dick Uihlein, in particular, has made opposing civil rights — particularly, LGBTQ rights — a centerpiece of his political spending agenda. "Opposing gay and transgender rights was frequently a focus of [Dick Uihlein's] efforts. In one Illinois school district, Mr. Uihlein bankrolled a school board candidate who fought a move

allowing transgender students in girls' locker rooms...The Uihlein forces drew sharp criticism for a recent television ad from the campaign of Jeanne Ives, the conservative challenger they backed in a primary against Gov. Bruce Rauner of Illinois. The ad featured a cartoonish depiction of a transgender woman...‘It was probably the most offensive thing I’ve seen in a state race,’ said Pat Brady, the former Illinois Republican chairman.”