

Protasiewicz campaign: After victim harassment and false information is exposed, WMC pulls ads

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MILWAUKEE, Wis. – In case you missed it, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC) has pulled their false ad after being exposed for harassing an assault victim and misleading voters.

WMC has spent \$5.2 million, which is the most of any outside group in support of Dan Kelly. Just two days after their behaviors and false statements were exposed, they pulled the ads off of the air.

Removing ads is rare, and speaks volumes to how irresponsible these ads were. Using a rape victim for political gain is deeply disturbing, but comes as no surprise as Dan Kelly has built his campaign on misinformation and right-wing extremism. Dan Kelly is unfit to serve on the Supreme Court, and will do whatever it takes to further right-wing interests even if it means retraumatizing a crime victim and spreading lies.

“WMC got caught spreading lies about Judge Janet Protasiewicz and harassing a victim of crime. Dan Kelly and his right-wing supporters have zero credibility and Wisconsin voters aren’t buying their lies,” said Janet for Justice Spokesperson Sam Roecker. “It’s time for Fair Courts America to follow suit and pull their slanderous ads instead of continuing to re-traumatize assault victims.”

Read the rest of the article below:

Business group pulls pro-Kelly Supreme Court ads featuring a rape victim’s case

[\[Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 3/31/23\]](#)

The political arm of Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce has removed two television ads backing Supreme Court candidate Daniel Kelly that featured a rape case his opponent Judge Janet Protasiewicz presided over.

The unusual move comes two days after WMC stood by the claims the ads made, despite the victim at the center of the case saying the broadcasts retraumatized her and were inaccurate.

“Ads are rarely pulled in races even when they’re really controversial,” said Michael Wagner, a University of Wisconsin-Madison journalism professor who directs the school’s Center for Communication and Civic Renewal.

“It’s not common for a candidate to ask for an ad to get pulled. But it’s uncommon for it to happen in a race,” Wagner said.

WMC did not respond to an interview request from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, but on Wednesday said the ads were “factually accurate and publicly available information” and informed voters about the judicial record of Protasiewicz, who is a Milwaukee County circuit judge.

Milwaukee attorney Matthew O’Neill with Fox, O’Neill & Shannon sent letters to television stations across the state Thursday afternoon warning that airing false or misleading ads could jeopardize station licenses. The Protasiewicz campaign received word Friday that WMC would begin airing older ads supporting Kelly.

WMC Issues Mobilization Council has spent \$5.2 million, the most of any outside group, in support of Kelly, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law. Tuesday’s closely watched election that will determine the ideological balance of the court has attracted unprecedented financial donations.

O’Neill sent a letter Friday to television stations asking the third ad involving the rape case, paid for by Fair Courts America, a super PAC supporting Kelly, be removed for the same reasons.

“It is our understanding that WMC has pulled all of its ads containing the false statements. This was the proper response, and what we requested,” O’Neill said.

"However, it appears that FCA is continuing to air its false advertisements. We repeat our demands that you immediately stop airing the false ads by FCA."

Fair Courts America has spent \$5.1 million on television ads, according to the Brennan Center.

Protasiewicz spokesman Sam Roecker said it's time for Fair Courts to follow suit and remove its ads.

"WMC got caught spreading lies about Judge Janet Protasiewicz and harassing a victim of crime," Roecker said. "Dan Kelly and his right-wing supporters have zero credibility and Wisconsin voters aren't buying their lies."

The victim in the rape case told the Journal Sentinel said she declined to participate in the ads when she was approached to do so and did not want her case to be featured.

When the ads began to air, "It immediately took my breath away," the woman told the Journal Sentinel. "To see it in action. I wondered if there was any thought put into the human beings behind the cases. I am a human being who wants peace."

Protasiewicz sentenced the defendant in the rape case to 2 1/2 years in prison with another 2 1/2 years of supervision, a sentence the victim said she was satisfied with. The maximum sentence Protasiewicz could have issued was 5 years in prison followed by 5 years of community supervision.

The victim, who asked to be identified by her first name, Emily, also took issue with the ads' use of a voiceover to read a brief portion of Emily's victim impact statement where she describes being afraid before the narrator says Protasiewicz "ignored her pleas." (The Journal Sentinel does not name sexual assault victims without their consent).

Emily told the Journal Sentinel the judge did take into account her perspective.

The WMC ads also claim Emily was "left for dead" after her attack. In fact, she was able to run back into a bar she had been in and ask that the police be called.