

# WisDems: Dan Kelly's growing list of right-wing financial ties

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**MADISON, Wis.** — Today, the [Wisconsin Examiner detailed](#) far-right Wisconsin Supreme Court candidate Dan Kelly's deep financial ties to right-wing special interest groups that have long advanced Republican causes in court. Groups connected to Kelly include the Bradley Foundation and two Illinois-based legal groups, the Liberty Justice Center and the law firm Troutman Pepper.

Notably, the Liberty Justice Center has done legal work on behalf of Fair Courts America, a super PAC funded almost exclusively by Dick Uihlein. Fair Courts America is now propping up Kelly's campaign with millions of dollars in independent expenditures.

The latest revelations detailing Kelly's right-wing financial entanglements build on his already lengthy list of conflicts of interest. Kelly provided legal counsel to Wisconsin Right to Life, an anti-abortion group that has endorsed his campaign, and advised both the state and national Republican Parties. Last month, the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) reported that Kelly was paid almost \$120,000 by the Republican Party to work on "election integrity" issues. Kelly's work included advising the Wisconsin GOP on their efforts to thwart democracy and overturn the results of the 2020 election by appointing fake presidential electors in the weeks leading up to the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol.

**Wisconsin Examiner: [Kelly and Protasiewicz financial disclosures show only one candidate did partisan work](#)**

Conservative Wisconsin Supreme Court candidate Daniel Kelly says the choice in the April 4 election for an open seat on the court is between "the rule of law" and "the rule of Janet." Criticizing his opponent for saying she supports abortion rights

and considers the Republican Legislature's voting map "rigged," Kelly makes the case that he would be a less partisan figure on the bench than Milwaukee County Judge Janet Protasiewicz.

Yet Kelly's 2022 statement of economic interest (SEI) shows that since he lost re-election to the court in 2020, he has mostly engaged in work on behalf of the Republican party and allied ideological groups. The SEI is a document candidates for office are required to file that outlines their — and their families' — income, investments, debts and potential conflicts of interest.

The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel previously reported that Kelly was paid nearly \$120,000 by the state Republican Party and the Republican National Committee (RNC) for work on election-related issues, including advising state party leaders on their failed effort to cast false Electoral College votes for then-President Donald Trump. Those payments came as late as December 2022 and included \$40,000 from the RNC after Kelly announced he was running for an open seat on the state Supreme Court.

Kelly's SEI also shows his work for Wisconsin-based conservative policy organization the Institute for Reforming Government, for which he wrote a manual urging state lawmakers to conduct more investigations similar to the widely criticized review of the 2020 election conducted by Michael Gableman.

The SEI additionally shows Kelly received at least \$1,000 in income from three groups deeply tied to the Republican Party and its legal interests.

The disclosure shows that in 2022 Kelly did work for the Bradley Foundation, an Illinois-based nonprofit called the Liberty Justice Center and the Chicago-based law firm Troutman Pepper.

The Bradley Foundation, based in Milwaukee, is a major contributor to conservative causes in Wisconsin and across the country. The foundation continues to be a large source of funding for the right-wing Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, which regularly brings cases to the state Supreme Court and its board of directors includes Cleta Mitchell, an attorney who was heavily involved in Trump's efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The Liberty Justice Center is a nonprofit which "fights for the constitutional rights of American families, workers, advocates and entrepreneurs." The organization

brought the Janus v. AFSCME U.S. Supreme Court case that prevented unions representing public employees from taking dues from non-union employees.

Last year, the organization filed a lawsuit on behalf of an Illinois resident and Fair Courts America, a super PAC tied to Republican megadonor Richard Uihlein that has dedicated millions of dollars to supporting Kelly's campaign. The lawsuit, Chancey v. Illinois State Board of Elections, challenged a state limit on contributions to judicial elections.

Uihlein has donated \$20,000 to Kelly's campaign, the maximum allowed under Wisconsin law, while Fair Courts America has run ads attacking Protasiewicz. During the primary race, Kelly argued he should be the conservative nominee partly because of his ability to attract outside money from groups such as Fair Courts America.

At an event hosted by the Wisconsin Counties Association earlier this month, Kelly said he wouldn't recuse himself from any cases in which Uihlein is involved because he "hasn't made greater donations than any other," person. Uihlein's company, the packing company ULine, is based in Wisconsin.

The law firm Troutman Pepper is regularly hired as outside counsel by the Republicans in control of the state Legislature. Its attorney, Misha Tseytlin, previously served as the Wisconsin Solicitor General under former Republican Attorney General Brad Schimel.

In recent years, Troutman Pepper has worked for Republican legislators in cases challenging COVID-19 restrictions; how absentee ballots can be returned; the lame duck laws passed by Republicans to take power away from Democratic Gov. Tony Evers and Attorney General Josh Kaul; Republican attempts to hire attorneys to fight not-yet-existing lawsuits over redistricting and other major cases.

[...]

Mike Browne, spokesperson for A Better Wisconsin Together, a progressive advocacy organization that has spent money supporting Protasiewicz, says the SEI shows Kelly is a "creature of the right wing."

"He's an extraordinarily ideological judge and he's shown us his ideology influences his actions on the court," Browne says. "We don't have to guess, we can just go

back to after he was appointed by [former Republican Gov.] Scott Walker. He is a creature of the right wing; he was part of their infrastructure after leaving the court. He continued to work for these right wing causes and got paid for it — pretty well, it seems.”

On the other side, the SEIs of Protasiewicz — who regularly says in campaign speeches that the state of Wisconsin is “the only client she’s ever had” because of her career spent working in the Milwaukee County District Attorney’s Office and on the county circuit court — show that since 2020 she’s had hardly any disclosures of note.

Her annually filed statements show that aside from the mortgage on her home, some credit card debt and money in a handful of mutual funds, she’s had little to disclose. Her income came from the state of Wisconsin, and her husband’s income came from the Milwaukee law firm where he works.

The Protasiewicz campaign did not respond to a request for comment, but a spokesperson for the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, which has spent heavily to support her candidacy, said in a statement the disclosures show Kelly’s involvement with special interest groups seeking to influence the state court system.

“Dan Kelly has not only made extreme right-wing special interests the centerpiece of his campaign — now we know he was on the payroll. Kelly’s long history of legal work for the far-right fringe, including his defense of extreme partisan gerrymanders and extensive involvement in the GOP’s fake elector plot are disqualifying,” spokesperson Haley McCoy said. “In contrast, Judge Janet Protasiewicz is committed to fairness and common sense, and this is reflected by her record as a prosecutor and judge. Judge Protasiewicz will give everyone a fair hearing before the court, while Dan Kelly has already proven he is willing to twist the law to benefit the extreme far-right special interests backing his campaign.”