

# Snapshot of Dick Uihlein and the “Fair Courts America” Attack Ad Machine

## Part 1 of a New Guide to the Right-Wing Groups Targeting the Wisconsin Supreme Court

By Lisa Graves and Evan Vorpahl

**Illinois Billionaire Dick Uihlein is targeting the Wisconsin Supreme Court** with a new political operation that calls itself “Fair Courts America” (FCA). FCA is spending at least \$1.79 million<sup>1</sup> to try to win a seat on Uihlein’s neighboring state’s highest court for Dan Kelly, a 1991 graduate of 700 Club mogul Pat Robertson’s Virginia law school, which was not fully accredited by the American Bar Association until 1996.<sup>2</sup> Then-Gov. Scott Walker put Kelly on the Court in 2016; he lost his bid to keep that seat in 2020.<sup>3</sup> Judicial candidates cannot give speeches about how they would rule in future cases.

**Zoom in:** Who is Uihlein? He and his wife, Liz, own ULINE, a shipping supply company. He has a history of backing controversial legislative candidates and groups, such as:

- **Gov. Ron DeSantis** (R-FL), who has attacked **Covid-19** mitigation and **equality** policies in schools. Nearly \$2 million from the Uihlein fortune has aided him.<sup>4</sup>
- **Doug Truax**, an Illinoisan running the Uihlein-funded PAC tied to FCA, who ran for Senate to repeal the **Affordable Care Act** (ACA).<sup>5</sup> (More than 180,000 Wisconsin residents rely on the ACA to get needed care to protect their lives.<sup>6</sup>)
- The **Tea Party Patriots**, which co-organized the **Jan. 6** events where Donald Trump incited the **insurrection**, received more than \$4.3 million from Uihlein.<sup>7</sup> He also underwrote efforts by **Thomas More Society** lawyers to overturn the will of a majority of Wisconsin voters for Joe Biden in 2020,<sup>8</sup> and is fueling the use of voter lists to fuel debunked **voter fraud claims** of Trump’s “**Big Lie**.”<sup>9</sup>

**What Else Is New?** The head of Uihlein’s FCA attack machine, **Andrew Wynne** (a New Jerseyan who lives in South Carolina), said last month that he “was **so excited about the Supreme Court’s reversal of that decision,**” **Roe v. Wade**.<sup>10</sup> Due to that reversal, the Wisconsin Supreme Court will be asked to rule on a statute **criminalizing abortion**<sup>11</sup> adopted in 1849, when only white male citizens and some tribal members could vote.<sup>12</sup>

**The Bottom Line: The Uihlein-Fueled FCA is the biggest outside spender so far.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2023/02/10/wisconsin-supreme-court-race-expected-to-top-6-million-dollar-spending-february-primary-2023/69890580007/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/VA-news/VA-Pilot/issues/1996/vp960807/08070339.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eu.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/04/13/wisconsin-supreme-court-election-results-daniel-kelly-vs-jill-karofsky-conservative-liberal/2983933001>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/19/desantis-cash-trump-donors-00040659>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.effinghamdailynews.com/news/local\\_news/senate-candidate-visits-effingham/article\\_589544e3-270d-5904-bc37-9005e773e40a.html](https://www.effinghamdailynews.com/news/local_news/senate-candidate-visits-effingham/article_589544e3-270d-5904-bc37-9005e773e40a.html)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/04/29/new-reports-show-record-35-million-people-enrolled-in-coverage-related-to-the-affordable-care-act.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://wisconsinexaminer.com/brief/uihleins-owners-of-wisconsin-company-gave-millions-to-group-sponsoring-the-jan-6-march-for-trump/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.americanoversight.org/documents-from-wisconsin-election-investigation-reveal-contact-with-mike-lindell-other-partisan-activists>

<sup>9</sup> <https://pbswisconsin.org/news-item/billionaire-backed-group-enlists-trump-supporting-citizens-to-hunt-for-voter-fraud-using-discredited-techniques/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeowzkyT7So>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wpr.org/wisconsin-faces-tangled-series-abortion-laws-dating-back-1849-it-heads-possible-post-roe-future>

<sup>12</sup> <https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2021/02/17/freedom-fighter--how-black-men-gained-the-right-to-vote-in-wisconsin>

## Curated Resources about Dick Uihlein and Core Groups His Fortune Helps Fuel

- Maggie Severns, “The biggest Republican mega donor you’ve never heard of,” *Politico* (March 19, 2018). [Link](#)
- Alex Kotch, “Who Funds the Federalist? Finally We Know,” PRWatch/Center for Media and Democracy (December 9, 2020). [Link](#)
- Dan Mihalopoulos, “Chicago-Area Billionaire Gave Millions To ‘Patriots’ Group That Backed Pro-Trump Rally,” *WBEZ Chicago* (January 12, 2021). [Link](#)
- Megan O’Matz, “Billionaire-Backed Group Enlists Trump-Supporting Citizens to Hunt for Voter Fraud Using Discredited Techniques,” *ProPublica* (March 7, 2022). [Link](#)
- Tina Sfondes, “Dollars to doubters? Megadonor Uihlein kicks in millions to help elect Republicans who question election results,” *Chicago Sun Times* (October 13, 2022). [Link](#)
- David Armiak, “ULINE CEO Pours Another \$7.1 Million Into His Restoration PAC to Boost Anti-Abortion and Right-Wing Candidates and Causes,” PRWatch/Center for Media and Democracy, (October 18, 2022). [Link](#)
- Justin Elliott, Megan O’Matz and Doris Burke, “That Cardboard Box in Your Home Is Fueling Election Denial,” *ProPublica*, (October 26, 2022). [Link](#)

## Key Financial Documents

- Fair Courts America:
  - Fair Courts America 2022 Proposal. [Link](#)
  - FCA Wisconsin expenditures, January 27, 2023 [Link](#)
  - FCA Wisconsin expenditures, February 10, 2023 [Link](#)
  - 2022 October Quarterly FEC filing [Link](#)
  - 2022 FCA Post General FEC filing [Link](#)
  - 2022 FCA Year-End FEC filing [Link](#)

*About this series.* Together, Lisa Graves and Evan Vorpahl have been covering [outside spending in state supreme court races](#) since 2019, including [in Wisconsin](#). Graves has lived in Wisconsin for more than a decade and graduated from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse before attending Cornell Law School. Vorpahl is a native Wisconsinite who graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. True North Research is a national watchdog group, and Graves is the President of the Board of the Madison-based Center for Media and Democracy, which she previously led for eight years, writing and editing numerous Wisconsin and national stories.

Graves received the Milwaukee Press Club’s “Excellence in Journalism” Award for her coverage of the Wisconsin Supreme Court race in 2011. Her investigations of the American Legislative Exchange Council (“ALECexposed”) have won an “Izzy”/I.F. Stone Award and the Association for Education in Journalism’s “Professional Freedom and Responsibility” Award, whose other recipients include Bill Moyers and Molly Ivins—in addition to other honors.

Graves previously served as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Office of Legal Policy in the U.S. Department of Justice where she worked on judicial nominations, federal and state court relations, and other policies; as the Chief Counsel for Nominations for the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee where she handled judicial nominations; as the Deputy Chief of the Article III Judges Division of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, where she advised judges and judicial programs on anti-corruption measures; and other posts. She has testified before Congress about the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Postal Service, FOIA reform, and national security matters.

She is one of the nation’s foremost experts on the infrastructure of right-wing groups, both nationally and in the states, and how their billionaire funders and influence are regressing American public policies and institutions.

For additional information about this series, please contact Evan Vorpahl via [evan@truenorthresearch.org](mailto:evan@truenorthresearch.org).