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# Billionaire, Former Senate Majority Leader Aim To Oust Washington Chief Justice

By [AUSTIN JENKINS \(/PEOPLE/AUSTIN-JENKINS\)](#) • 14 HOURS AGO



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File photo of The Temple of Justice in Olympia, Washington, home to the Washington Supreme Court.

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What does a southwest Washington billionaire have in common with the former majority leader of the Washington Senate? They've teamed in an effort to unseat the chief justice of the Washington Supreme Court.

Ken Fisher of Camas, Washington is a Forbes-listed billionaire. Rodney Tom is a Medina Democrat who joined with Republicans to take control of the Washington Senate in 2013.

Recently Tom formed and Fisher funded a new political action committee called Judicial Integrity Washington. In recent weeks, the PAC has spent \$100,000 on radio ads for Kittitas County Prosecutor Greg Zempel (<http://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2016061073>). He's challenging Chief Justice Barbara Madsen (<http://www.tvw.org/watch/?eventID=2016061038>) for her seat on the Washington Supreme Court.

Tom pointed to recent court decisions striking down charter schools and two-thirds for tax hikes and upholding a \$15 per hour minimum wage for Sea-Tac Airport workers as motivation for efforts to unseat incumbent justices.

“There’s a lot of different groups out there that are kind of upset with the current court,” Tom said. “That’s what we’re trying to change.”

A call to Zempel was not immediately returned, but Madsen said she “finds it concerning that this amount of money is being spent on a non-partisan judicial race.”

To date, independent expenditures in this Supreme Court race have outpaced spending by the candidates by a margin of more than seven to one.

Zempel is also getting some help from the pro-charter school group Stand For Children. It reports spending nearly \$130,000 on pro-Zempel pre-primary internet ads and canvassing phone calls in advance of the August primary election.

“We’re just concerned that the decision about charter schools was based on political beliefs rather than impartial judgment,” said Stand for Children spokeswoman Deborah Jaquith. Madsen authored the 2015 majority opinion that found the charter school initiative unconstitutional.

This year Stand for Children is also backing a ballot measure in Oregon that would require the state to fund dropout-prevention programs, as well as career and college readiness programs in high schools.

A third candidate, John Scannell, is also running for the Supreme Court position currently held by Madsen. The top two vote-getters in the August 2 primary will advance to the general election.

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