

Donations to MT School Board race top \$85,000

Many came from outside district,
including Illinois billionaire
Richard Uihlein

By Lisa Curtis

Special to the News Graphic

MEQUON — The organizers of the recall election against four members of the Mequon-Thiensville School Board say that they have not solicited any donations from people outside the county or the state. Donors simply hear about their efforts and want to help, said one of the co-founders of the recall group.

Campaign finance papers filed Monday with the MT School District show eight different reports submitted by the recall group, which is backing candidates Scarlett Johnson, Kris Kittell, Charles Lorenz and Cheryle Rebolz. The reports include

monies raised through two committees for each of the four candidates, such as the Friends of Cheryle Rebolz Committee and the Recall MTSD School Board Francour Committee.

The Coalition to support MTSD, which is raising money to help re-elect the incumbents — Wendy Francour, Erik Hollander, Akram Khan and Chris Schultz — filed one report. The candidates themselves have filed no reports. They are required to file exemption reports if they raised less than \$2,000; but at least two incumbents, Francour and Khan, said they have had zero personal donations.

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Khan said he has not fundraised, nor has he collected or spent any money.

Francour said she received zero cash donations, but did receive in-kind contributions below \$2,000. In-kind donations go directly to a good or service on behalf of the candidate.

Recall group spokeswoman Amber Schroeder said many of the funds they raised were not for the election, but for the recall effort itself, which started in June.

According to Monday's report, the Coalition to Support MTSD raised \$27,407.13.

The "Friends of" committees raised a combined \$31,289 while the "Recall MTSD School Board" committees collected \$26,758.

Out-of-state donors

Among the donors to the campaigns was billionaire Richard Uihlein, founder of Uline, a Pleasant Prairie-based distributor of shipping, industrial and packaging materials. Uihlein and his wife, Elizabeth, of Lake Forest, Ill., are known for their large donations to Republican political candidates.

Uihlein gave \$1,500 to each of the committees formed to recall one of the four school board members.

Both groups received donations from outside Mequon and Thiensville, though dozens more went to the recall group committees. They saw contributors from as far away as Florida, Georgia, Nebraska, Green Bay and Lodi, and as close as Germantown and Jackson.

In-kind donations, such as for Facebook advertising, were also made.

Schroeder said a lot of the outside contributions came from grandparents of MTSD students or families with a second home. She said their website allows people to donate and she isn't even sure she can turn down a donation.

She said she doesn't know Uihlein, but assumes that he, like others, sees what the recall group is about and believes in them.

"We're honored that people from outside the district are trying to help us," Schroeder said. "They see the district, they see the decline."

The donations to the Coalition to Support MTSD were almost exclusively from residents of Mequon and Thiensville. They were generally smaller, with \$10 and \$25 donations not uncommon.

One outside donor, from Grafton, gave \$10. A woman from Milwaukee gave \$50. Another \$75 came from a man in Oconomowoc.

The special recall election is Tuesday.