

STATE POLITICS

State pays law firm nearly \$1 million to defend Act 10

By *Patrick Marley* of the Journal Sentinel

July 19, 2013

0

Madison — After nearly \$1 million in expenses, the state is ending its contract with a Republican-aligned law firm that helped it fight litigation over the 2011 law that sharply limits collective bargaining for most public workers.

From now on, the legal work will be handled entirely by the state Department of Justice.

Gov. Scott Walker relied on Michael Best & Friedrich to help review the union changes even before the legislation was introduced.

The law, known as Act 10, prompted massive protests, the departure from the state of Senate Democrats and the largest wave of recall elections for state officials in the country's history. It also sparked a wave of lawsuits, and Michael Best helped the state fight them.

The law was blocked by a Dane County judge before it took effect, but within months it was reinstated by the state Supreme Court. Later, a different Dane County judge and a federal judge separately struck down parts of the law as unconstitutional.

The federal decision was reversed on appeal. The Dane County case is [pending before the state Supreme Court](#).

"When the case was certified to the Supreme Court, we determined that we were able to do what needed to be done without further help," said Steven Means, an assistant attorney general and executive assistant to Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen.

For its work on Act 10, Michael Best was paid \$961,036 by the state.

"All of this effort and state expense wouldn't have been necessary if it weren't for the repeated attempts to overturn a law enacted by the people's representatives and upheld in every case where we've had a final decision," said a statement Friday from Walker spokesman Tom Evenson.

The ending of Michael Best's contract was first reported Friday by the [Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism](#).

The nearly \$1 million payment for the work on Act 10 is on top of \$431,000 the firm received from the state in 2011 and 2012 for assisting Republican lawmakers with drawing new election maps for congressional and legislative districts.

That work caused its share of controversy when a federal court found the firm did not turn over all the records it should have to groups that sued over the maps. The court fined the firm [about \\$17,500](#) for [filing frivolous motions](#) to try to block the release of the records. In its final ruling in the case, the three federal judges on the court asked whether professional regulators should [review the firm's conduct](#) in the case.

The firm also came under scrutiny for [providing free legal service worth thousands of dollars](#) to state Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman.

It is possible the state will seek outside legal help again in the future for work on Act 10.

There are two other lawsuits over Act 10, but the trial judges have not issued rulings in those cases. Means said the Department of Justice would evaluate whether it needed assistance for those cases as they progress.

Twitter: twitter.com/patrickmarley4



About Patrick Marley

Patrick Marley covers state government and state politics. He is the author, with Journal Sentinel reporter Jason Stein, of "More Than They Bargained For: Scott Walker, Unions and the Fight for Wisconsin."

[@patrickdmarley](#)
pmarley@journalsentinel.com
[608-258-2262](tel:608-258-2262)

0

Share

Tweet

Email

Print

JOURNAL SENTINEL
Green Sheet

News

Watchdog

Opinion

Sports

Business

Entertainment

Lifestyle

Connect With Us

Facebook

Newsletter

Twitter

Today's paper

Contact Us

About Us

Partners

MyCommunity
NOW

**LIVING
LAKE COUNTRY**

-  Instagram
-  YouTube
-  RSS
- Mobile apps
- Subscribe
- Archives
- Historical archives

- Phone numbers
- Manage account
- Paid death notices
- Back copies
- Digital access
- FAQ
- Classifieds
- Display ads

JOURNAL SENTINEL



journalmediagroup

Job Openings

metroparent

wisconsin JS Homes
Trails

JS Autos JSJobs
CarSoup.com File for Wisconsin 1/11