



HANNAH NEWS RACES TO WATCH COMPILATION

Over the past several weeks, *Hannah News* has focused on “Races to Watch” for the 136th General Assembly (GA), U.S Congress, and the State Board of Education. Those articles are now compiled into a single document for easy reference. Each story is linked in the index below:

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Races to Watch: Blackshear v. McGuire in Senate District 6

A recently redrawn district and an incumbent who did not seek reelection after a run for Congress leaves Montgomery County's Senate District 6 as one of the seats Senate Democrats are most hopeful to flip in November's General Election.

The race features current Rep. Willis Blackshear (D-Dayton) looking to switch chambers against former State Board of Education (SBOE) President and current board member Charlotte McGuire.

The seat is currently held by Sen. Niraj Antani (R-Miamisburg), who declined to run for reelection, instead running unsuccessfully for Ohio's 2nd Congressional District during this spring's primary. While the 6th District had been reliably Republican in recent years, its boundaries were redrawn during the 2023 redistricting to include most of the metro Dayton area. Dave's Redistricting now gives the 6th District a 53.3-45.8 percent Democratic lean, and the Ohio Redistricting Commission in 2023 gave the district a 54.1-45.9 percent Democratic lean.

Both candidates stress the importance of acting as a true representative of the Dayton area.

"I believe the county has an opportunity to have a senator that is a true representation of this area. For too long this area has gone to extremists," said Blackshear.

Blackshear said the district needs a senator to represent its true, core values. His campaign has included several appearances at community events in the district, as well as communicating directly to voters via social media, email newsletters and even personal notes and letters.

McGuire has decades of experience running nonprofits in the Dayton area, including the organization now called the Senior Resource Center and Project IMPACT Dayton, which worked with disadvantaged youth and families. McGuire says the latter organization worked with Dayton residents on issues from public housing to drug addiction to children in the juvenile justice system.

"My goal was to provide hope in seemingly hopeless situations. I brought together community leaders and stakeholders -- I call them stakeholders because we all have a stake in the county's success and prosperity," McGuire said.

Both Blackshear and McGuire have made education a central piece of their campaigns. Blackshear says he has made it a priority during his time in the House to visit schools in his district for the opportunity to talk to teachers and students.

Blackshear says he has learned the importance of addressing students' mental health from those conversations; HB38 (Blackshear-Miranda) is the latest version of a bill he has introduced in the past two GAs to allow students to take three mental health days per school year.

Blackshear also says the Legislature needs a more long-term approach to school funding.

"Our schools have been unconstitutionally funded since '97 ... and we really need to take a hard look at making sure that our public schools have the tools and resources for our kids," Blackshear told *Hannah News*. He added there's no reason the state should be taking public dollars and giving them to private schools: "The majority of our kids go to public schools and the public schools are the ones that need the dollars."

Blackshear also says teachers need to be taken care of, as he says, “educators are the foundation of the world.”

McGuire, who was first appointed to the SBOE in 2016 by Gov. John Kasich, was then elected to the board in 2018 and reelected in 2022.

“I believe all our schools should value every young person, every unique young person. No two children are alike, and even those with special needs ... need options and opportunities. Not everyone is going to go to college, but we must stay focused on student outcomes, maintaining high expectations, and recognizing the unique talents and basic knowledge and skills each child needs to pursue their aspirations,” said McGuire. “I want to ensure we maintain collaborative stakeholders that create opportunities for every child to become the adult they aspire to be and make a significant positive contribution to Ohio.”

McGuire believes Ohio can both allow for students to pursue a college education and also collaborate with business regarding apprenticeships, job shadowing and internships, “so students can explore their interests and potential career paths.”

“We need to ensure optimal alignment from teacher preparation programs to the classroom. I want to see closer collaboration with higher education and the workforce through our business advisory councils. We must ensure our students have the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for the future. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are still important, but we must consider how they're executed in an AI and digital society,” said McGuire.

Blackshear said economic and workforce development are also among the top issues he’s hearing about from voters, as is the number of jobs coming into the Dayton area. He says people he talks to in his district are also concerned about the housing market and the amount of infrastructure improvements needed, like fixing potholes.

“You’ve got cities that have a lot of abandoned properties. We're not collecting taxes on those properties. A lot of those properties [represent] a lot of back taxes. So all of that goes hand-in-hand,” said Blackshear.

On McGuire’s listening tours, which she calls “appreciative inquiries,” she says voters are concerned about inflation, job availability and whether their voices are being heard. McGuire says people are also concerned about their children’s future, safe communities and an economic climate that will attract businesses to the county.

“Especially in these economic times, people are concerned about inflation and rising costs,” said McGuire.

“Imagine those working multiple jobs to provide for their families. We need to stabilize and ignite economic growth by being cost effective and exploring ways to attain more with less.”

Races to Watch: Cirino v. O’Neill in Senate District 18

The general election in November for one Ohio Senate seat will see a repeat candidate for the Statehouse take on an incumbent who has previously alluded to his legislative plans for the next General Assembly.

Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) was first elected in 2020 to represent the 18th Senate district, which was redrawn in 2023 to include most of Lake County and a portion of eastern Cuyahoga County and exclude Portage and Geauga counties.

“My district has only been my district for two years because of the change that was made after I was elected four years ago. So, a lot of these people are just getting to know me,” Cirino said of new voters in his district.

Dave’s Redistricting now gives the 18th District a 51.8 percent Republican lean. The Ohio Redistricting Commission’s index from 2023 grades the district similarly along party lines.

Cirino’s opponent in the race, environmental lawyer Katie O’Neill, is running to represent the district where she was raised. O’Neill previously ran for a seat in the Ohio House from the 94th District against Rep. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville) in 2020 after attending Ohio University and becoming involved in environmental activism in Southeast Ohio. An Ohio Supreme Court decision ordered the Athens County Board of Elections to include O’Neill on the ballot for that race in 2020 after she was removed for not meeting residency requirements. (See The Hannah Report, 4/15/2020.)

Cirino’s committee assignments during his first term in the Senate included the Energy and Public Utilities Committee and Ways and Means Committee, as well as the vice chair seat on the Finance Committee and the chair of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee.

During the current General Assembly, Cirino introduced higher education reform bill SB83, which would restrict mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) instruction at public colleges and universities in Ohio. (See The Hannah Report, 7/18/24.) SB83 passed the Senate in May 2023 and was reported out of committee in the House later that year but has not received a vote from the full House. Cirino has said he is waiting for a more “favorable” environment in the House to move further on the bill. (See The Hannah Report, 6/27/24.)

O’Neill cites education as a “significant concern” of her campaign. Cirino’s bills, “particularly [SB83], threaten collective bargaining and restrict teachers from teaching relevant topics like climate change,” said O’Neill. “He’s also attacking diversity, equity, and inclusion, which are essential for our success, environment, communities, and economy.”

Cirino says inflation is a main concern of the voters he has spoken to in his district. “People do not feel that they’re nearly as well off as they were four years ago. The younger people can’t buy homes because of the interest rates and mortgages,” he said, adding “automobile insurance and homeowners’ insurance have really been going up. And that’s part of the inflationary cycle. People are very concerned about the economy and they want something changed.”

Cirino also said voters are telling him their concerns about public safety issues.

“People are very concerned about the impact of the border. Open border policies are now impacting every state, because these illegal immigrants are coming in and they’re looking to do harm to people. And we’ve seen so many examples in the news of horrendous crimes committed by some of these people, and nobody’s monitoring who comes in, nobody cares where they go, or what they’re doing. People in Ohio are very concerned about the impact of those people and their behaviors, about drug trafficking and so on. And they feel like nobody at the federal level is really doing anything about it,” said Cirino. He said he is discussing “what we can do with the state level and to have strong laws in Ohio and to support our law enforcement people, which I think we do a pretty good job in general. But they are very, very concerned about their own safety.”

O'Neill calls her run an "educational campaign, focusing on discussing the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, the labor movement and the women's movement." She says she was originally inspired to run for the Statehouse in 2020 "because [133-] HB6 was clearly wrong," adding that people want the nuclear bailout law overturned. "There's no reason to keep paying for it, and they're angry about it."

O'Neill says parts of Ohio, including the Southeast Ohio Public Utilities Council, are working toward achieving "100 percent renewable energy," including hydroelectricity from rivers, solar and wind power. She notes that Ohio has abundant fossil fuels, "which could serve as a valuable asset in the future. However, we should focus on developing renewable energy sources and promoting sustainable practices to ensure the long-term wellbeing of our state."

O'Neill also calls for making Ohio's universities and colleges affordable and investing in trade schools, noting her own experience attending a trade school during high school. O'Neill says Ohio's school voucher program gives "public money to private schools that compete with our public schools, which doesn't benefit the public."

Cirino says he tells voters in the 18th District that he has worked very hard for them, and after a successful business career, he's not doing the job of a state senator for the money. "Believe me, I haven't worked this cheap since 1978, I think," Cirino said. But he also said his campaign is about putting Ohio in a good position for his 38 grandchildren.

"I'm doing this not just for my grandchildren, of course, but for the next generation, to protect the values that I consider important, to make sure that we have a very vibrant economy that is going to allow my grandchildren and other people's grandchildren to get educated and to stay in Ohio and to not feel like they have to leave Ohio to go take advantage of opportunities. And I think we're making some good progress in that regard," said Cirino.

O'Neill says she has worked on political campaigns since her father, William O'Neill, was elected to the Ohio Supreme Court in 2012. But she admits the questionnaires, interviews and expectations are different when you're the candidate. She said the job of a senator requires a new set of skills and understanding.

"We expect a lot from our leaders, and I hope that during my time running for office and serving the public, I can remind people that we are just people trying to help our families, neighbors, communities, and state," said O'Neill.

Races to Watch: Patton v. Durichko in Senate District 24

A nurse and city councilwoman is running against a sitting General Assembly member looking to switch chambers in the 2024 general election to fill the seat being vacated by term-limited Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls).

The redrawn 24th Senate District now encompasses much of the southwest corner of Cuyahoga County, after previously running along much of the county's southern border. Voters in November will choose between Rep. Tom Patton (R-Strongsville) and would-be Statehouse newcomer Sue Durichko to take Dolan's seat.

While Dave's Redistricting gives the district a very slight Republican advantage, giving both parties just over 49 percent of voters, the Ohio Redistricting Commission's index from September 2023 gave the district a 51-48 percent Democratic lean.

In what may turn out to be a very close race in November, Patton claims a lot of existing familiarity with the district's voters, noting this is his 10th campaign to represent the area since 2002. Patton was first elected to the Ohio House in 2002, before serving as state senator from the area from 2008-2016, including two years as Senate Majority Leader in the 131st General Assembly from 2015-2017. He has represented the area once again in the House since 2017.

"I don't think we could have had the tenure we've had without their trust," Patton told *Hannah News* about the district's constituents.

Patton said that as the only Republican in Cuyahoga County, he has been the "go-to" person for organizations like the Cleveland Clinic, Providence House for Women and others, who reach out to him to deliver capital budget money and funding they need even though they aren't in his district.

Patton says that people in the new cities in the district's boundaries like Parma Heights and Brooklyn are excited to have representation from the other side of the aisle, and many mayors and labor unions in the district have also given him their support.

Patton said his main concern recently has been property tax, and after the election in November he plans to return to Columbus to ensure that Ohio's counties have to re-evaluate both commercial and residential properties. Patton also referred to HB90 (Patton) and HB375 (Demetriou-Patton) from the 135th General Assembly (GA) as bills he's introduced to address property taxes. In addition, he said he's introduced bills in the past two GAs for senior tax relief, including freezing property taxes for people 65 and older who make \$50,000 or less.

"It's a shame that people are forced to sell the house they raised their family in because they can no longer afford, on their fixed income, to pay for the rising cost of property taxes and utilities," said Patton.

Professionally a geriatric nurse, Durichko says she too often sees what happens to people in the last third of their lives concerning affordable and accessible health care, and, in some cases, spending down their life's savings before they can get a Medicaid waiver for assisted living or memory care.

"To me, it's simply wrong that the legacy they worked so hard to create can be completely wiped out in one or two years, or less in some cases," Durichko said.

Durichko also called for better staffing and funding for adult protective services, citing a story from her campaign when she heard an elderly person calling for help from inside their home, prompting her to call for emergency services for the man.

"This elderly individual was living alone, isolated, and appeared confused and suspicious of others. ... Ohio can and should do better for our seniors. It shouldn't take a candidate out campaigning, knocking on doors, to recognize that this individual needs better resources," Durichko said.

Durichko says affordable and accessible health care and quality public education are among the top issues she's hearing about from the voters in her district. Durichko has served on the Parma City Council since 2022, and she says the people in her district are fiercely protective of opportunities in the Parma City School District like the career tech programs in the high school's curriculum.

“I've seen firsthand the positive impact quality public education has on our community and its economic viability. Good schools encourage young families to move to our city. They buy homes, get jobs, and contribute to the local economy through taxes and job creation. This, in turn, creates a need for supporting businesses like transportation, retail, grocery stores, gas stations, and restaurants,” said Durichko.

Durichko also supported the passage of Issue 1 in Ohio's 2023 general election. She says that reproductive freedom is important on both a social and familial level. She knows from her experience in health care that the impact of protected reproductive freedoms on the public health system is far-reaching, including preventive screenings, annual visits and STD screenings and treatment.

“I believe everyone should have the right to decide when and if to start or grow a family,” Durichko said.

Patton says his campaign has the support of a number of labor unions, including police, fire, steel workers, UAW and teachers' unions.

“It's rare for a Republican to have this type of labor support, but I believe I've demonstrated over the years that I care about working Ohioans, regardless of party,” said Patton, who added that his achievements from his time in the Legislature speak for themselves.

Patton mentioned the “Superman” movie that just filmed in Cleveland and his sponsorship of two film tax credit bills. Patton also pointed to his help passing the Ohio Third Frontier bill “many years ago” and his work with JobsOhio and high-profile successes with companies like Honda and Intel.

“There are many other projects that don't get as much attention. Ohio needs to do a better job of showcasing these new jobs. When people vote, they vote with their pocketbooks, and they think about the economy. I'm sensitive to that. When I vote, I think about the people I represent, including my five daughters who all live in my district. Every vote I take is with them in mind, as well as the rest of my constituents,” said Patton.

Races to Watch: Garvine vs. Sigrist in House District 10

The sudden withdrawal of incumbent Rep. Dave Dobos (R-Columbus) from this year's Republican primary has thrown House District 10 in south-central Franklin County wide open to a fresh look in and around Grove City. Attorney Brian Garvine dominated the GOP run-up, while city Councilman Mark Sigrist edged his Democratic rival by 20 votes to challenge the incumbent party in November.

Garvine is a relative newcomer to Grove City, if not the capital area, while Sigrist is homegrown. Now retired from a 34-year career with Honda and extended periods in Japan and other communities around the state, Sigrist, the Ohio University-trained accountant, returned to his roots and won election to city council two and half years ago after previous volunteer work with Keep Grove City Beautiful and other programs for the developmentally disabled and local food pantries.

“I was always just very involved as a community organizer,” Sigrist says of his subsequent bid for city council. “I thought it would be great way to continue public service at a higher level and maybe with a little more structure.”

The 62-year-old says council achievements include Grove City's certification with Bicycle Friendly America and, in a much heavier lift, collaboration with a citizens' task force on a "new model of city government" that would move from a "strong mayor," as he describes it, to a city manager with broad authority.

"There's caution from some of our administration members that may feel this isn't needed. We thought it was worth a focused study," Sigrist says of the 6-1 council vote to convene the task force. "It's going to take a lot of effort to get our citizens up to speed on why you would even want to do this."

The father of three grown children is more certain of the statewide redistricting goal of Issue 1, in which Democrats and Republicans have traded competing accusations of gerrymandering.

"I believe we can all agree that no one is accurately representing the will of the voters in our district currently. I intend to change that, even in the face of these attempts to disenfranchise our district's voters with manipulative gerrymandering," he says.

"We had significant ballot issues in the state of Ohio last year when our representatives voted opposite of our constituents," Sigrist points out, calling District 10 incumbent Rep. Dave Dobos (R-Columbus) a prime example. He says that's equally true of other legislative districts. "If you know your people are for something, you have to represent the people. I object to lawmakers' saying, 'I know what's best for you.'"

His policy concerns include public education, organized labor, affordable health care, abortion access and LGBTQ+ rights but are topped by services to Ohio's aging demographic.

"If I'm going to work on things, what do I think is common across the state of Ohio? I think the senior population is common across the state of Ohio," he explains. "Seniors should be able to age affordably and with dignity at home. They do not have many options to go get another job."

That raises another top issue for Sigrist -- affordable housing -- which he says affects all age groups including elderly Ohioans on fixed incomes.

"It's like the bottom rung of Maslow: shelter. They're getting taxed out of their house," he observes.

Sigrist says "unregulated investment" in single-family homes by out-of-state and global players is further draining Grove City and other communities of housing for sale in the real estate market.

Sigrist says he looks forward to the prospect of working across the aisle "as long as we're doing the right thing."

"I want an Ohio where everyone can thrive and we try to find a balance in solutions," he observes, saying experience has taught him any public policy creates -- to one degree or another -- winners and losers that then prevail or concede on another issue. "What can we do to make it more palatable?"

His Republican opponent is hardly a stranger to Columbus points south, living 14 years in Ashville just over the Pickaway County line, where Garvine served as council pro tem for two of three terms and still makes the short drive from Grove City as part-time magistrate to Ashville mayor's court. He was born in Ohio; grew up in Baltimore, MD; returned home to attend Ohio State University; secured his law degree from the University of Toledo; and settled in Central

Ohio, where he now lives in Grove City with his two sons and runs a law office in German Village.

“I had always been involved in charitable organizations and wanted to get involved in the community,” he says of his time as a councilman.

The growth of nearby Rickenbacker International Airport, which straddles Franklin and Pickaway counties, schooled Garvine in regional economic development, infrastructure planning and public finance, including tax increment financing (TIF) and joint economic development districts (JEDD). It also taught him there are no partisan potholes.

“When I was on council, I didn’t even know the makeup of Democrats and Republicans. But we worked very well together. We learned to agree to disagree in a respectful way,” he says.

After moving to Grove City in 2019, the 54-year-old got involved with the Grove City Visitors Bureau and was recruited by his “good friend” from city council, Rep. Brian Stewart (R-Ashville), to run for the state Legislature.

“He told me if I wanted to get back in the game, now was a good time to do that,” Garvine says, prevailing in this year’s Republican primary.

“We were fortunate to come out on top. I think having the endorsement of the Franklin County Central Committee helped a lot. They have a pretty substantial process in how they choose to endorse. I interviewed with multiple people -- as did my opponent,” he says.

Garvine holds a technical edge on Sigrist, with District 10 in a virtual split at 50 percent Republican and 49.1 percent Democrat. They are closely matched, too, in their shared concern for available and affordable housing that is not overtaxed.

“There is a housing shortage in Central Ohio that must be dealt with,” he says, finding some hope in the Senate Select Committee on Housing’s April report. Chaired by Sen. Michele Reynolds (R-Columbus), the bipartisan panel examined tax incentives, downpayment assistance and land subsidies spanning the socioeconomic spectrum.

“Everything has to be taken care of, because we need every level of housing,” says Garvine, including seniors with paid-off mortgages. “I do think there’s got to be some cap or some control on the property tax, because that’s a vulnerable population.”

Perhaps unlike his challenger, the Republican would like to see the taxing overhaul continue on earned income through rate reductions, fewer brackets and even a complete elimination of Ohio payroll taxes. He acknowledges the bottom line state and local government would face without those revenues, which would need replacing, to one degree or another, by other sources.

“It may have to be a combination of raising certain sales taxes, including on professional services,” Garvine says, noting government subdivisions might have to do another round of belt-tightening. “It’s tough to navigate, because you want local jurisdictions to be as efficient as they can be, and you want them to have autonomy.”

He believes it’s a holistic question implicating state-funded services, communities, local levies, the cost of commerce, and more.

“What can we do to make Ohio a very attractive place for businesses to come?” he asks rhetorically.

Garvine says public servants cannot waste time when constituents and taxpayers are relying on them to make the right decision -- whether Republican- or Democrat-led, or some compromise.

"I'm a practical, results-oriented person. I want to get the best result as quickly as possible," he says.

Races to Watch: Kunze vs. Lett in House District 11

This year's House District 11 race on Tuesday, Nov. 5 will not be the candidates' first encounter, as term-limited Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard) and Democrat Crystal Lett reprise their 2020 Senate nailbiter after both breezed through their respective primaries unopposed.

The partisan toss-up in northwest Franklin County grows more interesting still: District 11 has an incumbent whom neither Kunze nor Lett will face. Rep. Anita Somani (D-Dublin) has been drawn into departing Rep. Beth Liston's (D-Dublin) District 8 as the latter runs for Kunze's expiring Senate District 16 seat.

The partisan index varies slightly in Dublin/Hilliard's House and Senate districts but favors Democrats by several points and shakes out 53.9 percent for Lett in the redrawn District 11. Kunze is the area's Republican incumbent, on the other hand, and already has one victory against her rival.

The veteran senator entered the General Assembly as a House representative for northwest Franklin in 2012 and seized the opportunity four years later to replace former Republican Sen. Jim Hughes. With a husband and two grown daughters of her own, Kunze has led a number of family related legislative efforts over the years and currently chairs the Senate Transportation Committee. Like Lett, she has a passion for early learning and child development and also chairs the Children's Trust Fund Board under the one-year-old Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY), which completes other agency transfers of child-related functions by Jan. 1, 2025. Kunze also co-chairs the Commission on Infant Mortality.

"It's something I've been asking for from the governor since I came to the Senate," Kunze says of DCY. "I kept seeing gaps and silos in the existing agencies, including the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and others. "None of those departments knew what the others were doing."

The question, she says, for early childhood policymakers is, "Does that make your kindergartner more ready; will that make young people more successful?"

The 54-year-old says the next biennial budget cycle holds more opportunities for DCY and child development, including continued work on the Strong Foundation Act for healthy mothers and babies if HB7 (White-Humphrey) does not clear the Senate in lame duck after passing the House 72-20 in June. The state already is measuring kindergarten participation by regions and demographics under the current budget.

"Children are not individually tracked, so it's not that scary data sharing. They will be able to be looked at from a programmatic standpoint," says Kunze, also sponsor of Stillbirth Prevention Day SB207 and Ohio Child Abuse Prevention Month SR90. "It will be interesting to see what investments are really working in different zip codes. It will have a great return on investment for future generations."

Her concern for women, children and families has produced a major accomplishment with this year's passage of human trafficking bill SB214 (Kunze), which allows victims to expunge felony records for drug possession, theft and other collateral crimes without a predicate offense of prostitution or soliciting. Building on a decade of legislative efforts against human trafficking, she says advocacy groups have been working with eligible victims to apply with courts for record expungement as soon as the bill becomes effective on Oct. 24.

Labor trafficking remains a growing concern, however, and one that implicates federal law, says Kunze, who also serves on the Governor's Executive Workforce Board.

"I'm hearing how difficult it is for Ohio farmers to get people with H-2A visas to help with the harvest of any kind of crop production," she says on one side of the problem. "I know the agriculture industry and the nursery association have been pushing for access to those workers."

Concern for child wellness also prompted her introduction of SB212 (Kunze-DeMora) which deals with controls on youth access to online pornography; it received proponent testimony in June.

"I think that legislation was a great starting point to raise awareness and to start a conversation. I don't know that any of us knows what lame duck will hold this year," she says. "I'm glad people are aware of the predatory nature of pornographic content available to children."

Kunze also looks forward to continued phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan and places public education among the top issues in Senate and House districts encompassing Hilliard and Dublin.

"I think I am one of the members with a more holistic view of how we improve the lives of all Ohioans and families," she says. "I have stood up to extremists in my party and continue to bring common sense and wisdom to issues that go against my caucus. And I will do that again."

Also a mom, wife and community leader, Lett credits her late brother's struggles and eventual suicide with her genuine empathy and commitment to practical solutions. Her childhood experiences led to a political science degree from Ohio State University, a turn as a marketing professional, a case management career with youth facing severe mental illness, and she has a son with a serious genetic disorder, Prader-Willi syndrome.

"I think growing up in a household where my brother really had serious, symptomatic mental health issues and my family's lack of access to community supports drove me from 'I want to be involved' to -- not just a mom and care provider to my son -- but an advocate, because that's what this life requires of you," she says.

Looking around the upwardly mobile communities of Dublin and Hilliard, Lett saw neighbors and strangers in need of help.

"My experiences were being replicated in many other families in the community," she says.

To expand her professional skills and help pay for her son's care, Lett first managed a financial services office and then a psychology practice part-time.

“Both of those situations gave me a business background that will inform how I legislate,” she says. “It helps me marry the ideal with the pragmatic. It helps me avoid unintended consequences because I see how policies affect different interests from the start.”

Lett sustained her twin interests in community service and politics, managing a staging location for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign; volunteering with Save the Children Action Network and traveling to Washington, D.C. in support of related legislation; assisting U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) with the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP); starting The Salon Lab Columbus’ (TSLC) bi-partisan support for women interested in politics; launching Dublin Area Progressives; and recruiting candidates for the left-leaning community organizing group, LEAD Ohio.

“I have always been very interested in the political world. Who gets what and why?” she says. “That was all very fascinating for me coming of age. What brought me back to politics was my best friend. ‘You’ve done all this advocacy work -- why don’t you get involved in the political side?’” she asked her.

Given the opportunity, Lett’s first legislative concern will be a fully funded Fair School Funding Plan and universal pre-school, because she believes many lawmakers want to get those done sooner rather than later, even if others seem less certain.

“While the Legislature keeps saying, ‘Yes, we too really want to fully fund the plan,’ the voucher program keeps growing,” she observes. “We have the money to fully fund the Fair School formula at 100 percent, except we diverted a billion dollars to vouchers. That burden keeps being passed on to municipalities in school levies.”

Lett also supports government-funded child care but says its workers are grossly underpaid, revealing an inherent contradiction in their own quality of life.

“How do we take care of families, the workforce, and child care workers behind the workforce?” she says, also calling for a holistic approach to communities and employers. “I want to work on policy that is not just seen but felt.”

Businesses and other organizations need work-ready, trained and trainable employees who in turn need paid family leave, Lett says, highlighting one of her quality-of-life issues.

“It’s a very, very tedious balance that we’ve been talking about in this country since its inception. We want to support the business community because they employ people. It’s also important that people have a living wage and access to child care,” she says. “Wages have not kept up with inflation. A lot of people are choosing not to have a family, and those reasons are mostly economic.”

Lett says the biggest distinction between her and her opponent is access to abortion, which Kunze has opposed in the Senate and in the campaign against last year’s Issue 1.

“To me, that was deeply discouraging, because it really was an affront to families from the word go,” she says.

Races to Watch: Brennan v. Morgan in House District 14

State Rep. Sean Brennan (D-Parma) faces off this November against Republican challenger David Morgan in Ohio House District 14.

In 2022, Brennan, a former American government and social studies teacher and Parma City Council president, easily won out over Republican Jolene Austin, but the Northeast Ohio district has since been redrawn and is slightly less favorable to Democrats.

According to the 2024 Ohio Election Guide, published by the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) and compiled with assistance from *Hannah News*, the district has a political Republican index of 48.38 percent. Its top three industries by number of jobs are education and health services (39.3 percent); trade, transportation, and utilities (16 percent); and professional and business services (12.2 percent), according to OMA.

In 2020, President Joe Biden won the district with 50.28 percent, while former President Donald Trump received 49.72 percent of the vote. In 2022, Gov. Mike DeWine easily carried the district with over 58 percent of the vote over Democratic challenger Nan Whaley's 41 percent, according to OMA.

The redrawn Ohio House District 14 includes Parma and Parma Heights, parts of Old Brooklyn and Brooklyn Center as well as Clark Fulton.

Brennan is ending his first term as one of the most prolific members in the General Assembly. According to the legislation tracking website, Legiscan, Brennan has sponsored or co-sponsored 270 bills, more than any other lawmaker in the Statehouse.

In an interview with *Hannah News*, Brennan touted his record. Two of his bills have been signed into law -- HB195 (Demetriou-Brennan), to create an adaptive mobility dealer license, and HB466 (Schmidt-Brennan), regarding written agency agreements for licensed brokers.

Brennan said he's focused on building relationships with his colleagues this term, and hopefully in the next.

"My priority is continuing to build relationships and trust with my colleagues because ... that's how you get things done. Again, my teaching career informs a lot of what I do now or how I operate now. You know in the classroom, you had to not only prove to your students through your words, but through your actions, that you really care about them and had their best interest in mind. And you know, once they figure that out ... they would really go out of their way to show you they were proud by reaching their potential academically," Brennan said. "And it's kind of similar around here -- if you prove to your colleagues through your words and actions that you respect them and want to work with them to get things done, it works, right? You can get things done."

While there hasn't been movement on HB120 (Brennan-Weinstein), legislation to repeal provisions in scandal-plagued, nuclear bailout bill 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin), Brennan said he's hoping to work on the legislation more if he wins re-election.

Speaking with voters, Brennan said he's hearing concerns about public safety, inflation, health care and jobs and wages. He said he's concerned about the difficulty local governments are having in attracting and retaining police officers and firefighters and wants to see more dollars in the Local Government Fund. While the state can't do much about inflation, he said, he's advocating for greater price transparency in utility bills and health care costs.

"I am greatly honored to do this work. I still can't believe that I get to do it. As a former government teacher, I'm living my life's work and I just love the people that I serve, and I want to do my part to make their lives better, to improve their quality of life, and I would really, really

be honored to be able to continue to do the work,” Brennan said. “I think I've proven that I'm not a seat warmer -- that I am a workhorse.”

Morgan describes himself as a “Christian, veteran and conservative outsider” on his social media. He holds both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in business administration from the University of Phoenix and he also studied at ITT Technical Institute, according to the 2024 Ohio Election Guide. Morgan, a tool and die maker, said he’s currently working on a doctorate degree at the University of Phoenix. He previously served in the U.S. Army Reserves.

In an interview with *Hannah News*, Morgan said he was inspired to run after the U.S. exit from Afghanistan in 2021, saying better leadership was needed at all levels of government.

Morgan previously ran for the Statehouse in 2022 but was defeated in the primary. This time around, he did not face a challenger and said his relationship with the Ohio Republican Party has been “a little bit better” than it was in his last race. He has previously volunteered on a number of political campaigns, including for U.S. Rep. Max Miller (R-Parma).

He said voters are concerned about national issues affecting the country, as well as economic issues and government overspending.

“Everybody wants to say that, you know, politics is local, but it's not like that anymore because all those national and international issues are seeping down into lower levels of politics now -- where before what the people were doing on the federal level had little to nothing to do with what's happening in the cities or within the state, but that's no longer true ... because you see the same kind of policies seeping through at every level,” he said.

Morgan said he supports legislation on “medical freedom” and school vouchers.

Races to Watch: Glassburn vs. Borowski in House District 15

Two local city councilmen are facing off in November to represent Ohio House District 15.

After redistricting put incumbent Rep. Richard Dell’Aquila (D-Seven Hills) outside the new 15th House District boundaries, Democrat Chris Glassburn and Republican Aaron Borowski are vying for a seat at the Statehouse. Both men defeated primary challengers.

The western Cuyahoga County district covers communities including Brook Park, Brooklyn, Linndale, Middleburg Heights, North Olmsted and parts of Cleveland and Olmsted Township.

The 2024 Ohio Election Guide, published by the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) and compiled with assistance from *Hannah News*, gives the district a political Republican index of 46.80 percent. President Joe Biden won the district with over 53 percent of the vote in 2020, and Gov. Mike DeWine won it with over 56 percent of the vote in 2022, according to OMA.

Glassburn is a councilman for Ward 2 in North Olmsted and previously served on the North Olmsted School Board. He is the owner and president of a small business. According to his campaign website, he has endorsements from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce PAC, Ohio Farm Bureau AGG-PAC, the Ohio Education Association and the Ohio Federation of Teachers, the Cleveland Building & Construction Trades Council, and many others.

A former aide to former House Speaker Armond Budish, Glassburn told *Hannah News* that he has a direct understanding of what the state can and can't do for communities. He said he wants to see Ohio suburbs "get our fair share back from Columbus."

He said the top issue for the district, and one of his top issues, is addressing the property tax rates that have been skyrocketing. He said it is exacerbated by the state's abandoning the 10 percent rollback for properties. Inflation is another concern among residents.

"For most folks, top of mind is, my mortgage payment is going to go up \$300, \$400 a month in January, and they're panicked about that," he said.

He said people want government officials to do something about the tax increases and identify solutions that make it better, not just shrug their shoulders at it.

The district is made up of middle class communities, Glassburn said, and they are getting tired of sending money to Columbus and not getting it back.

"I've gotten support from a wide variety of groups, some that are more traditionally conservative, some that are more traditionally liberal because I take a pragmatic approach to taking a problem and working at it until we get solutions," he said.

Borowski is a city councilman for Brooklyn and a bread delivery driver with management experience in retail. In an interview with *Hannah News*, he said he became involved in politics "to be a part of something" and to provide a better community for his child. He said he didn't want to be "someone that was just on Facebook or social media or on the water cooler complaining."

As a new father, Borowski said supporting children's health care and education are important to him. He also highlighted issues like property tax relief, particularly for seniors and those with disabilities, and building affordable housing.

Borowski said state representatives are elected to "serve the people." Too many politicians, he said, neglect their responsibilities to their constituents, but he looks up to lawmakers like Reps. Sean Brennan (D-Parma) and Tom Patton (R-Strongsville), who he said are extremely invested in their communities. A major priority for Borowski if elected is connecting with constituents directly.

Borowski is endorsed by the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association as well as Attorney General Dave Yost, Secretary of State Frank LaRose, and Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague, among others.

Races to Watch: Dovilla v. Sutherland in House District 17

Former Rep. Mike Dovilla, who served from 2011 to 2016, is seeking a return to the Legislature in this year's election for the seat currently held by term-limited Rep. Tom Patton (R-Strongsville). His challenger is Democratic candidate Jessica Sutherland.

Dovilla told *Hannah News* he decided to run for office again given "the state of the country" and some conditions in Ohio. If elected, he would like to resume efforts on tax reform and improving the education system, such as through providing EdChoice at all levels. Dovilla also wants to address "government transparency and accountability issues" from recent years,

including the HB6 scandal which he said was “the largest public corruption scandal in state history.”

While *Hannah News*’ attempts to interview Sutherland were unsuccessful for this story, her campaign website says she has worked in “poverty alleviation, higher education access, and basic needs advocacy” and experienced “poverty, hunger, and homelessness” as a child herself. It added that those experiences give her an understanding of policies that help people escape poverty.

In talking with voters, Dovilla said he promotes himself as “an experienced, accomplished legislator who actually enjoys doing the job” and is more focused on policy than politics. Dovilla referenced working for former U.S. Sen. George Voinovich in Washington early in his career, saying those experiences made him “accommodating and interested in working with folks across the aisle and across the political spectrum.”

Dovilla also pointed to Voinovich as a mentor, and said that when he started in the Ohio House at the age of 35 then-Speaker Bill Batchelder was another “big influence.” His past committee work, including on the House Finance Committee, and time as House Majority Whip during his third term provide “experience and ... a level of accomplishment.”

He further voiced concerns about the condition of the Ohio House as an institution and said there has been “more interest in holding a gavel and holding power” rather than helping all of Ohio. The Republican Caucus has not been “in great shape” over the past few years and he hopes his experience can improve that if he’s elected. Asked about who will be the next speaker, Dovilla said his focus is on the district and that matter will resolve itself. His campaign committee has organized a joint fundraiser with Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima).

Among the top issues Dovilla identified are property tax appraisals, going on to discuss his previous work to reduce personal income tax and the potential that it could be eliminated completely over time. Dovilla said income tax is “punitive” and that Ohio has the highest tax burden among states with Republican-controlled legislatures. However, he called property taxes the more pressing issue.

Regarding education, he discussed the role of “lifelong learning” in his own life and said there can be a greater focus on how government works to promote better civic discourse. In general, Dovilla also wants to see improvements on “educational quality” given where Ohio ranks nationally now. Teachers should focus on “the things that matter” rather than there being distractions around social issues “outside the lane” for public education.

As to the “fundamental purpose of education,” he said that includes making sure people are prepared for life generally but also getting them ready for higher education and the workforce. That can include going into the trades or other professions directly after high school. The goal should be to keep young people in Ohio to become contributing citizens who support the tax base and raise families in the state, he added.

Dovilla observed that public trust in government is at “a low point” and he wants to restore it at the state level by providing “additional sunshine.” He pointed to previous legislation that wasn’t passed but led to the Ohio Checkbook program so the public could see how their tax dollars are spent. He would like to see that codified at some point and is open to other ideas to improve trust in government as well.

The level of spending in the operating budget is another area of concern to Dovilla, as he said there should be a “really critical look” at how money is spent in Ohio across the board and

finding out how to “tighten our belt” particularly given discussions about reducing taxes. That includes the capital budget, he continued.

Issues identified on Sutherland’s website include “protecting freedom” including reproductive choices, unions, marriage and marijuana use within the home. She said, “Ohioans have made it known what they want for themselves and for each other” on those issues and legislators need to respect it. The site also listed the government role of ensuring “basic needs” through “fair wages and solid social safety nets,” adding that the middle class, the environment and people with disabilities must be protected.

During his time out of office, Dovilla -- who serves in the U.S. Naval Reserve -- has worked as the founder and president of a nonprofit supporting the future USS Cleveland, which will be the fourth ship named after that city and is expected to be commissioned in 2025. The organization raised around \$4.2 million as part of a \$5 million capital campaign before he left to focus on his political efforts.

Asked about other factors influencing this November’s election, Dovilla said he was “bullish” about former President Donald Trump’s chances in the Northeast Ohio area and criticized Issue 1 as “a really imperfect proposal that would actually drag us in the wrong direction towards very partisan, very gerrymandered districts.” Dovilla added its influence on voters would depend on how much “out of state money gets flooded in here.”

According to the 2024 Ohio Election Guide, published by the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) and compiled with assistance from *Hannah News*, the district has a political Republican index of 53.38 percent with top industries of trade, transportation and mining; education and health services; leisure and hospitality; and manufacturing. Dovilla said it includes around 85 percent of the district he previously represented.

Races to Watch: Troy vs. Hocevar in House District 23

The 23rd House District race in November features Rep. Dan Troy (D-Willowick), who has spent much of his life in the Legislature and local office, challenged by Republican candidate Tony Hocevar, who said he offers a “non-political perspective.”

Troy told *Hannah News* he enjoys government work as a way to provide “the necessary services for a civilized society” and that “I just kind of eat, sleep and drink government service and have since my early twenties.” If re-elected, the 136th General Assembly would be his 10th term in office overall, as Troy had returned to the Statehouse in 2020 after serving seven terms from 1983 to 1996.

Hocevar in turn pointed to his experience as a small business owner, first in the home building industry and now in the tile contracting field, as giving him a “day-to-day perspective” of issues affecting Ohioans rather than one focused on the “political world.” Those issues include how tax burdens, labor shortages and the economy affect the business community and working families. Hocevar additionally said he would bring a “common-sense approach” to the seat and his background is “a clear alternative” to Troy.

This is Hocevar’s third run for the Legislature, but he said when he challenged then-Reps. Kenny Yuko and Armond Budish in 2010 and 2012, respectively, he was “more of a placeholder than a legitimate contender” in a heavily Democratic district, and his opponents were in the House leadership. Those runs were an attempt to ensure the Democratic candidate wouldn’t be unopposed and have made Hocevar more effective in his bid this cycle, he said.

Dave's Redistricting shows the 23rd District is 50.7 percent Republican and 48.4 percent Democratic in a composite of 2016 to 2022 data.

Troy, who refers to himself on social media as “a voice of reason,” said the days where people voted for a candidate rather than their party have gone away and that the number of legislators “in the middle” has also declined since his previous House tenure. He expects that will get worse in the future, and described the passage of Issues 1 and 2 in 2023 as a public response to Republicans' unwillingness to compromise over the years. Passage of the redistricting issue could lead to more competitive districts, Troy added.

Hocevar also said there is a need to move away from partisan divides in the public and noted Teamsters President Sean O'Brien spoke at the Republican National Convention as a contrast to labor's traditional support for Democrats. He added he sees the Republican Party as pro-family and pro-labor as well.

Both candidates pointed to tax issues, particularly property reappraisals, as a problem that needs to be addressed. Troy detailed his work to create the Joint Committee on Property Taxation Review and Reform, which he now serves on, saying this is a “complex subject.” He was also a member of the Lake County Board of Revisions for 18 years and said property taxation is the biggest issue constituents raise to him.

Taxes should be made more fair and uniform, Troy continued, as there has been too much “tax shifting” in the state to benefit higher-income earners. He instead prefers a drastic increase in the homestead exemption and creation of “circuit breakers” for people who struggle to pay property taxes.

Hocevar also talked about how people in the district are hurt by property appraisals and said there should be changes at the national level to stop taxes on Social Security, which he called unfair “double taxation.” The proposal to eliminate state income tax would be “nice” but he questioned how to get there as that is the “true test.” Income tax changes in general would be “a big help” to working families, he continued.

There should be a look at where the money is going at the state level, Hocevar added. He questioned a capital budget item providing \$450,000 for a new salt storage bin in Richmond Heights as an example, contrasting that to needs for the city park's “decrepit” pool, which Hocevar said is what brings the people together.

Other topics Hocevar discussed included the “severe shortage of qualified help” in the construction trades given his own experience. He went to Lake Community College and said vocational technical training is “near and dear to my heart” but its presence in schools has declined. Hocevar added the labor shortage was years in the making and he is “very disenamored” by the direction the U.S. is going, saying long-time politicians have contributed to “this mess.”

Hocevar additionally discussed his past work on the governing board for the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Northeast Ohio and how they supported schools, giving him a “good sense of how that impacts quality education.”

Troy told *Hannah News* his career has seen endorsements from business and labor groups, which shows they want to see more compromise and meaningful legislation. He pointed to the child care issue and how it affects business as an issue that needs to be addressed as well,

and also detailed his desire for “common-sense” action on firearm purchase background checks and “red flag” provisions.

Troy further said he wants to stay away from “culture war issues that pop up on both sides of the aisle” and that constituents talk about improved access to health care services, help with their property taxes and better road, sewer and water infrastructure instead.

Asked about his experience in politics so far, Hocevar said he has benefitted from local Republican Party leaders and talked about the number of regional political figures with Slovenian heritage. That includes George Voinovich, Frank Lausche and Kenny Yuko, he said, but if elected he would be the first Ohio legislator born in Slovenia itself. He called that a “motivating factor” for him. Hocevar is also a U.S. Army veteran, and compared the need for focus and commitment in the military to legislative service.

Races to Watch: Baker vs. Hartman in House District 27

A newly drawn Cincinnati-area House seat will see an incumbent who says she has been able to make progress on everyday issues for the residents of her district despite being in the minority going up against a long-time attorney who argues his opponent is a passive lawmaker who only does what she is told by her caucus.

Rep. Rachel Baker (D-Cincinnati) flipped the district blue in 2022, winning nearly 56 percent of the vote over Republican Jenn Giroux. The district, however, was redrawn by the Ohio Redistricting Commission last year in response to an Ohio Supreme Court order striking down the previous map.

According to the commission, the partisan index of the new district is 50.3 percent Democratic and 49.7 percent Republican, making it one of the more competitive races in the state. Gov. Mike DeWine won the district with nearly 54 percent of the vote in 2022, while President Joe Biden won the district with nearly 56 percent of the vote in 2020.

Baker, seeking re-election, faces long-time attorney and former Judge Curt Hartman.

She tells *Hannah News* that her new district has nine new neighborhoods for her to get to know. Speaking with voters, she said the top issues in the district that she hears about are education, health care, gun safety, current economic conditions, higher costs, and property taxes.

"Kind of the day-to-day issues that impact people. I'm not hearing the culture wars and those kind of topics," she said.

Being a presidential race makes this race feel different from her 2022 run, she said, adding that people seem to be more engaged knowing there is a federal election coming up.

Baker touts her accomplishments from the first term, saying she has been able to work on issues that everyday people will see make a positive impact on their lives while also establishing relationships across the aisle.

"I think people are just tired of it. Tired of all the divisiveness and rhetoric and hostility and are ready to just have people working to make things better," she said.

She also said that in this campaign she can show voters evidence of how she addresses issues in Columbus, rather than talking about the future plans she had when she was campaigning for an open seat. Still, she said, she is using similar messages of working collaboratively on real life issues.

Hartman told *Hannah News* that he sees the race as a question of whose values align best with the voters of the district, adding that he has had a career of challenging anyone in government who oversteps, no matter which side of the aisle they fall on.

He said the voters of the district are concerned about kitchen table issues, such the higher cost of food and gasoline, which he attributes to Democrats, as well as public safety and concerns about rising crime, rising taxes, government regulations, issues at the southern border of the United States, and overall getting the power to allow them to realize the American Dream.

He said that while voters may see immigration as a federal issue, they also recognize that it has a direct effect on their community and neighborhoods.

"It comes back to the state level and even the local level because the Democratic Party has been so taken over by the far progressive liberal wing, that seems to be the priority at all levels," he said. "What the Democrats aren't doing is looking out for the voters and the people of their communities and when it comes to the 27th District in particular, they see that in my opponent as well. She's not an advocate for them, she's not an advocate for the safety of communities and the interests of the people."

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Hartman later went to law school at Vanderbilt University and started his own private practice, where he said he has dealt with the challenges that people have faced in their personal and professional lives. He also has served as a Hamilton County Common Pleas judge.

He said he is a better alternative for the district because he has a "proven track record of being a fighter" and being an advocate for the constituents of the districts. He also said he believes his principles of limited government, limited taxes, safe communities, and educational opportunities align with the district's values.

Hartman said he has had over 80 cases before the Ohio Supreme Court, citing one case that took on a local village council that was using secret ballot voting.

Among issues he said he would work on are property taxes, saying people have been shocked by their sudden increase, which he said has had a ripple effect in the community. He also spoke about empowering parents in education, including in school choice.

Baker said she has some bills that she hopes to get across the finish line. One she pointed to is HB509 (Barhorst-Baker), that would apply prescription drug rebates to cost sharing requirements.

"We introduced it pretty late in the General Assembly, so I'm excited to hopefully get a couple of hearings on it, start to see where the push back is and where areas of improvement can be, and then start of running at the beginning of the General Assembly," she said. "There's definitely bills that I'm excited to get introduced at the very beginning of the [next] General Assembly."

Despite the district's being more competitive, Baker said she is confident, especially since she has work she can show voters to demonstrate that she is not just making promises, but actually following through on them.

Hartman argued that he won't be just a "warm body" that is "keeping a seat warm and not being an advocate" as he said Baker is.

"I'm able to come in there bringing the intellectual argument to my colleagues in the General Assembly," he said.

While Baker said she is working to get to know the new areas of the district, Hartman said that with his practice and previous runs for countywide offices, "it's not new territories for me. I've already had that base support in those communities that I'm simply building upon."

"At the end of the day, who's going to be the best advocate for the people of the new 27th District on their concerns?" Hartman said. "I think when the comparison is made where we stand on the issues and who's the better advocate on those issues, I win on both accounts."

Baker said her work shows that she is able to work with people on both sides of the aisle on real issues that people will support no matter their affiliation.

"I think my track record of actually putting the work in, not just getting there and throwing flames and creating division, but working together on common issues that we all see as issues -- those have been my best examples of how we can get things done despite being in the minority," Baker said.

Races to Watch: Brownlee vs. Giroux in House District 28

Residents of the 28th House District in Hamilton County will be picking between a social worker and a small business owner and nurse to represent them in the 136th General Assembly.

The district has seen change since the last election. Redistricting has given it new boundaries, and the former incumbent, Rep. Jessica Miranda, was appointed as Hamilton County auditor to replace the late Brigid Kelly, also a former state representative. House Democrats appointed Jodi Whitted to replace Miranda for the rest of the session, but as she does not live in the newly drawn 28th District, she cannot run to retain the seat. Meanwhile, the Democratic ballot replacement, Karen Brownlee, could not be appointed to the seat because she does not live in the current district as it stands for the 135th General Assembly.

Brownlee faces Republican Jenn Giroux, who co-owns a Catholic-focused book and gift shop and who also works as a nurse. Giroux ran for the 27th District in 2022, losing to now Rep. Rachel Baker (D-Cincinnati), but is running for the 28th District this cycle because her home now lies within its boundaries for the upcoming session.

Both candidates discuss similar issues such as the economy and public safety as being important to their districts, but have different views on their approach to those issues. They also both say they are seeing excitement and momentum for their parties among voters of the district.

Brownlee describes her time as a candidate as "short but sweet" due to what she called the unusual way she became a candidate. She was appointed by Hamilton County Democrats as

the ballot replacement for Miranda in May. (See The Hannah Report, 5/9/24.) She said her goal is to further work that both Miranda and Kelly did while in the Statehouse.

She describes herself as a "proud wife and mother of three kids," in the young adult and teenaged age range. She said having children has informed her outlook on politics and policy.

Additionally, she notes her work as a licensed independent social worker who has been working as a mental health therapist with children and families, which she said has also informed her views on how much policy, especially state policy, can impact day-to-day lives.

She said as a mental health provider, she has been asked to help kids and their families get strong mental health outcomes, but when they leave the therapy office, they leave a safe space and have to deal with the negative impacts of their environment. She said the top issues she hears from kids are concerns about gun violence and safety, and the environment and how it will be preserved for them to have children of their own.

"What I see is a lot of families who are in chronic financial instability due to the policies that exist at the Statehouse," she said. "Living under that amount of stress impacts children very deeply and it's not something that children have the agency to change. It's not something that I have the agency to change as a therapist."

Brownlee said that as a legislator, she wants to work to create an Ohio that has citizens that feel healthy and safe and will be able to impact productivity, the economy, and the ability to attract and retain people in the state.

Giroux, a mother of nine, said she felt compelled to run because of the economy and crime. She said people are concerned about safety, especially from crime from a number of illegal immigrants that she said is due to border policy.

Education is also a concern among residents of the district, Giroux said. She said parents are concerned about their parental authority and wanting to be heard by the local school board, as well the quality of education, including lower test scores.

On the economy, she said being a small business owner for the past 25 years has opened her eyes to the challenges small businesses face. While the country has a number of chain stores, she said the "mom and pop" stores are the backbone, and she believes more can be done to help business owners. Expanding on that, she said there has been a push for more regulations on businesses such as higher minimum wage or diversity and equality initiatives.

"I believe that if you just let the market work, it doesn't need government setting restrictions on that," she said.

She also said she is a supporter of school choice, adding that a parent knows what is best for their children. She argued that while there is always a need for strong public schools, she believes it is good for parents to have a choice for which school their children attend, saying it empowers parents.

Both said they believe the presidential race will have an effect on their race.

Speaking on changes on the campaign trail from when she ran in 2022, Giroux said she has noticed that voters are more willing to listen to someone no matter who they support for president, adding that there has not been a prevalent, "never Trumper attitude" at the door.

Brownlee said she has also seen an increase in enthusiasm since President Joe Biden announced he would not run again and Democrats coalesced around Vice President Kamala Harris as the nominee.

Both candidates said they have strong cases as to why voters should choose them.

Brownlee said she is a moderate.

"I do not espouse extremist values. I listen as much as I talk. I approach complex issues not with some silver bullet answers because they don't exist," she said. "I approach things with intelligence, with compassion, and a very strong ethical code to make sure that we are finding consensus and working to outcomes that serve the most people the best."

She said voters she has talked to on the campaign trail want decency and collaborative efforts from their representatives, and her goal is to "bring common sense, and not nonsense to the Statehouse." She argued using "culture wars real or imagined" for their own advantage "is very, very harmful to the electorate."

Giroux said there couldn't be a further gap in her positions and her opponent's.

"Democrats are for open borders, they are for higher taxes," she said. "I really hope in the next two years we can move to a flat tax and eventually end up with no personal income tax in Ohio. I think that's a realistic goal and I think it'd be a huge thing for Ohio to do that. That's a complete polar opposite position that my opponent and the Democrats have."

She also pointed to issues involving sex changes for children and transgendered athletes playing in women sports as differences, as well issues on immigration.

Giroux also spoke of the advantages of her experiences "that God has put in my path," whether it is as a nurse, a mother of children including one with special needs, and as a business owner.

"I check a lot of boxes for people that I can represent," she said. "I'm a good listener, and I'm going to represent all of the district, not just Republicans, if I get in there. I think that I would be a very good advocate for the needs of the 28th District."

Races to Watch: Harris v. Roemer in Ohio House District 31

A fraction of a percentage point separates Democrats and Republicans in Ohio's 31st House District in suburban Summit County, but that is on paper and contrasted by Rep. Bill Roemer's (R-Richfield) single- to double-digit wins in the last three elections. Continued redistricting has altered the district's borders and demographics somewhat since 2018, giving challenger A.J. Harris perhaps Democrats' best shot at reversing that trend on Nov. 5 after their previous candidate came within a few points of Roemer in 2022.

Roemer says he's working as hard at maintaining his seat as he does at moving legislation, passing more bills than any of his colleagues in the previous General Assembly.

"My full-time job is representing the people of Ohio, and part of that is getting reelected. Two years ago, the district was even more Democratic leaning, and I won by four points," he observes. "This one is no different. We always work as hard as necessary to win. I focus on what I need to do and not what my opponent is doing."

A 32-year resident of Richfield in northwest Summit County, Roemer says the area has changed in that time as more and more agricultural land is developed into neighborhoods, shops and other services. They do not include his family farm of 93 years, which is no longer cultivated but rather protected as the Western Reserve Land Conservancy's number one designated property for biodiversity in Summit and Medina counties.

Also boasting the largest share of Cuyahoga Valley National Park, the growing district doubles as a feeder for the Greater Akron Polymer Innovation Hub marked for nearly \$100 million in federal, state and local funding. Roemer helped launch the project two years ago with the Akron Chamber of Commerce and University of Akron, expanding the county's reputation as polymer capital of the world.

"It will lead to massive amounts of additional development," he says. "Leading scientists and researchers from around the world will be lodging, eating and shopping in the 31st District."

That attention to practical results also characterizes the Case Western CPA and MBA graduate's approach to lawmaking. He focuses on "commonsense" legislation, drawing broad support from both sides of the aisle.

"I try to look at bills that reduce taxes, that reduce regulation appropriately, and that fill gaps we have in social service programs," the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee says. "The bills I've worked on primarily are on a bipartisan basis that make life better for people in Ohio."

His legislation includes HB158's (Roemer-Miller) streamlining of barber and cosmetology training and oversight, which takes effect today, Thursday, Oct. 24. Timely pay for construction contractors in HB203 (Roemer-Sweeney) and increased penalties for assaulting sports officials in HB139 (Roemer-Miller) -- both with Democratic joint sponsors -- have reached the Senate after committee work before the summer break and show promise in lame duck, he says.

"Good bills will move, and people who work their bills properly will get them moved," Roemer observes.

He also co-chairs the Joint Committee on Property Tax Review and Reform and remains optimistic about a system overhaul after the Senate scrapped three-year averaging of property values in HB187 (Hall-Bird) for a temporary increase in the homestead exemption.

"We followed the structure of what we've been doing in Summit County with three years rather than one year of sales data," Roemer says. "It would save people a significant amount of money."

Stay tuned for the joint committee's final report in January, he says, which could drive change in the new biennium.

"In the next General Assembly, there will be greater ability to modify property tax processes because we'll have the operating budget to offset changes," says Roemer, conceding he might not be around for his final two years under term limits.

Democrat A.J. Harris is keen to make that happen and draws on a salient fact: he helped flip Cuyahoga Falls' last two Republican seats blue in 2022 as a member of the city Democratic Club -- a possible bellwether for the district at large.

A Zanesville native and son of a public school teacher, Harris learned his own lessons in hard work watching his mother come home from a full shift at McDonald's to work on her education degree.

"I grew up in public housing. We were a working-class family but were able to get out of a situation where we still see people struggling today," he says, emphasizing his quality-of-life commitment to all Ohioans. "I'm running a campaign on my lived experiences."

His stepfather, a firm but loving veteran who entered civil service as a code enforcement officer, dedicated his off-work hours to service and family.

"He was the busiest person I knew. He would sit on any board. Being involved was something I grew up around," Harris says.

Following in his parents' footsteps, Harris graduated high school as class president in 2008 and entered the Student Senate at Miami University, where he graduated with a degree in history.

"I've always been a history buff," says Harris. "That's my bread and butter, especially the Civil War."

He married in 2018 and moved to his wife's hometown of Cuyahoga Falls, where Democratic Mayor Don Walters extended his political activities by naming him to the Community Redevelopment Housing Council.

In 2021, Harris accepted an unexpired term on the city school board and was reelected unopposed last year.

"We hired a new superintendent, built a new multi-million-dollar school building, and improved school safety across our district," among other achievements, he says. "It's one of the main reasons I'm running for the 31st District. It has made public education my top priority right now."

Harris supports the Legislature's Fair School Funding Plan but speaks cautiously of its long-term prospects in light of Republicans' continued support for private school vouchers and charter schools.

"As I go door-to-door, people talk a lot about property taxes. We're seeing school districts almost pitted against their own communities," he says of local levies to augment state funding. "The folks they should be mad at are those down at the Statehouse who are not funding our public schools."

Like Roemer, Harris supports property tax reform and says "Democrats want to work across the aisle" on bipartisan solutions around rising housing costs.

"I'm living this right now. Everybody's feeling it," he says.

Among other policy concerns, the full-time social worker is committed to abortion access, voting rights, reduced gun violence, expanded child care, and other policies supporting economically challenged families.

"Not too long ago, my wife and I were living paycheck to paycheck and struggled with child care and my wife and son's health care," Harris says, complaining of "price-gouging" in many

consumer goods. “During the pandemic, we saw so many corporations raising their prices. What we didn’t see is prices come down after the pandemic.”

He also points to “overreliance on energy companies” and “corruption” at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), citing 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) as the prime example.

“We still have a majority that’s hell-bent on preserving their power,” observes Harris.

A committed Democrat and campaigner, he believes “politics should be separate from policy” and should not stand in the way of bipartisan solutions to common problems.

“I will use Minority Leader [Allison] Russo (D-Upper Arlington) as an example of working across the aisle to get things done. It is possible,” Harris says.

He acknowledges policymakers have different communication styles and approaches to work, including legislation. For his part, he is as committed to the person as the policy.

“Every decision made in the Statehouse has a human element to it. Every decision is going to affect someone in some way,” Harris says.

Races to Watch: Bozic v. Hall in House District 34

With Rep. Casey Weinstein (D-Akron) running for the Senate, the 34th House District will have a new representative in the 136th General Assembly.

Derrick Hall, a judge advocate general (JAG) officer in the U.S. Army Reserve, health care executive and former Akron Public Schools Board of Education president, is hoping to retain the seat for the Democrats in the race against Tallmadge City Council President Adam Bozic, who is also a small business owner and Marine Corps veteran.

According to the Ohio Manufacturers’ Association’s 2024 and 2022 election guides, which were created with assistance from *Hannah News*, the new 34th House District favors Democrats more than the current district. Weinstein’s seat has a 48.26 percent Republican index, while the new district has a 46.6 percent Republican index. The district is in Summit County, and includes parts of Akron.

Bozic told *Hannah News* that he is proud of his work on city council, and believes he could make a difference for his area in the Statehouse.

“I enjoy helping my community, and making things better. If I can be a small part of that for my district and for the state, that’s just even better,” Bozic said.

Bozic said one of his priorities will be addressing the staff shortages for police and firefighters.

“Probably 10 years ago, we had 50-plus applicants for one police officer job. Now, we’re lucky if we get like five,” he said. “That’s a problem. We need to address it.”

Bozic said one possible solution is to reduce the minimum age for police officers from 21 to 18.

“I think that would definitely help the situation,” Bozic said. “When I was 18, I joined the U.S. Marines. What’s the difference between doing that and serving your community?”

Bozic said he's also hearing about workforce issues generally when he's out on the campaign trail.

"When talking with business owners, just having the workforce is a big issue," he said. "I hope to bring light to all the resources that the state offers or other agencies offer that can help get people jobs, and get people enrolled into trade programs. The trades are hurting right now for workers. Being that I'm in a floor insulation and floor cleaning business, I see this every day. I see other contractors that just can't find the qualified help."

Bozic said he would also like to ensure that high schools have woodshop classes.

"That's the first introduction for them to experience ... basic construction," he said.

Bozic also worked in the parks and recreation department in Tallmadge before joining city council, and said parks are very important for quality of life.

Bozic said the state parks are great, but would like to see more of an emphasis on funding improvements for local parks.

"Essentially, that's where our families and kids are going to be going, and we need to make sure our facilities are up to standards," he said. "There are a lot of playgrounds out there that may not be up to code. There are improvements that need to be done across the state in local communities in the parks, and we need to make sure we are doing everything we can at the state level to help them out if we can."

Hall, the Democratic candidate, did not respond to messages seeking comment for this story.

According to Hall's campaign website, his top priorities are education, redistricting reform, health care, reproductive rights, environmental issues, small business growth, senior services, new economic opportunities and military service.

"I have seen firsthand where public schools succeed and where they struggle," Hall said on his website, pointing to his service as president of the Akron school board.

"In 1997, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that the overreliance on property taxes as the primary means of funding schools was unconstitutional. Very little has changed," he said. "All our students deserve equal opportunities to receive a quality education. The funding is not adequate and must be revisited by the Ohio Legislature. My experience gives me a unique perspective on public schools and their needs. Healthy and thriving schools are integral to the future success of our community."

On health care, Hall noted he has worked in the health care sector for nearly 20 years.

"Our health care system works for some and for others it does not. I have seen those racial, gender, and geographic inequities. As a representative, we must have those difficult conversations to address the deep-seated inequities in our health care system. Those conversations are not easy to have but are imperative to improving the system," he said. "We must strengthen what we do well and improve upon our shortcomings. Ohio should ensure easier access to mental health as well as expanding long term services and support. We can do better in Ohio by providing for our citizens."

Discussing the environment, Hall said, "We must take care of our public lands. That translates into protecting the integrity of all our green spaces so they can be enjoyed for generations to

come. We must continue to strive for clean water. Ohio has the largest number of lead service lines per capita in the country. Ohio must seize the opportunity to be at the forefront of the renewable energy revolution. Ohio has a history of being innovative and market driving. If we commit to taking the lead in the renewable energy revolution, we can be that again. These are the jobs that will ensure our future economic and environmental prosperity.”

Races to Watch: Demetriou v. Curtis in House District 35

Rep. Steve Demetriou (R-Chagrin Falls) looks to defend his seat in the significantly reconfigured 35th House District against Democratic candidate Mark Curtis.

The 35th House District currently represented by Demetriou includes parts of Southern and Eastern Geauga County, parts of Southern and Eastern Portage County and parts of Eastern Summit County outside Akron. The district Demetriou and Curtis are hoping to represent in the next General Assembly includes parts of Southeast Geauga County, parts of Northwest Portage County and parts of Northeast Summit County.

The current district had a political Republican index of 58.06 percent in 2022, according to the Ohio Manufacturers’ Association’s (OMA) election guide from that year. OMA’s 2024 election guide says the new district has a 51.52 percent Republican index. OMA’s election guide is created with assistance from *Hannah News*.

Demetriou, first elected in 2022, told *Hannah News* that the makeup of the new district is evidence that the current redistricting process can work well.

“I imagine the 35th District checks a lot of boxes as far as competitiveness and compactness, and I think those are things that Ohioans want to see as far as their legislative maps,” Demetriou said. “The current district I serve is different demographically and geographically, and -- let’s be honest -- is more favorable to a Republican candidate.”

Despite being drawn into a more competitive district, Demetriou said he’s not changing his campaign tactics.

“I was an outsider. I wasn’t involved in politics before I entered the race. I had to work hard and meet a lot of new people and do all the things one needs to do to win an election. We’re just doing the same thing this year,” he said. “We have a lot of new people to meet, a lot of new ground to cover, and we’re doing it. I’m blessed to have a great team behind me helping me win this race. We’re out meeting voters every day at their door or at events in the community.”

Demetriou said he’s eager to prove that he can win an election in a more competitive district.

“I look forward to getting this notch on my belt to show that I can win in conservative districts, and I can win in competitive districts too,” he said.

Discussing his accomplishments over the last General Assembly, Demetriou said he’s most proud of homestead exemption measure HB57 (Demetriou-Hall), which was ultimately passed as part of the budget, HB33 (Edwards). (See *The Hannah Report*, 8/16/23.) The law indexes the state’s homestead exemption to the rate of inflation.

“It helps seniors and totally disabled veterans save more money on their property tax bills and helps ensure they don’t get taxed out of their home,” he said.

Demetriou said he hopes to further address the property tax issue in the 136th General Assembly.

“Obviously that’s a complicated topic, because property taxes fund a lot of great things, like our local governments and our schools, but I think it’s becoming a huge burden for Ohioans,” he said. “I look forward to finding solutions to that problem with my colleagues in the next General Assembly.”

Curtis is an education professional with experience in both K-12 schools and higher education; he is currently the director of data and technology at the Maple Heights City School District. He also recently served eight years on the Twinsburg City School District Board of Education.

In an interview with *Hannah News*, Curtis said he’s excited about the opportunity to flip the 35th House District and make a difference in the Statehouse.

“The only way to change what’s going on down there is to change the people that are down there. If I can be one of those people, then perhaps we can start to change the dynamics of what’s going on at the Statehouse,” he said.

Curtis said he is passionate about education, and especially supporting underrepresented populations.

“It isn’t something that you necessarily do for the money. You really do it to impact change, and change lives,” he said.

Curtis said he served as the Twinsburg City School District Board of Education’s legislative liaison during his time as a member, noting that experience helped convince him to run for a state legislative seat.

“That’s where I started to make inroads in working with our elected officials, lobbying for bills that impacted education, and I’ve done that on the state and federal level,” he said.

Curtis said education funding is a major issue for him, noting that the Cupp-Patterson law has been helpful.

“That’s probably the closest we’ve come to a constitutional level of funding for the state of Ohio, but I feel that’s being threatened,” he said. “One of my priorities is to make sure we honor the commitment that was made to fully fund this initiative, and it was a bipartisan initiative. It’s significant, and I think it needs to continue.”

Another priority, he said, is to stop public dollars from supporting private religious schools.

“The last General Assembly passed legislation that appropriates nearly \$1 billion to private religious schools. ... I feel very strongly that public dollars belong in public schools,” Curtis said. “Folks are not happy that our tax dollars are going to people whose kids are in private school and they’ve never been to public school. So their tax dollars are basically supplementing the tuition of other people’s kids.”

Curtis said the current model for funding schools is unsustainable.

“We’re funding two systems of public schools,” he said. “I think it’s going to blow a big hole in our budget, and one is going to have to go. What I don’t want to happen is that legislators renege on their commitment to fully funding public schools.”

Curtis also discussed legislation that would eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in K-12 schools and universities, saying those programs are essential for underrepresented populations.

“I believe strongly in a commitment to DEI. I feel that it makes us stronger. I feel that it’s necessary. I feel that everyone has an obligation to better understand people that don’t look like them, that don’t worship like them, that don’t enter relationships the same as everyone else,” Curtis said. “Everyone deserves decency and respect. Right now, we have bills that have been introduced that threaten that, and threaten to punish marginalized populations. I don’t think that we should be doing that. I think that Ohio is really a good representation of who we are as a nation, but unfortunately, some of the legislation that has been introduced fails to honor that.”

Discussing issues that often come up on the campaign trail, Curtis said voters frequently tell him they are concerned about rising property taxes.

“I think the folks that are most vulnerable are the ones who are retired and on fixed incomes,” he said, noting those individuals are often being forced to choose between supporting their schools and supporting themselves. “If they have to choose between paying for their medicine and paying a mortgage, obviously they’re not going to support the levies that are necessary to sustain funding for public schools.”

Races to Watch: White vs. Lounsbury in House District 36

Rep. Andrea White (R-Kettering) is hoping to fend off a challenge from Democratic candidate Rose Lounsbury this fall to win a third term in the House.

The reconfigured 36th House District still includes the cities of Kettering and Oakwood, but now contains more of the city of Dayton and all of the city of Riverside. According to the Ohio Manufacturers’ Association’s election guide, created with assistance from *Hannah News*, the new 36th House District has a 52.12 percent Republican index, compared to the current district’s 50.17 percent Republican index.

“I represented parts of the community of Riverside in the past,” White told *Hannah News*, noting she has also represented part of Dayton in both of her terms. “Now I have downtown, the historic districts, Old North Dayton ... and kind of the heart of the opiate epidemic, some of the hardest hit parts of East Dayton. For me, having represented many parts of Dayton, having spent a lot of time personally downtown and in the historic districts for decades, I’m very excited about the new parts of Dayton.”

During her time in the district and on the campaign trail, White said she’s hearing a lot about the high costs of food, energy and property taxes.

“The costs have risen so astronomically that a lot of people are concerned. They want to be able to have the resources they need to not only provide for themselves and their families, but to be able to give their children the tools that they need educationally in order to thrive as an adult,” White said. “That’s a lot of what I work on as a legislator. I work on -- how do we help ensure that every child has access to quality early learning, and quality and affordable child care when the parents need it? We need to get more of our kids ready for kindergarten, because right now we have 65 percent showing up not ready for kindergarten.”

White noted that she has introduced five child care-related bills this General Assembly, including the following:

- HB484 (White-Roemer), which would provide about \$10 million for a grant program to expand child care capacity.
- HB576 (White-Abrams), which would provide a non-refundable tax credit for an employer that provides certain child care benefits to employees.
- HB577 (White), which creates a refundable income tax credit for eligible child care expenses of a taxpayer with a dependent younger than 13.
- HB578 (White), which would authorize a non-refundable income tax credit for contributions to certain child care programs.
- HB580 (White-Ray), which would make foster caregivers and kinship caregivers eligible for publicly-funded child care.

White also pointed to her work on Strong Foundations Act HB7 (White-Humphrey), which aims to address maternal and infant mortality, and improve children's development through the first 1,000 days of their lives.

"We are 41st in infant mortality and 32nd in infant maltreatment. More moms are dying from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth in Ohio than many other states, right? So what are we doing about that?" White said, noting there are also too many infants and toddlers in homeless shelters and foster care in Ohio. "We've got to do more. ... If we don't do more to invest in our kids early, children and families will continue to pay now and later."

Other priorities for White include K-12 education, workforce development and mental health, she said.

"I'm all about beginning with the end in mind. What are the goals that we are shooting for? I have a lot of experience over the years, whether it's me serving in health care in the nonprofit world, as a business consultant with my own small business for 15 years helping businesses ... and nonprofits work to improve their processes and their communications and outreach. I have a lot of experience navigating complex systems, listening and leaning in and bringing the right people together to solve the problems that are facing our communities. And I've demonstrated that skill in many ways since I've been in the Legislature," White said.

Lounsbury, an author and "personal simplicity coach," told *Hannah News* that she wasn't very interested in politics for most of her life, although she has always been a regular voter since she became an adult.

"I kind of operated under the assumption that whoever was in charge was probably doing a good job. It didn't really especially seem to matter who was in charge, because my life kind of went on the same way," Lounsbury said. "That illusion started to shatter in the 2016 election when Donald Trump got elected, and I suddenly felt this fear that we could do what we were supposed to do, which was vote in our elections, and we could elect really bad people, people who I felt were truly rather dangerous. I felt this threat."

Because her triplets were still very young and she was just starting her small business, she said she didn't decide to get involved in politics immediately. However, she eventually joined the

League of Women Voters in 2020, and decided to get further involved after Roe v. Wade was overturned in 2022.

“I was like, OK, this is now very personal to me. I am a woman, I have a daughter and that threat that I had started to feel in 2016 became a physical, bodily threat. Enough is enough. Now I have to really find a way to make a change,” Lounsbury said.

Ultimately, she said she decided to run for the seat after speaking with White about Issue 1 in the August 2023 special election, which would have made it significantly more difficult to amend the Ohio Constitution. That measure was ultimately voted down. (See The Hannah Report, 8/9/23.)

“She told me that in her opinion, the Ohio Constitution was too easy to amend, and I should feel grateful that I’ve had it easy for so long because other states had stricter rules around constitutional amendments. When I got off the phone with her I thought, ‘OK, not feeling especially grateful, but definitely feeling like somebody needs to challenge this person very hard when she’s up for election again,’” Lounsbury said.

“Because this is May, I thought surely the Democrats have somebody to run against her. In my mind, they have this bench of great candidates just waiting to run ... and by October, I realized they don’t have anybody who can beat her,” Lounsbury said. “By October I was like, well fine, I will do this because I cannot stand to be represented by someone who is going to vote for things that are truly dangerous for me and my family.”

Lounsbury said the 36th House District is extremely competitive, and history has shown a Democrat can win.

“In 2022, this district was won by 462 votes. Now, obviously they have changed the lines since then, because that was too close for comfort for the Ohio GOP. They redrew the lines to be slightly more favorable to Republicans, but the district as it’s drawn today -- my favorite statistic about it is ... Joe Biden won this district in 2020 by one literal vote, which I will say was mine. I pushed him over,” she said. “It’s about as tight as a district gets.”

Lounsbury said while reproductive rights are a top issue among voters in her district, an even larger issue may be the state of public education.

“Being a former teacher, the daughter of two teachers, and the mother of three kids in public school, I recognize that it’s an issue that is affecting all of us. Even if you don’t have kids in school, the quality of your schools is affecting your neighborhood, businesses that want to come into your town -- it affects so many aspects of our communities,” she said.

Lounsbury said property taxes are straining communities because schools are too dependent on local levies for funding.

“The reason is because the state of Ohio does not properly fund our public education system. They have no option but to come to us, the taxpayers, every two years begging for funds to keep running,” she said, noting the fair school funding plan is a good start, but it’s not enough yet.

She said many voters have also told her they are upset about the state increasing public funding for private school vouchers while failing to fully fund Ohio’s public schools.

“We are now spending \$1 billion, just this past year, to pay for private school tuition for families mostly of means, who could already afford that tuition. That is something that I don’t think most taxpayers are in favor of. I’m certainly not,” Lounsbury said.

Other priorities for Lounsbury include protecting democracy, supporting workers, protecting the environment, increasing gun safety, improving access to health care and emphasizing justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

Lounsbury said gun safety is particularly important, noting the new 36th House District includes Dayton’s Oregon District, where a gunman killed nine people and injured 27 people in 2019. (See *The Hannah Report*, 8/5/19.)

“I come at this from a few different angles. I’m a former public educator who had to do active shooter drills with my students, which is traumatizing for kids and teachers. This is an awful thing that teachers and students do every year. It’s become normal, and it’s something that should not be normal. We should not be doing combat training in our schools with kids, and that’s what we do every single year,” she said.

“Not only is it a waste of valuable instructional time, but I think it is traumatizing for children to go through and play act like they are targets of a mass shooting,” she continued. “If my children were playing that at home, if they were playing ‘mass shooter,’ I would be appalled. But this is what we have them do in schools every single year. And it’s because the GOP will take no meaningful action on gun safety legislation.”

Lounsbury said she has guns in her home, and always will.

“I grew up in a rural area. Gun ownership was part of the culture. Everyone I knew had guns in their home. We always had guns in our home. My husband is an avid hunter, and my sons are avid hunters,” she said. “I like to tell people that ... because there is this narrative that Democrats want to take away your guns. No. I know what responsible gun ownership looks like, and I know that common-sense gun safety laws are not in opposition to that.”

Races to Watch: White vs. Leinbach in House District 41

A longtime communications worker and union leader campaigning on worker issues and a graduate student who wants to address what he sees as an existential crisis among his Gen Z generation are facing off in November for a redrawn and open 41st House District.

One of four Lucas County districts, the 41st district was redrawn by the Ohio Redistricting Commission last year. The seat’s current occupant, Rep. Josh Williams (R-Oregon), now has his home in the 44th House District.

The redrawn lines give House Democrats their best chance for a seat pickup in the House, with the redistricting commission giving it a Democratic leaning index of nearly 61 percent, while Dave’s Redistricting puts it at a 58 percent Democratic lean.

The Democratic nominee for the seat, Erika White, was defeated by Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Maumee) in 2022 by a margin of 54 to 46 percent. This election, Merrin is term-limited and running for Congress.

Running for the General Assembly again, White told *Hannah News* that she has noticed a shift in the energy in her community for this year’s election.

Working for AT&T for over 30 years, she is the current president of Communications Workers of America Local 4319, and is also a fitness enthusiast, motivator, freelance writer, and public speaker. She described herself as a working mother who knows what it is like to have to decide between paying a bill or getting something her children need, or having an unexpected expense because her car hit a pothole.

"I understand what it's like to start at an entry level job and have the mobility to move myself up, which I was able to do with a union job," she said, adding that she believes a person shouldn't have to be a part of union just to have equal pay.

Discussing the campaign trail, White said she is finding voters want someone to listen to them and their struggles. She said they want to discuss what is important in their community.

"They want government to carry their voice, not government to govern over them and take away their rights," she said.

She faces Republican Josiah Leinbach, a 26-year-old graduate student at Bowling Green State University who said he can't be ambivalent about his generation facing what he calls an "existential crisis," including high rates of loneliness, depression, suicide, and falling marriage rates.

He said voters he has talked to on the campaign trail have shared similar stories about the struggles of their children and grandchildren. He said they are impressed that a younger individual wants to make a difference.

"I want to be part of the solution to that problem, and that has really resonated with people as we've talked about any number of ways that we can try to address this at the state level," he said. "People are very receptive."

White described uncertainty among voters in her community, especially on issues such as women's rights, feeling safe sending their kids to school, costs of child care, or water quality. Mental health is also a concern she has heard about, whether it is access to or the availability of time off from work to get treatment or even just de-stress and take care of their mental health.

Many of those issues are part of her campaign platform. She said she is focused on workers, making sure that people can get to work, and not only receive health care but time off to take care of their own health and family. She also said child care is important, allowing people to go to work while their children are in a safe environment.

She said she is a big advocate for mental health, and wants to make sure people have the resources. She said it should not just be about saying you believe in mental health, but also having an investment and resources to address the issue, including making sure people can have access to appointments.

She also listed women's reproductive rights as a top issue, adding "at no point should we have a government that is taking away rights."

White said economic and social mobility are also important to her.

"We're supposed to leave this world, this place better for the next generation, and that's something that is very significant and important to me," she said, also adding clean water as a top issue.

"I don't know if I'd be able to do it all, but I'm certainly going to try," she said. "I have a checklist in no certain order to really address and list how these issues affect people and what is most important, where do we start, and making sure that my community is part of the process."

Leinbach graduated from Hillsdale College with a degree in history; he is working on graduate degrees in statistics and economics at Bowling Green State University. He said he has studied many of the philosophers and thinkers that the Founding Fathers based many of their ideas for the country on. He said that a study of history and how to approach issues has been lacking among politicians today "because they tend to live in just the last five minutes or whatever sound bites are necessary to drum enough votes to win another election."

"I'm looking at what I'm doing as one tiny part of a 100-year play and try to fix the sort of things that are going on in our country," he said.

He cites issues such as affordable housing and paid parental leave as issues he would look to address. With the housing crisis, he said it is an issue of supply in addition to interest rates, and discussed looking at solutions such as removing certain zoning restrictions. He also noted cities that have given tax breaks to developers for converting abandoned buildings into mixed use to increase supply.

On paid parental leave, Leinbach said the U.S. lags behind the rest of the world, and said there needs to be a serious discussion about how to do it. He cited the Institute for Family Studies at the University of Virginia on a proposal that would provide eight weeks of parental leave to new parents that could be funded through discretionary Medicaid funds or taxes on recreational marijuana.

He said many of these issues that he has discussed on the campaign trail he wishes more politicians would discuss, "but since they won't, I will."

Asked if he may have to go up against his own party on some of these proposals, Leinbach said it is about having reasonable discussions, "which has not happened today." He said if they can come together and agree on a shared purpose, they can work towards a consensus.

He added that he has found few issues that are impossible to discuss.

"I've had a lot of positive conversations already with people in the Republican Party on some of these issues, and it's come because I've said I don't view this as 'I hate you and I think you're stupid and wrong' and say that we can both agree that this is a good thing to strive for helping families," he said. "I haven't found anybody in the Republican Party who says we think you're wrong."

Both candidates said they are focusing on their communities in their campaigns and avoiding national politics.

White said she has lived in the district her entire life, and sees running for office as a continuing dedication to her community. She said she is focusing on hope and "good things" instead of what tears people apart.

With the change in the district due to redistricting, she said she believes there is more connectivity in the neighborhoods. She said being able to walk the neighborhood she grew up in to campaign and seeing people excited has really made a difference for her.

Leinbach called himself an "ardent localist."

"It's not that I don't care what happens at the federal level. But when you look at the day-to-day things that affect your life, it's so much more driven by what happens at your local and state level," he said. "I treat people as people ... I don't treat them as demographic blocks that need to be catered to in a particular way. If people are human beings at the core, then that means that they have the same concerns, the same desires, longings and loves of anybody. When you talk with them, if you treat them as such, it shouldn't matter whether they happen to live in an urban area or a rural area."

Races to Watch: Thomas vs. Allison in House District 49

Rep. Jim Thomas (R-Canton) flipped his district for the majority last cycle and now must try to hold the 49th District against education professional Krista Allison in a closely divided district with a slight Republican lean.

The 49th includes Jackson Township in Stark County, where Thomas previously served as trustee, and the city of Canton. Ohio Redistricting Commission data give the district a 51.5 percent index for Republicans, while the Ohio Manufacturers' Association's 2024 Election Guide puts it at 50.5 percent. However, President Joe Biden carried the district with about 50.7 percent of the vote in his 2024 victory over former President Donald Trump.

Thomas, who is seeking a second term after defeating Rep. Thomas West (D-Canton) in 2022, is an attorney and real estate investor who used to be a professional tennis player. Allison, the challenger, has a career in education focused on student and family supports, including state-level work.

In an interview with *Hannah News*, Thomas said he's helped the state and district make good progress in his priority areas and has built relationships that will serve the district well in his future terms.

"When I started, my plan was to work in four areas, and I think I've done well in those four areas, and there's still more work to be done," he said, referencing his policy focus on economic development, workforce development, education and advocacy for capital and community projects.

He notes expansion and development announcements from steel processing and aerospace manufacturing firms in the area and awards to Stark State for workforce training equipment as examples of wins for the district during his tenure.

Thomas also touts his work on two particular bills: HB27 (Mathews-Thomas), intended to give people a better handle on their economic outlook as they consider higher education, and HB105 (Thomas), which limits penalties for late filings on municipal income tax returns.

"Helping to make sure Ohio's tax structure is competitive with other states is very important to me," he said.

Thomas said focusing on his record the past two years is the key to victory in a district rated as competitive.

"I'm definitely expecting a competitive race. From what I can tell my opponent is out working hard, and I'm doing the same," he said. "I have to share the good things that I've been doing, that my office has been doing. We have to keep representing and taking care of the

constituents and their concerns. Those are the main things. We work hard. We're staying on point with our messaging," he said.

Thomas also says his prior service as a Jackson Township trustee gives him a leg up in the race.

"I have very strong relationships with the folks there, the trustees, the police department, the fire department, and I have a very good sense of what's going on in the township. And in the last year and a half, I've been developing relationships in the city of Canton. This [job] is built on relationships and listening to what the concerns are from the residents who I have the pleasure of representing," he said. "I think that experience and that knowledge is going to help me continue to represent the folks. I also think the experience I've gained in the last year and almost eight months in Columbus and relationships I've built are going to help me produce more positive results for our community than someone starting from scratch."

Thomas professes no worry that House GOP infighting and the leadership battle for the next General Assembly will hinder his chances. "I have the faith in my Republican colleagues that they're going to support me, and I'm going to support them."

Allison, who also spoke to *Hannah News*, says her relationships from work at the district, county and state levels and the policy and operational experience she gained will make her an effective representative for the district.

Allison worked at the former Ohio Department of Education and in Canton City Schools and is now with the Stark County Educational Service Center.

"Being a member of a state agency, you have an opportunity to work with legislators and the governor's office and all the other agencies," Allison said. "I understand policy, and what it takes to move policy."

"I'm a person who understands systems, creating not just one system but making sure that systems are sustainable," she said.

"I understand the notion of grinding and getting the work done, not just saying we need to do it, but getting it done," she said.

"All of those experiences have led me to this point in time, to understand not only how to navigate within those systems but also get the job done," she said.

Allison said much of her work involves the non-academic side of education, and her experience includes leadership of the Stark County CARE (Coordinates & Aligns Resources to Engage, Empower and Educate) Team, a partnership of school, nonprofit and other government entities to help at-risk youth.

"One of the things that's always been at the core is focusing on the heart of students and families in our communities," Allison said. "If they're hungry, if they're worried about where they're going ... to sleep at night, if they're worried and have stressors because of trauma, they're not in the best possible position to even begin to learn."

"In order to have a strong community, in order to have strong students, you do need families, students and communities to come together," she said.

She said her work now focuses on helping children from before birth through college and career preparation. “I’m focusing on a seamless transition in that continuum,” she said.

Allison describes herself as someone who knows how to listen and then reflect and amplify constituents’ voices. “One of the things you should know about me is I’m all in for all people, and I’ve always been that way,” she said.

“I think at the heart of it for me is leading with humanity. I’m a person who not only is that advocate, but leading in a space where I’m going to be not only kind-hearted and authentic, but I’m also going to be advocating for my community, not only hearing those voices but raising those voices,” she said.

She shares a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. as reflecting her philosophy: “Whenever you are engaged in work that serves humanity and is for the building of humanity, it has dignity, and it has worth.”

Allison said her priorities include providing adequate funding for education, giving students and families an opportunity to learn about and find high-demand jobs and ensuring a strong and diverse workforce. “That means strong unions. Our unions are central to the viability of our economy,” Allison said.

Allison also emphasizes the importance of reproductive freedom. “I’m a mom. I have two daughters, and I want to make sure that women and families understand that they’re in the best possible position to make decisions without government interference,” she said.

Allison said her current campaign focus of getting out into the community and making sure people know about her and her experience will serve her well in November.

“I’m coming into this new. I’ve never run for office before. But I have a heart and passion for serving my community, and serving all of my community,” she said. “For me, the big piece is education and visibility, making sure that I’m out there and creating awareness in terms of what my platform is, how my platform resonates with everyone in this community.”

Races to Watch: Manning vs. Flieger in House District 52

The fall’s House District 52 contest features a veteran representative with a family name familiar to local voters and a challenger with experience in hunger relief and home finance. Voting patterns show the district to be competitive.

Rep. Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville) is seeking a fourth term in the Ohio House. She previously served two Senate terms, including time as majority whip. Serving as a lawmaker is a family affair for Manning. Her late husband, Jeff Manning, served in the General Assembly. Her son, Nathan Manning, joined the House and then switched seats with his mother when she faced term limits in the Senate.

Before serving in the General Assembly, Manning had a career as an elementary school teacher.

Democratic challenger Genevieve Flieger is a project specialist with the Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio. She previously worked as a senior loan processor for United Trust Bank.

Neither Manning nor Flieger responded to interview requests from *Hannah News*.

The 52nd House District covers a portion of Northern Lorain County. Ohio Redistricting Commission data gives the district a 50.5 percent Democratic index, but the Ohio Manufacturers' Association 2024 Election Guide gives it a 51 percent Republican index. Former President Donald Trump won the district in 2020 by nearly that much, while Gov. Mike DeWine carried the district by 20 points in 2022.

On her website, Flieger lists priority issues including health care affordability, raising the minimum wage and protections against price gouging to address rising food costs, housing affordability and school funding.

Manning's website lists priority issues including promoting local job training, fighting drug overdoses, upgrading infrastructure to create local jobs and supporting early childhood initiatives.

Races to Watch: Santucci v. Mathews in House District 64

After flipping his Trumbull County seat for Republicans in 2022, Rep. Nick Santucci (R-Warren) this year faces a slightly more favorable playing field but one that still leans toward Democrats on paper. He faces Democratic challenger Lauren Mathews, who is heavily involved in community groups and until recently worked with people overcoming substance use issues in specialty courts. Both candidates argue they have relationships across the district that will help propel them to victory.

The 64th District remained wholly within Trumbull County in last year's redraw of General Assembly districts but shifted from the southeast portion of the county to the southwest. Ohio Redistricting Commission statistics show it with a 52-48 Democratic lean, slightly closer than the 54-point Democratic index it had for the 2022 election. Republicans, in general, have seen their fortunes rise in Mahoning Valley legislative contests in recent years.

While he picked up new territory since first being elected, including more rural parts of the county, Santucci said his prior work at the Youngstown-Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce gave him the opportunity to get to know people throughout Trumbull County. "I have family in all of those areas. I've got relationships with the local governments there, so I feel really good and really confident," he said in an interview with *Hannah News*.

Mathews likewise does not sweat the shift in territory, saying she has roots throughout the county, and her life on the farm in childhood helps her connect to the more rural areas added to the district. "Growing up on a farm and being a dairy farmer, those are my people. I spent a lot of time at the fair, but I didn't spend a lot of time standing in the booths at the midway. I was down at the barns. I was holding my friends' babies at the goat show," she said. "Trumbull County is a smaller county, and even though the landscape of my district is larger, it's all very small town."

The incumbent is running on a record that includes work on youth employment, human trafficking and help for families.

Santucci's HB71 on the Community Connectors Workforce Program aims to connect students to jobs and internships in their communities and grow the labor pool. That can help build up Ohio's labor force and give students soft skills and professional experience they'll take with them into career fields and higher education, he said.

Santucci's professional background is in workforce and economic development, with experience at the Youngstown-Warren chamber, an educational service center and now at VAZA Consulting. While he does less outside professional work since his election to office, his consulting services focus on career-technical education – “a direct pipeline into our workforce,” he said.

His proposal with Rep. Josh Williams (R-Oregon), HB377, would boost penalties for human trafficking, in some cases to as much as 25 years to life imprisonment. Ohio's prison spending should be directed to those “most disgusting” offenders, like those who traffic in people, he said.

As for helping families, Santucci noted his bill with Rep. Melanie Miller (R-Ashland) to exempt baby products like diapers and cribs from the state sales tax, HB118, was enacted via the biennial budget bill, HB33 (Edwards).

“I'm pretty proud of that, but there's a lot more for us to do in the state. I'd love to see our income tax cut completely, or phased out, and ultimately eliminated. Inflation is crushing folks here in Ohio, and I think if we can restructure our tax base it will give them a little bit of flexibility in their budgets,” Santucci said.

Santucci said inflation and the effects of the U.S. border crisis are top issues for district voters.

“The path to victory is just performing, and helping to solve problems for everyday folks. A lot of the issues that we face in the state are not Republican or Democrat issues, they're challenges that everyday people are dealing with, and that includes safety, the border and things like human trafficking,” he said.

Santucci expresses no worry about whether internal divisions among House Republicans might hamper his chances at victory. “The people of my district elected me to come down to Columbus, and so those are the folks that I'm working closest with on my re-election: knocking doors, talking to voters, showing up at events. That is how I'm going to win my race. Columbus, regardless of who is in charge of OHRA [Ohio House Republican Alliance campaign fund] or who's speaker of the House, can only do so much to support me. I have to be in front of the voters,” he said. “I'm not too worried about what's going on with OHRA or the speaker's race. My focus is on earning support of the voters of the 64th District.”

Mathews left her job with the state to campaign, as she could not have engaged in partisan political activity while employed by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. Her recent work focused on helping people whose cases were assigned to specialty court dockets established for veterans, human trafficking survivors and those with substance use issues. She is a social worker by training and also worked in the developmental disabilities system.

“Having come from a social work background, most of my platform is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We need to be able to help meet people's basic needs if we want them to be a flourishing member of society. This is the same mindset I had when I worked in the drug courts,” Mathews said.

Outside work, Mathews said she's had a lifetime of community involvement, from nonprofit boards to youth sports boosters and coaching. Before working for the state, she'd volunteered extensively with local Democrats, knocking on hundreds and hundreds of doors in a given cycle. She says she learned this from her family at a young age, with a mother who taught and a father who served on the board of education. During childhood, her family's sponsorship of the local Democratic Party steak fry had her and her sister wrapping baked potatoes in foil.

“From the time we were born, we were always taught to give back in the community service realm. My mom would say, no matter what, there’s always someone who has less than you,” she said.

Mathews said she would like to get past the “performative” and “divisive” side of politics. “I think that most people are in the center as far as their political beliefs align, and I think we need to do more about working across the aisle,” she said.

Mathews said she hears voters expressing concern about child care costs, reproductive health care access after the U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and a general distaste for corruption and lack of transparency in government.

“Last year a lot of time was spent fighting [about] Issue 1 and Issue 2 and having a special election in August, and that’s going to be a reason also that people come out. When a majority in the Statehouse decided they’re going to do a special election after they said it was too costly, just to try to get the results they wanted for the November election – there’s a lot of people who are talking about that,” she said.

Gov. Mike DeWine’s recently announced opposition to a redistricting amendment fits that bill as well, she said. “It’s still politicians drawing the maps. If people are paying attention at all, those are the things they’re really upset about. Can we just have transparency in government?” Mathews said.

That dissatisfaction with government and the effects of inflation on families’ budgets will be top issues for voters this cycle, Mathews said.

“I think everybody’s feeling very energized with the change at the top of the national ticket, and I think we’ll have a lot more voter turnout than people would have anticipated six to eight months ago,” Mathews said. “The path to victory for me is doing what I’ve always done, and it’s being part of my community. I will never be able to outspend, nor do I want to outspend my opponent.”

Races to Watch: Sherrod Brown vs. Bernie Moreno for U.S. Senate

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) is hoping to win a fourth term in office this fall as he takes on Republican challenger Bernie Moreno.

The race is being watched closely across the country, as the outcome very well could decide which party controls the U.S. Senate in the next Congress.

Brown first joined in the U.S. Senate in 2006, defeating then-U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine by a vote of 56.2 percent to 43.8 percent. In 2012, Brown beat then-Treasurer of State Josh Mandel 50.7 percent to 44.7 percent. In 2018, Brown won against then-U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci 53.4 percent to 46.6 percent.

Brown has also served as a state representative, Ohio secretary of state and as a member of the U.S. House during his political career.

Moreno has never held an elected office before, and defeated Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) and Secretary of State Frank LaRose in the Republican primary for the opportunity to

face Brown. Moreno briefly ran for U.S. Senate in 2022, but dropped out after meeting with former President Donald Trump. Trump eventually endorsed JD Vance, who won the U.S. Senate seat and is now Trump's running mate in the 2024 election. Trump endorsed Moreno ahead of the 2024 Republican primary.

Brown has consistently led Moreno in the polls over the course of the campaign, even though former President Donald Trump has led both President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris in the polls.

According to the RealClearPolitics poll average, Brown leads Moreno 46.5 percent to 42.8 percent. The polling average from FiveThirtyEight.com shows Brown with a lead of 47 percent to 44.3 percent.

Trump leads Harris in Ohio 51.5 percent to 43.3 percent in the RealClearPolitics poll average, while the former president leads Harris 51.7 percent to 43 percent in the FiveThirtyEight.com poll average.

Brown also holds the edge in fundraising, reporting \$10.7 million on hand to Moreno's \$4.5 million in their July quarterly campaign finance reports. (See The Hannah Report, 7/16/24.)

Brown's campaign released its October quarterly numbers early, saying in a news release that Brown raised more than \$30.6 million in the quarter.

"Sherrod has a proven track record fighting for Ohioans, whether it's fighting for a woman's right to make her own health care decisions or saving the pensions of over 100,000 Ohio workers -- and that's why he has unprecedented momentum going into the final month of this campaign," said Rachel Petri, Brown's campaign manager. "Sherrod and Connie are grateful to every supporter and volunteer working to make sure Sherrod can keep fighting for all Ohioans."

Moreno's campaign did not release early fundraising numbers as of late Thursday. The reports are not due until Tuesday, Oct. 15.

Brown often talks about the "dignity of work," and has emphasized his opposition to trade deals that he says are bad for Ohio.

"Born and raised in Mansfield, OH, Sherrod saw firsthand how corporations lobbied for tax breaks and bad trade deals that shipped Ohio jobs overseas. That's why he's always opposed unfair trade deals that hurt Ohio workers and why he stood up to his own party to lead the opposition against NAFTA," Brown's campaign website says. "Sherrod believes that when you love your country, you fight for the people who make it work. He's never been afraid to stand up to corporations and special interests to level the playing field for Ohioans -- from standing up to Wall Street to taking on Big Pharma. He has worked with both parties to pass some of the most significant legislation in recent years, and he continues to work across the aisle to hold corporations accountable."

Brown has also stressed the importance of protecting abortion rights, often attacking his opponent for supporting a national abortion ban at 15 weeks, which would override the reproductive rights constitutional amendment Ohio voters overwhelmingly approved in November 2023.

Brown's campaign website also notes the following priorities:

- Protecting Medicare, Social Security and pensions.

- Supporting law enforcement.
- Securing the border.
- Supporting agriculture and rural areas.
- Supporting veterans and the military.
- Protecting equal rights for minorities.

Moreno was born in Colombia, and moved to the U.S. with his family at the age of five. He became an American citizen at the age of 18, according to his campaign website. Moreno has run luxury car dealerships and has invested in blockchain technology.

“After a long, successful career, Bernie sold most of his business to begin focusing on his calling -- protecting the American dream for another generation,” his website says.

Moreno is running as a political “outsider,” calling Brown a “career politician” who is leaving Ohioans behind.

“All public policy priorities in America should revolve around a simple concept -- what is good for American workers and families? All elected officials should strive to create a growing middle class where the American dream is accessible to anyone, regardless of their background,” Moreno’s campaign website says.

Moreno’s priorities include the following, according to his website:

- Supporting school vouchers.
- Securing the border.
- “Restoring the integrity of our elections.”
- Reducing regulations and cutting government spending.
- Supporting Israel and stopping “all forms of anti-Semitism in the U.S., especially on our college campuses.”
- “Holding ‘Big Tech’ accountable and break up ‘Big Media.’”
- Defending the Second Amendment.
- “Restoring American energy independence.”
- “Ending ‘wokeness’ and ‘cancel culture.’”
- “Ending socialism in America.”

Races to Watch: Landsman v. Sonza in First Congressional District

A first-term congressman in Cincinnati is seeking to fend off a former assistant prosecutor in the First Congressional District in a race that could help decide control of the U.S. House of Representatives in the next Congress.

U.S. Rep. Greg Landsman (D-OH) is in the midst of his first term after unseating long-time U.S. Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Cincinnati) in 2022 after redistricting made the district more friendly for Democrats by incorporating the entirety of Cincinnati. Mapmakers, however, sought to blunt that Democratic advantage by drawing the city with Republican-heavy Warren County, making it a district that only slightly favors Democrats.

Landsman faces Orlando Sonza, who had previously run unsuccessfully for the Ohio Senate. A former Hamilton County assistant prosecutor, West Point graduate and veteran, he currently serves as the executive director of the Hamilton County Veterans Service Commission.

Dave's Redistricting App gives the district a 51 percent to 48 percent Democratic lean. The Cook Political Report currently rates the race as "Likely Democratic," as does Sabato's Crystal Ball. Gov. Mike DeWine won the district with nearly 55 percent in 2022, while President Joe Biden won over former President Donald Trump with 54 percent in 2020.

In an interview with *Hannah News*, Landsman said the voters of the district want "normal, pragmatic, and bipartisan leaders who are just going to do the work and get things done."

He said he has worked to build that reputation in Congress, noting his membership in a problem solvers caucus with 30 Democrats and 30 Republicans who work to get critical bills over the finish line, such as funding resolutions. He also said they worked to pass an extension of the child tax credit, but that bill did not get through the Senate.

He pointed to work on legislation addressing pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) that would require disclosures of all their transactions on behalf of Medicare to make sure savings go to seniors and Medicare.

Another piece of legislation he pointed to is his work on the Social Security Fairness Act that would allow retired teachers, police officers and firefighters to receive their full Social Security benefits. He said he helped to get 218 signatures on a discharge petition to get the bill to the floor, and he said he expects the teachers, police and firefighter unions will be making it a priority to get it passed after the election "because it will truly be a game changer" for them when they retire.

Landsman said voters are exhausted "with the chaos and extremism of the far right." He criticized Sonza for his stances on abortion, support of killing an immigration bill negotiated between Democrats and Republicans in the Senate, and his stances on taxes.

"I think most people all across the country want an economy and a tax code to finally be built for working people in the middle class and have the super wealthy start paying all of their taxes," he said.

He argued the economy has been rigged against the middle class for decades and talked about a new tax code where the "rich pay their share," a child income tax credit, help for people buying a home, and addressing price gouging.

Landsman also touted his refusal to accept money from corporate political action committees.

A message was sent to Sonza's campaign seeking an interview for this story was not returned. On his website, he lists the economy, securing the country, and protecting families as top issues.

During a debate last month, Sonza promised, that as a member of Congress, he will work to cut government spending, starting with waste, fraud and abuse he said can be seen across the federal government. He also said the government needs to stop "taxing the American taxpayer into oblivion."

He said Landsman has taken positions that "don't make any sense," including raising the debt ceiling without making any cuts to spending.

Sonza said he is committed to renewing the tax cuts passed under former President Donald Trump in 2018. He argued that if corporations are continued to be taxed at high rates, they will lower salaries for employees or let them go, or there will be a lower return on investments. He wants to not only incentivize people to work but also incentivize corporations to hire.

He also criticized Landsman for supporting a hike in the federal minimum wage above \$20 an hour, saying they should allow the free market to operate.

On immigration, Sonza argued that the federal bipartisan bill "does not work," only closing the Southern Border when the number of migrants trying to cross reaches 5,000 a day. He said that does not solve the problems with immigration but continues to exacerbate it.

Noting that he is the product of legal immigration by his Filipino parents, he argued that it does not make sense that American citizens are burdened by paying for the housing and health care costs of illegal immigrants.

Both said they support Israel in the current Middle East conflict. Landsman put much of the blame on Iran, saying the U.S. should stand shoulder-to-shoulder with its allies against Iran including Israel. He said once Iran is dealt with, the Middle East will be on a path to peace.

He also supports Ukraine, calling Russian President Vladimir Putin, along with Iran, "bullies."

Sonza said the U.S. should support Israel and its fundamental right to protect itself. He blamed current American leadership for the issues, saying that it has not taken strong policy positions to deter the terrorist groups in the Middle East and has emboldened them.

Races to Watch: Kaptur v. Merrin in U.S. House District 9

A key race in deciding whether Democrats or Republicans will control the U.S. House of Representatives in the next Congress is heating up down the home stretch along the shores of Lake Erie as incumbent and longest-serving woman in the House, Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo), is seeking her 22nd term against state Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Maumee) in Ohio's 9th Congressional District.

The race for the 9th District is rife with national implications as Republicans and Democrats battle in races nationwide for control of both chambers of Congress. The 9th District is one of only eight House districts in the U.S. where a Democrat is defending a district that Donald Trump (51.5 percent) won over President Joe Biden (48.5 percent) in 2020. The district voted for Gov. Mike DeWine over Democratic challenger Nan Whaley by a 63-37 percent margin in

2022. The 2024 Ohio Manufacturers' Association Election Guide gives the 9th District just under a 52 percent Republican Index after 2023 redistricting moved the district further west into rural Northwest Ohio.

Polls from The Cook Political Report, The Hill's Decision Desk HQ and Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball were all reporting through the end of September and mid-October that the race was leaning Democratic. Earlier in September, Cook had graded the race as a toss-up.

On the economy, Merrin blames Kaptur and the Biden administration for a "tax-and-spend" agenda that is driving inflation and skyrocketing the national debt. Merrin also supports a constitutional amendment to require balancing the federal budget, reducing Northwest Ohio's tax burden and bringing American jobs back to America.

Kaptur supports an economy that she says works for working people, including job training and technical skills programs. Kaptur also touts her previous votes against cuts and privatization of Social Security and Medicaid, and her campaign promises to work to expand Medicaid to cover dental care and hearing aids. One of Kaptur's priorities in an earlier term would be to grow the economy by securing federal funding for "transformational investments" that boost manufacturing and modernize infrastructure and transportation systems, according to the Kaptur campaign.

Kaptur opposes a national abortion ban, saying, "the criminalization of reproductive health care must be fought in every instance." Merrin's campaign website omits any stance on abortion, though in the Ohio House, Merrin either co-sponsored or supported multiple bills to restrict or criminalize abortion, including 134-HB598 (Schmidt), 133-HB413 (Keller-Hood) and 132-HB258 (Hagan-Hood).

Merrin blames Kaptur for giving illegal immigrants American union jobs and flooding communities with fentanyl and criminal cartels. He supports finishing the construction of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border to stop drug and human trafficking, as well as deporting illegal immigrants. Kaptur says she has voted to improve and expand border security, citing the immigration reform plan recently negotiated in the U.S. Senate by Sen. James Lankford (R-OK), which would increase troops and security technology along the border but which was opposed by Donald Trump and therefore did not pass.

Kaptur says she worked with Republicans in Congress to keep the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative from being defunded. Merrin's campaign website says, "For 40 years, Marcy Kaptur has allowed algal blooms to fester and cause crises." Merrin adds that he will be proactive in securing investments and leveraging technology to protect Lake Erie.

Merrin also criticizes Kaptur for not acting in 40 years to address a "broken, bureaucratic system that is letting our veterans down." Kaptur counters that she helped pass the federal PACT Act in 2022 and has secured funding for new VA clinics across Northern Ohio.

Merrin has also signed the U.S. Term Limits Pledge to cosponsor a constitutional amendment to limit U.S. House members to three terms. In addition, Merrin says he would oppose regulations on cryptocurrency and support a regulatory framework to ensure "government won't get in the way."

In Congress, Kaptur has proposed legislation to reinstate provisions of the Glass-Steagall Act and supported legislation to repeal the U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United decision.

Both candidates support increasing American capacity for energy production. Merrin says as Ohio continues to grow, industry and manufacturing will need more power. Kaptur calls for an

“all of the above” energy policy, including solar, wind, geo-thermal or biofuels, in moving toward American energy independence and bringing down emissions to combat climate change. Kaptur has also criticized Merrin’s support in the Ohio House of 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin).

The National Republican Congressional Committee, U.S. House Republicans’ campaign arm, has launched advertising criticizing Kaptur on her voting record on U.S.-Mexico border policies. Multiple media outlets have also reported recently that Elon Musk’s America PAC has filed with the Federal Elections Commission to spend over \$160,000 in support of Merrin’s campaign.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has run advertisements criticizing Merrin’s abortion stance and other aspects of his record in the Ohio House.

Underscoring the national implications of the race, OpenSecrets reports nearly \$10 million in outside spending on the race between the two candidates. Outside spending in support of Merrin’s campaign is reported at \$1,597,135, with \$4,055,352 spent in opposition. OpenSecrets reports \$745,757 in outside spending in support of Kaptur’s campaign, with \$3,489,160 spent in opposition.

The Federal Elections Commission reports that as of Sept. 30, Kaptur’s campaign had raised \$4,239,754 and spent \$2,922,626. By the same date, Merrin’s campaign had raised \$1,279,335 and spent \$848,397.

Toledo business owner and previous candidate for local government positions Tom Pruss is also on the ballot for the Libertarian party.

Multiple news outlets in the 9th District have attempted to facilitate a debate between Kaptur and Merrin before the election, but both campaigns blame the other for the inability to set date. The Sandusky Register reports that Kaptur last took part in a debate before an election in the district in 2014. The Toledo Blade reports that Kaptur’s campaign declined to take part in a debate with Merrin, citing campaign donations Merrin received from Speaker of the U.S. House Mike Johnson (R-LA).

Races to Watch: Sykes v. Coughlin in 13th Congressional District

While U.S. Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) is the incumbent for the 13th U.S. House District, both she and Republican challenger Kevin Coughlin are former state legislators. Sykes served in the Ohio House of Representatives from 2015 until taking her congressional seat in 2023, including two years as House minority leader. Coughlin was in the House from 1997 to 2001 and the Ohio Senate from 2001 to 2011.

Kyle Kondik, managing editor of Sabato’s Crystal Ball at the University of Virginia Center for Politics, has called the 13th House District “one of the most competitively drawn districts in the whole country,” according to media reports. As of Oct. 24, Sabato’s Crystal Ball lists the race as Leans Democratic.

Sykes previously defeated Republican candidate Madison Gesiotto Gilbert by over 5 percentage points in 2022, while the 2024 primary saw Coughlin overcome Republicans Chris Banweg and Richard Morckel. This is not Coughlin’s first time running for federal office either,

as he sought the 2012 U.S. Senate nomination but withdrew in October 2011. (See The Hannah Report, 10/25/11.)

According to the 2024 Ohio Election Guide, published by the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) and compiled with assistance from *Hannah News*, the district has a political Republican index of 48.94 percent with top industries including education and health services; professional and business services; and trade, transportation and utilities. It backed Gov. Mike DeWine in 2022 with 57.13 percent and Joe Biden with 51.43 percent in the 2020 presidential election.

Sykes' campaign website emphasizes her work to bring "critical federal resources and support" to the 13th District, including over \$100 million in federal funds and returning \$2 million directly to constituents. Other actions identified on her website include promotion of good-paying jobs and the local economy; support for organized labor; keeping communities safe; protecting reproductive rights, Social Security and Medicare; and ensuring access to quality, affordable health care and education.

Coughlin's site describes how he learned "the values of hard work and resiliency" while growing up in a working-class family and being raised by a single mother. He started working at 15, making \$2.50 an hour at a drive-in restaurant and then working his way through college at Bowling Green State University. The website added that made him passionate "about creating educational opportunities that would break the cycle of poverty for Ohio students" and led him to the Legislature.

Regarding issues in the race, both candidates list education and public safety topics on their websites. Sykes said she is a "proud product of public schools" and works to ensure every child in Northeast Ohio has access to a high-quality education. She has co-sponsored the EDUCATORS for America Act and the American Teacher Act and wants to continue those efforts.

Coughlin said his legislative record on education is "clear" as he was "on the ground floor of the parents' rights movement in Ohio, helping to establish choice scholarships and sponsoring Ohio's special education scholarship so that kids with special needs can go to the schools that best fits their needs."

Sykes noted she worked with Democrats and Republicans on legislation to improve hiring and retention resources for local law enforcement and also discussed ensuring there is "accountability and trust within the community through meaningful criminal justice reform efforts."

Coughlin said people committing crimes should be kept away from law-abiding citizens, calling for officials with "soft-on-crime policies" to be voted out. His website noted Coughlin worked in the Legislature to "protect children and the victims of domestic abuse by giving law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges the tools they need to keep our communities safe."

Regarding economic issues, Sykes said Ohioans shouldn't be struggling to pay for gas, groceries, housing and other expenses and that led to her sponsorship of the Raise the Wage Act. Coughlin brought up inflation as a critique of the Biden administration and called for a constitutional amendment to balance the national budget. He also noted his small business experience and said a more competitive tax rate and less "unnecessary red tape" are needed.

Sykes detailed her support for labor and fair trade, while also discussing the significance of the health care industry to the region. She further stressed the importance of clean water, clean air, and a clean environment as "a basic human right." Coughlin's website in turn said the Great

Lakes provide pristine recreational opportunities and “a vital role in our economy” which he would work to protect.

On immigration, Sykes said a “bipartisan, comprehensive solution” is needed for the current “broken” system while Coughlin called it the “Biden border crisis” and said he would work on border security and closing “loopholes that allow illegal immigrants who commit a crime to escape justice.”

Sykes also detailed “Democracy” as an issue, saying she supports legislation to make it easier for citizens to vote and holding people accountable if they attack “the right to a free and fair election” with the Jan. 6, 2021 events mentioned as an example. Coughlin further said he would “defend the Constitution” if he is elected by ensuring “Congress is acting as a check and balance to protect the freedoms and liberties that we hold dear.”

Other issues mentioned on their websites were Sykes’ work to protect a woman’s right to health care and promote legislation benefiting senior citizens, and Coughlin’s commitment to “American energy independence” and protecting the military and veterans, including through their health care.

In recent federal campaign finance filings, Sykes reported \$1.3 million in contributions, \$2.3 million in spending, and \$1.4 million on hand. (See The Hannah Report, 10/16/24.) Coughlin’s campaign amended his filing on Thursday and is now reporting \$269,304 in contributions and \$201,728 in spending during the period from July 1 through Sept. 30 with \$631,585 on hand.

Among endorsements in the races, Sykes’ campaign noted she had the support of Canal Fulton Mayor Joseph Schultz, a Republican, while Coughlin’s campaign touted the endorsement of former state Rep. Bryan Flannery, a Democrat. (See The Hannah Report, 10/11/24.)

The two campaigns have also sparred over a challenge to Sykes’ eligibility as a voter in the 13th District. That issue would not affect her ability to hold the seat. (See The Hannah Report, 10/28/24.)

Voters to Choose Six New State Board of Education Members; VP Must Exit in New Term

At least several and potentially more than half of seats on the State Board of Education could turn over next year as voters face a crop of candidates for six positions and terms for at-large seats expire at year’s end.

Ohio voters will choose new board members in Districts 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 11 in November. An incumbent in another seat is running mid-term for the General Assembly, potentially creating another opening.

One of four at-large seats will definitely get a new occupant in the coming year because of term limits. Gov. Mike DeWine appoints members to the board’s eight at-large seats, half of which come up for appointment every two years.

Board seats are technically nonpartisan, but candidates often identify with major parties and carry their endorsements. The Ohio Democratic Party endorsed in some races. The Ohio Republican Party did not respond to messages about whether it plans to endorse in board races. Ohio’s teacher unions endorse in the races as well.

Board districts are supposed to align to General Assembly boundaries, which each board district encompassing three Ohio Senate districts. However, the conflagration after redistricting in 2022 left the maps out of alignment, and DeWine's office argued he has no authority to update district designations. (See The Hannah Report, 7/18/22.)

District 1

Kristie Reighard is the sole candidate in the race. She carries the endorsement of the Ohio Democratic Party (ODP), the Ohio Education Association (OEA) and Ohio Federation of Teachers.

Incumbent Diana Fessler, who served on the board two decades ago and also was a member of the Ohio House, declined to run for re-election.

According to a campaign biography publicized by the Ohio Education Association, Reighard works with ExploreLearning and has decades of experience as teacher and administrator in public schools, including Bowling Green, Pike-Delta-York, Toledo and Penta Career Center. Reighard lives in Swanton, a village straddling the Fulton County-Lucas County line.

District 5

Incumbent Brendan Shea won a Republican primary for Madison County commissioner and is unopposed in the fall. Running to replace him are Hava Laudon, owner of financial and accounting firm Mantle Financial Solutions, and Mary Binegar, a retired teacher who held leadership roles in local and state teachers' unions and is now chair of OEA-Retired. Binegar ran against Shea in 2020 for what was then designated as District 10.

OEA and OFT endorsed Binegar, as did ODP.

District 6

Incumbent Antoinette Miranda faces term limits. Three candidates filed for the seat.

- David Donofrio of Grove City, a former South-Western City Schools Board of Education member.
- Cathye Flory of Logan, a former at-large appointed board member during the Kasich administration and former Logan-Hocking Local Schools Board of Education member.
- Chris Orban of Columbus, an Ohio State University physics professor.

The district covers Fairfield, Hocking, Muskingum, Perry and Pickaway counties and part of Franklin County.

OEA and OFT back Orban.

ODP stayed neutral in the District 6 race on the recommendation of its screening committee.

District 7

The District 7 seat has had no incumbent since the resignation of Christina Collins at the end of 2023; she joined the group Honesty for Ohio Education as executive director. As a Medina

County resident, she would not have been able to run for re-election, since the reconfiguration of districts by Gov. Mike DeWine following redistricting put her home county in District 11.

Jessica Goeller of Sunbury and Rhonda R. Johnson of Dublin, former Columbus City Schools teacher and local union president, have filed for the race.

The district covers Delaware, Knox, Morrow and Union counties and parts of Franklin and Holmes counties.

OEA, OFT and ODP back Johnson.

District 8

Incumbent Michelle Newman did not file for re-election to the seat.

According to the Mahoning County Board of Elections, only Karen A. Lloyd of Steubenville, a retired teacher, has filed to run for the seat. The district covers much of Eastern Ohio, running along the border from Mahoning County to Meigs County and stretching as far west as Licking County.

District 11

Incumbent Meryl Johnson is term-limited and ineligible to run for re-election.

Delores G. Ford and Jennie Kelley-Crosby have filed to run for the seat. District 11 includes Ashland, Wayne and Medina counties and part of Cuyahoga County.

Ford has the backing of ODP and OEA. OFT's endorsement list did not include a recommendation for District 11.

At-Large Seats

Martha Manchester, originally named to the board by former Gov. John Kasich, is the longest serving at-large member of the board. Her second term on the board expires at the end of 2024, and she cannot be reappointed because of term limits.

Manchester serves as board vice president. The race to succeed her in that position will happen under new policies adopted by the board recently that bar appointed members from holding both the presidency and vice presidency. Paul LaRue, another at-large member, is the current president. His term runs through 2026, so he could seek the presidency again next year.

No other at-large board member faces term limits, although it is not unheard of for governors to swap appointees at term's end rather than reappoint sitting members.

Aside from Manchester, other at-large members whose terms expire at the end of 2024 are Melissa Bedell, Sue Hackett and Amy Malone Fugate.

Elected Member Seeks Senate Seat

Charlotte McGuire, a former board president and the District 3 elected member, is running for a Dayton-area Ohio Senate seat against Rep. Willis Blackshear (D-Dayton). Incumbent Sen. Niraj

Antani (R-Miamisburg) made an unsuccessful bid for Congress in the spring primary after redistricting tilted his district more toward Democrats. (See The Hannah Report, 9/13/24.)

McGuire is in the middle of her second elected board term, so if she succeeds in her Senate campaign, DeWine would get to appoint a successor to serve through 2026.

McGuire first joined the board when she was appointed by Gov. John Kasich to fill a vacancy.