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Ohio Statehouse Update: General Election Preview 2012

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With the November 6 General Election only five weeks away, the political campaign season is kicking into high gear. Here is a preview of the major candidate races and issues that will be on the ballot in Ohio.

Presidential Election

President Barack Obama is seeking a second term as president of the United States against Republican challenger and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. As in the past, Ohio, with its 18 electoral votes, is again predicted to be one of several key swing states in determining which candidate is elected to the White House.

U.S. Senate

Ohio Democrat U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown is being challenged by Republican State Treasurer Josh Mandel. This matchup is being touted nationally as one of the top U.S. Senate races in this year's election. The candidates have agreed to three debates prior to the election, currently scheduled to take place in Cleveland on October 15, Columbus on October 18 and Cincinnati on October 25. Ohio's other U.S. Senator, Republican Rob Portman (who was widely rumored over the summer to be on the Romney campaign's vice presidential running mate short-list), was elected in 2010 and does not face re-election until 2016.

U.S. House of Representatives

Due to slower population growth in relation to other U.S. states, Ohio was forced to reduce its number of congressional districts from 18 to 16 in last year's redistricting process, required to take place every 10 years following the census. All 16 of the newly drawn congressional districts are up for election this year to two-year terms.

[Click here for an overview map of Ohio's new congressional districts.](#)

- **District 1** – Incumbent Republican Steve Chabot is facing Democrat challenger Jeff Sinnard, an engineering consultant from Cincinnati.

- **District 2** – This is an open seat. Incumbent Republican Jean Schmidt was defeated in the primary by Brad Wenstrup, a physician from Cincinnati, who will face Democrat William Smith, a truck driver from Waverly.
- **District 3** – This is an open seat. Democrat Joyce Beatty, former minority leader of the Ohio House, is facing Republican candidate and Reynoldsburg City Councilman Chris Long.
- **District 4** – Incumbent Republican Jim Jordan is facing Democrat challenger Jim Slone, a retired General Motors trainer from Elyria.
- **District 5** – Incumbent Republican Bob Latta is facing Democrat challenger Angela Zimmann, a Bowling Green State University faculty member.
- **District 6** – Incumbent Republican Bill Johnson is facing Democrat challenger and former member of Congress Charlie Wilson.
- **District 7** – Incumbent Republican Bob Gibbs is facing Democrat challenger Joyce Healy-Abrams, a businesswoman from Canton.
- **District 8** – Incumbent Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner is running unopposed in the November election.
- **District 9** – Democrat incumbent Marcy Kaptur, who defeated long-time Congressman Dennis Kucinich in a race that pitted the two incumbents against each other in the March primary due to the geographic composition of the newly configured district, is facing Republican Samuel “Joe The Plumber” Wurzelbacher in November.
- **District 10** – Incumbent Republican Mike Turner is facing Democrat challenger Sharen Swartz Neuhardt, an attorney from Yellow Springs.
- **District 11** – Incumbent Democrat Marcia Fudge is running unopposed in the November election.
- **District 12** – Incumbent Republican Pat Tiberi is facing Democrat challenger Jim Reese, an attorney from Gahanna.
- **District 13** – Incumbent Democrat Tim Ryan is facing Republican challenger Marisha Agana, a pediatrician from Warren.
- **District 14** – This unexpectedly became an open seat when incumbent Republican Steve LaTourette announced in late July that he was retiring from Congress and would not seek re-election. Geauga County Prosecutor David Joyce was selected to replace Congressman LaTourette on the November ballot, and is facing Democrat candidate Dale Blanchard, a Solon accountant.
- **District 15** – Incumbent Republican Steve Stivers is facing Democrat challenger and City of Athens Law Director Pat Lang.
- **District 16** – Due to the changes made through redistricting, this race features incumbent Republican Congressman Jim Renacci and incumbent Democrat Congresswoman Betty Sutton in a contest to determine who will represent the citizens of the newly drawn 16th District.

Ohio Supreme Court

The Ohio Supreme Court has seven justices who are elected to six-year terms. Currently the makeup of the Court by political party affiliation includes six Republican justices and one Democrat. Three seats will appear on the ballot in the November election.

- Democrat incumbent Justice Yvette McGee Brown is facing Republican challenger Butler County Domestic Relations Judge Sharon Kennedy for election to the remainder of an unexpired term ending December 31, 2014. Justice McGee Brown was appointed to this seat by former Governor Ted Strickland in January 2011, just prior to his departure from office.
- Republican incumbent Justice Terrence O'Donnell is facing Democrat State Senator Mike Skindell for election to a full six-year term. Senator Skindell was a late addition to this race, having been selected to run as the Democrat candidate in June after the initial candidate, Robert Price, declared that he was exiting the race.
- Republican incumbent Justice Robert Cupp is facing Democrat William O'Neill, a registered nurse and former Judge of the Ohio Court of Appeals, for election to a full six-year term. Recent polling suggests that this could be a close race.

Ohio Senate

Through a process paralleling congressional redistricting every 10 years, Ohio's state legislative districts have also been redrawn for the 2012 election by the Ohio Apportionment Board to account for changes in population across the state. Republicans currently hold a 23-10 advantage over Democrats in the Ohio Senate. Members of the Ohio Senate are elected to four-year terms. Of the Senate's 33 seats, 18 are on the ballot in the November election. Highlighted below are several races of interest.

[Click here for an overview map of the new Ohio Senate districts.](#)

- **District 2** – Republican State Representative and veteran legislator Randy Gardner is vying to return to the Senate in a contest against Democrat Jeff Bretz, an engineer from North Baltimore. Current State Senator Mark Wagoner decided not to seek re-election.
- **District 18** – Republican incumbent John Eklund, a Chardon attorney, is facing Democrat former Ohio House member Jim Mueller, a chemical and environmental engineer from Novely.
- **District 24** – Republican incumbent Tom Patton of Strongsville is facing Democrat Jennifer Brady, a former state representative from Westlake. There is potential for voter confusion in this race because Democrat Matt Patten, also from Strongsville, is on the ballot in this area running for the Ohio House 7th District seat.
- **District 30** – Democrat incumbent Lou Gentile of Steubenville is facing Republican challenger Shane Thompson of St. Clairsville.

Ohio House of Representatives

As mentioned above, the Ohio House of Representatives' districts have been reconfigured for the 2012 election through the Apportionment Board process. Republicans currently hold a 59-40 majority over Democrats in the Ohio House. All 99 seats in the Ohio House are up for election this year to two-year terms. Due to member departures as a result of term limits and other factors, as well as the new geographical boundaries of the districts resulting from apportionment, there are numerous open House seats in this year's election. Highlighted below are several races of interest.

[Click here for an overview map of the new Ohio House districts.](#)

- **District 2** – Incumbent Democrat Representative Jay Goyal announced in May that he was dropping his bid for re-election. In his place, Democrat Mansfield City Councilwoman Ellen Haring is facing Republican business owner Mark Romanchuk, also from Mansfield.
- **District 3** – This is an open seat. Bowling Green Democrat business owner Kelly Wicks is facing Republican Wood County Commissioner Tim Brown.
- **District 7** – Incumbent Republican House member Mike Dovilla of Berea is being challenged by former Democrat House member Matt Patten from Strongsville. As mentioned, there is potential for voter confusion in this race because Republican Tom Patton will also be on the ballot running for re-election in the Ohio Senate 24th District.
- **District 17** – This is an open seat. Democrat and former Editor of *The Columbus Dispatch* Mike Curtin is facing Republican Nick Szabo, a student at Franklin University seeking his master's degree in marketing and communication.
- **District 20** – This is an open seat. Republican Reynoldsburg City Councilman Nathan Burd is facing Democrat Heather Bishoff, a financial planner from Blacklick.
- **District 24** – This is an open seat. Democrat Maureen Reedy, an Upper Arlington teacher, is facing Republican Hilliard City Councilwoman Stephanie Kunze.
- **District 28** – Incumbent Democrat Connie Pillich, a Cincinnati attorney, is facing Republican business owner Mike Wilson in a rematch of a race that was extremely close in 2010.
- **District 29** – This is an open seat. Republican Lou Blessing III, a professional engineer from Cincinnati, is facing Democrat Hubert Brown, a Whitewater Township trustee and retired electrician. Incumbent Republican Rep. Lou Blessing II, who is currently serving as speaker pro tempore for the House, is ineligible to run for this seat due to term limits.
- **District 36** – Republican incumbent Anthony DeVitis, a Uniontown business owner, is facing Democrat attorney Paul Colavecchio of Cuyahoga Falls in a newly configured district that appears to be more challenging for Republicans.
- **District 43** – Democrat incumbent Roland Winburn of Dayton is facing Republican Joyce Marie Deitering, who is an attorney and mayor of the Village of Clayton.
- **District 51** – This is an open seat. Democrat attorney Mark Hardig of Hamilton is facing Republican Wes Retherford, a Marine Corps veteran, also from Hamilton. Incumbent Republican Representative Courtney Combs is ineligible to run for this seat due to term limits.
- **District 60** – This is an open seat. Republican Painesville City Councilwoman Lori DiNallo is facing Democrat Mentor-on-the-Lake Mayor John Rogers. Former State Representative Dan Troy won the Democratic primary in March, but subsequently decided to drop out of the race. Incumbent Democrat Representative Lorraine Fende is ineligible to run for this seat due to term limits.
- **District 76** – Incumbent Republican Matt Lynch, a Chagrin attorney, is facing Democrat Tom Warren of Novelty, also an attorney.
- **District 78** – This is an open seat. Democrat Jeremy VanMeter of Sugar Grove is facing Republican Ron Hood, a former state representative from Ashville.

- **District 98** – Republican incumbent Al Landis of Dover is facing Democrat attorney and former Ohio House member Joshua O’Farrell of New Philadelphia in a rematch of a closely contested race in 2010.
- **District 99** – Republican incumbent Casey Kozlowski of Pierpont is being challenged by Jefferson high school teacher John Patterson in a district that has traditionally leaned Democratic.

Statewide Ballot Issues

Although a myriad of proposed ballot initiatives involving issues such as dog auctions, medical marijuana and “workplace freedom” were under discussion this spring, only two statewide issues will appear on this year’s general election ballot – one automatically mandated by Ohio’s Constitution, and the other a proposed constitutional amendment placed on the ballot through an initiative petition.

- **Issue 1: Question of a Constitutional Convention**– Article XVI, Section 3 of the Ohio Constitution requires the question: "Shall there be a convention to revise, alter, or amend the constitution," to be submitted to a statewide vote on the general election ballot every 20 years, beginning in 1932. The question of whether to assemble a constitutional convention was defeated when it was put to a statewide vote 20 years ago in 1992, as well as the previous three times the issue was before Ohio voters in 1972, 1952 and 1932.
- **Issue 2: Redistricting Amendment** – An organization named Voters First spearheaded the effort to initiate this statewide ballot issue that proposes to amend the Ohio Constitution to change the process for redrawing Ohio’s federal and state legislative districts. If Issue 2 passes, a 12-person “Ohio Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission,” comprised of individuals appointed through a selection process involving a panel of Ohio appellate judges, will be charged with the task of again redrawing Ohio’s congressional and state legislative districts in time for the next statewide election in 2014.