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Ohio Statehouse Update: Ohio Election Preview

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Every 10 years, following the census, the Ohio Apportionment Board is tasked with redrawing Ohio's House and Senate districts to reflect changes in population. The Ohio legislative districts must include 99 House Districts and 33 Senate Districts. Four Republicans – Governor John Kasich, Senate President Tom Niehaus, Auditor of State Dave Yost and Secretary of State Jon Husted – served on the Apportionment Board along with a lone Democrat, House Minority Leader Armond Budish. Amid complaints that the proposed new districts were skewed too heavily in favor of Republicans, the Board adopted the new maps on September 30, 2011. In January, a group of former Democrat lawmakers filed a lawsuit in the Ohio Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the new maps. The Court issued an initial ruling that allows the new districts to stand for this year's election, but plans to hear additional arguments over whether the new maps should remain in place for the remainder of the decade.

Similarly, just as Ohio's legislative districts must be redrawn following the decennial census, so must Ohio's congressional districts be reconfigured. In Ohio, congressional redistricting is accomplished through passage of legislation by the Ohio General Assembly. The Republican-dominated General Assembly initially passed a bill setting the new districts in September, but due to lack of bipartisan support for an immediate effective date, the bill would have required Ohio to hold two separate primary elections in 2012. However, after Democrats threatened to subject the redistricting legislation to a referendum vote, Republicans and Democrats eventually reached an agreement in December to pass legislation slightly modifying the districts and re-unifying Ohio's primary election to be held on March 6, 2012. Complicating matters and adding additional concerns to the redistricting debate, Ohio was forced to reduce its number of congressional districts from its current 18 down to 16 due to Ohio's slow population growth in relation to other states in the U.S. As the March 6 primary election approaches, here is a look at some of the key races that are shaping up in the new state legislative and congressional districts.

Ohio House Primary Races

All of the 99 seats in the Ohio House are up for election this year to two-year terms.

- Peter Stautberg, an incumbent Republican from the Cincinnati area is being challenged by former State Representative Tom Brinkman in the new 27th House District.
- Denise Driehaus, an incumbent Democrat from the Cincinnati area, established residency in the new 31st House District, an open seat, and is facing three challengers in the primary: Terry Tranter, Luke Brockmeier and Sandra Queen Noble.
- Tom Letson, a three-term incumbent Democrat from Warren, Ohio, is facing two challengers in the 64th House District primary: Sheila Calko and David Cook.
- Andrew Brenner, a first-term incumbent Republican from Delaware County, faces a primary challenge from Craig Schweitzer in the new 67th House District.
- Margaret Ruhl, a second-term Republican from Mt. Vernon, is facing two primary challengers in the new 68th House District: Jason Rogers and Jeff Furr.
- Jarrod Martin, a second-term Republican from Beavercreek, is in a three-way primary against Rick Perales and Eric Spicer in the new 73rd House District.
- Former State Representative Ron Hood is facing off against Monty Lobb for the Republican nomination for the newly created 78th House District, an open seat which includes all of Hocking and Morgan, and portions of Athens, Fairfield, Muskingum and Pickaway counties.

Ohio Senate Primary Races

Of the Ohio Senate's 33 seats, 17 are up for election this year.

- In the wake of State Senator Mark Wagoner's decision not to run for reelection to the Toledo-area 2nd Senate District seat, two Republicans are vying for the nomination: current State Representative Randy Gardner and Michelle McCauley.
- In the 14th Senate District currently held by term-limited Cincinnati area Republican and Senate President Tom Niehaus, four candidates are vying for the Republican nomination: Tony Adkins, Paul Hall, Steve Purtell and current State Representative Joe Uecker.
- Newly appointed State Senator John Eklund of Geauga County faces two opponents in the primary for the 18th Senate District: former State Representative Jamie Callender and Christopher Galloway.

Key Congressional Races

All 16 of the new Congressional districts are up for election this year to two-year terms.

- The newly created 3rd Congressional District in the Columbus area has drawn interest from a variety of local politicians. Seeking election in the Democrat primary are the following individuals: former Congresswoman Mary Jo Kilroy, former State Representative and Minority Leader Joyce Beatty, current State Representative Ted Celeste and current Columbus City Councilwoman Priscilla Tyson.

- Two congressional districts encompassing the Cleveland and Toledo areas were combined into one through the redistricting process, creating the 9th district and pitting current Congressional members Dennis Kucinich and Marcy Kaptur against each other in the Democrat Primary.
- State Senator Nina Turner (D-Cleveland) threw her hat in the ring to challenge incumbent Congresswoman Marcia Fudge in the Cleveland area's 11th Congressional District. However, Senator Turner recently decided to back out of the race, potentially leaving Congresswoman Fudge without an opponent in either the primary or general election.
- The downsizing necessitated by Ohio's congressional redistricting also resulted in two Republican Congressmen, Steve Austria and Mike Turner, facing each other in the newly created 10th district. However, Congressman Austria decided to withdraw from the race at the end of December, leaving Congressman Turner with two other primary opponents, John D. Anderson and Edward Breen.

Ballot Issues

It appears that Ohioans may be voting on a myriad of ballot issues during the November general election. Here is a snapshot of ballot issue activities to date:

- **Dog Auctions Initiated Legislation** – Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted certified that the Coalition to Ban Ohio Dog Auctions met Ohio's constitutional requirements to initiate a statute that would make dog auctions illegal and prohibit bringing into the state, for purposes of sale or trade, a dog acquired through auction. The Coalition collected 118,115 valid signatures to place the statute before the Ohio General Assembly. Lawmakers have four months from the January 27 certification to approve a ban or pass an amended version of the proposed statutory language. If the legislature fails to do either, the Coalition could collect additional signatures to place the proposal before voters on the ballot in November.
- **Ohio Alternative Treatment Constitutional Amendment** – Passage would allow the use of marijuana for medical purposes and task the Ohio Department of Health with administration and regulation of the process. (The attorney general certified the language and 385,245 signatures must be submitted by July 4, 2012 for placement on the ballot.)
- **Ohio Medical Cannabis Constitutional Amendment** – Passage would allow the use of marijuana for medical purposes and create the Ohio Commission of Cannabis Control to regulate the process. (The attorney general certified the language and 385,245 signatures must be submitted by July 4, 2012 for placement on the ballot.)
- **“Personhood” Constitutional Amendment** – Passage would define a person as any human at any state of development, including fertilization. (The attorney general certified the language and 385,245 signatures must be submitted by July 4, 2012 for placement on the ballot.)
- **Workplace Freedom (“Right to Work”) Constitutional Amendment** – Passage would prohibit any law, rule or agreement in Ohio from requiring employees to join or remain in a labor organization, or pay labor organization dues or equivalent fees as a condition of employment. (The attorney general certified the language on February 9 and 385,245 signatures must be submitted by July 4, 2012 for placement on the ballot.)
- **Ohio Clean Energy Constitutional Amendment** – Passage would require the state to issue \$1.3 billion in bonds each fiscal year until 2023 to invest in renewable energy and create the Ohio Energy Initiative

Commission. (The attorney general certified the language on February 21, and 385,245 signatures must be submitted by July 4, 2012 for placement on the ballot.)

- **Election Law Legislation Referendum** – Passage would repeal Ohio’s recent election law legislation, House Bill 194. (Constitutional requirements have been met for this issue to be placed on the November ballot. However, Senator Bill Coley (R-West Chester) has introduced Senate Bill 295, legislation that would repeal House Bill 194, in an effort to avoid the necessity for the referendum on the November ballot.)

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