



2020 Primary Election Report

Here are a few of the top headlines from an exciting night in Ohio politics

Ohio's Extended Mail-in Only Primary Election Sees Low Turnout

The 2020 primary election season will go down in history as a unique one with a big asterisk next to it, and likely analyzed and referenced for decades to come. With the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and ensuing shelter-in-place lockdowns, we have seen 15 state primary elections postponed (so far). Ohio is one of the few that extended its primary election with the caveat of vote-by-mail ballots only. Results are still coming in after yesterday's primary election deadline, with potentially a chunk of ballots still in the mail to be processed and counted if received by May 8. But with a large early voting window leading up to the original March 17 primary election date, and a push for mail-in ballot applications after the last-minute, month-long extension, we have a good picture of the results and the numbers don't look great as far as turnout.

Unofficial turnout for the 2020 Ohio primary election was about 1,547,617*, or 19.9%, which is low. In fact, that is the lowest turnout percentage in an Ohio presidential primary election in at least the last 36 years (SOS website data doesn't go back further). By comparison, the 2008 double-contested presidential primaries saw a 46% turnout with 3.6 million votes, the 2012 primary with President Obama running as an unopposed incumbent saw a 25.5% turnout with 2 million votes, and 2016 had a 43.6% turnout with 3.3 million votes. 2012 previously held the lowest turnout in an Ohio presidential election since at least 1986. Since the two-step absentee ballot voting system lets you see some public numbers early, we knew going into yesterday that only 1.9 million ballots were requested in Ohio. It will be an interesting data point to see the final tally of those requested ballots that went unsubmitted in this election.

Granted, it is possible that a mail delay will see an influx of additional ballots counted to pump the 2020 turnout number up, but not likely by much.

**Estimated 14,000 ballots submitted to Wayne County still pending posted results as of 4:00am on 4/29*

In Double Uncontested Presidential Primaries, Trump Vote Count High

In presidential election years, uncontested primaries for presidential candidates also usually lead to a drop in overall turnout due to less of a draw. Moreover, there were no ballot issues this go-around. However, amid this mail-in only election (with the exception of some early in-person votes), President Trump holds a formidable flex heading into November having still received 676,839* primary election votes in Ohio. By comparison, President Obama received 426,000 votes as an uncontested incumbent in 2012. The Democratic field saw 856,413* votes, with many other candidates such as Bernie Sanders still having collected votes from early voting and remaining on the ballot even with a suspended campaign.

This still falls well short of the 1.2 million Democratic votes cast in the 2016 primary. The contested 2012 Ohio Republican primary also had 1.2 million votes cast. Former Vice President Joe Biden secured 72%* of the Democrat votes to secure a comfortable majority of Ohio's 136 delegates.

**Not including Wayne County still pending posted results as of 4:00am on 4/29*

Former State Rep. Hagan to take on U.S. Congressman Tim Ryan

One non-Statehouse item we saw in some of the races last night was that former State Rep Christina Hagan, an outspoken conservative Republican will take on U.S. Congressman and recent presidential candidate Tim Ryan in a Mahoning Valley showdown. Hagan championed previous iterations of the "heartbeat bill" in General Assemblies ahead of its passage last year when she had already vacated her seat in the House. In 2018, she lost in the primary election for U.S. District 12 to Anthony Gonzalez. This will be an interesting race to watch with President Trump's ability to capture much of "legacy blue" and union-heavy northeast Ohio, and a town called Lordstown in the heart of this district.

OCCPAC Endorsed Candidates go 10-2 in General Assembly Races

Ohio Chamber of Commerce PAC (OCCPAC) endorsed General Assembly candidates were successful in all but two races. Republican candidate Shayne Thomas, Seneca County Commissioner and former corporate banker, fell short against pastor Gary Click in a three-way primary for House District 88. Encompassing Seneca and Sandusky Counties in northern Ohio, the seat is vacated by term-limited Rep. Bill Reineke who moved on to secure the GOP nomination for the Senate District 26 seat. Mark Welch, small businessman and West Chester Township Trustee, lost the open seat GOP primary for the House District 52 seat to nurse practitioner Jennifer Gross. HD 52 was vacated by Rep. George Lang who secured the GOP nomination for the Senate District 4 seat heading into November.

The following is a breakdown of each contested primary for the General Assembly, beginning with the House and moving to the Senate. () denotes OCCPAC endorsement. These results are based on the unofficial results posted by County Boards of Elections immediately after the April 28 primary election, some eligible mailed-in ballots may still be counted through May 8.*

Race-by-Race: Ohio House

1st District (Republican) Incumbent Rep. Scott Wiggam* vs. primary challenger Jason Wetz. (Wayne County, still TBA-Wiggam projected to win)

2nd District (Republican) Richland County Commissioner Marilyn John defeated Shelby Councilman Nathan Martin in the open primary to replace outgoing Rep. Mark Romanchuk 69-30%

6th District (Republican) Former staffer for U.S. Sen. Tim Scott Shay Hawkins won the GOP nomination to take on incumbent freshman Rep. Phil Robinson, who flipped the seat red in 2018.

9th District (Democrat) Incumbent Rep. Janine Boyd successfully beat primary challenger Vincent Stokes II 86-14%.

10th District (Democrat) Freshman Rep. Terrence Upchurch, who won in a crowded primary in 2018, took down primary challenger J. Allen Burger 82-18%

12th District (Democrat) Incumbent Rep. Juanita Brent won against her primary challenger Felicia Washington Ross 80-20%.

16th District (Democrat) Lakewood Councilwoman Monique Smith defeated lawyer Joe Romano 70-30% to become the challenger to incumbent Rep. Dave Greenspan in November. This seat is considered a priority target by both parties as one of the few remaining GOP-held urban county seats.

17th District (Republican) Tim Haske overcame John Rutan 60-40% to become the GOP candidate to take on incumbent Rep. Adam Miller in the general election.

22nd District (Democrat) Rep. Dave Leland defeated primary challenger Kashi Adhikari 79-21%

25th District (Democrat) In a crowded 5-candidate primary, Franklin County Treasurer Chief of Communications Dontavius Jarrells emerged victorious with 45% of the vote to obtain the Democratic nomination to replace controversial Rep. Bernadine Kent.

32nd District (Democrat) Rep. Catherine Ingram defeated primary challenger Dadrien Washington 89-11%.

33rd District (Democrat) Incumbent freshman Rep. Sedrick Denson overcame primary challenger Terence Allen Gragston 77-23%.

36th District (Democrat) Green City Councilman Matt Shaughnessy defeated open primary opponent A.J. Harris 66-34% to take on fellow Green City Councilman Bob Young in November to replace term-limited Rep. Anthony Devitis.

39th District (Democrat) Montgomery County Auditor staffer Willis Blackshear Jr. handily secured the Democrat nomination to run to replace term-limited Rep. Fred Strahorn with 69% of the vote.

42nd District (Republican) Financial advisor Tom Young defeated open primary opponent Jake Stubbs 74-26%. Young will be running unopposed in November to replace Rep. Niraj Antani.

43rd District (Republican) Preble County Commissioner and small businessman defeated incumbent Rep. J. Todd Smith 66-34% in a unique situation where Smith announced he was not running for reelection but never removed himself from the ballot.

52nd District (Republican) Nurse Practitioner and retired Air Force Colonel Jennifer Gross defeated Small businessman and West Chester Township Trustee Mark Welch* in this open primary 52-48% to become the GOP candidate to replace Rep. George Lang.

53rd District (Republican) Madison Township Trustee Thomas Hall won with 45% of the vote in a three-way primary against pastor Diane Mullins and Brett Guido. Hall now goes on to run to replace Rep. Candice Keller, who vacated the seat to unsuccessfully run for State Senate.

63rd District (Democrat) Recent appointee Rep. Gil Blair handily secured the Democrat nomination against two primary challengers with 64% of the vote.

65th House District (Republican) Former Congresswoman and State Rep. Jean Schmidt looks to be the GOP nominee to replace term-limited Rep. John Becker after emerging with 44% of the vote in a three-way primary. Small businessman and Air Force veteran Joe Dills came up short at 42% and less than 300 votes behind.

66th District (Republican) Former superintendent Adam Bird pulled off an upset to beat two other challengers in this open primary to replace term-limited Rep. Doug Green with 36% of the vote. The next closest candidate, lawyer Nick Owens from Brown County came up short with 32%.

70th District (Republican) Incumbent Rep. Darrell Kick* comfortably held off primary challenger Terry Robertson 76-24%.

71st District (Republican) Recently appointed Rep. Mark Fraizer* appears to have won the GOP nomination for his first general election having won over Newark businessman Thad Claggett 51-49%. However, there is a less than 300 vote difference and outstanding mail-in ballots may still be counted.

73rd District (Republican) Insurance businessman and former local chamber of commerce president Brian Lampton won the open seat primary against John Boughton 69-31% to run to replace term-limited Rep. Rick Perales.

76th District (Republican) Rep. Diane Grendell* comfortably defeated primary challenger Frank Hall 60-40%

78th District (Republican) Pickaway County Commissioner Brian Stewart* blew out the competition in a three-way open race to replace term-limited Rep. Ron Hood with 67% of the vote.

88th District (Republican) Pastor Gary Click emerged victorious in a three-way primary against Seneca County Commissioner Shayne Thomas* and environmental scientist Ed Ollum with 41% of the vote.

93rd District (Republican) Recent appointee incumbent Rep. Jason Stephens defeated primary challenger Jeff Halley 64-36%.

96th District (Democrat) Lawyer Richard A. Olivito secured the Democrat nomination over Charlie DiPalma to take on Republican nominee Ron Ferguson, a political grassroots specialist, to replace term-limited Democrat Rep. Jack Cera.

Race-by-Race: Ohio Senate

2nd District (Democrat) BGSU professor Joel O'Dorisio pulled out a victory against lawyer Reem Subei to challenger incumbent Republican Sen. Theresa Gavarone.

4th District (Republican) In one of the projected-closest races, Rep. George Lang* trounced opponents Rep. Candice Keller and West Chester Twp. Trustee Lee Wong with 50% of the vote. Lang runs as the GOP candidate to replace term-limited Sen. Bill Coley.

6th District (Democrat) Air Force veteran Mark Fogel walloped his primary opponent Albert Griggs Jr. 82-18% to secure the Democrat nomination.

6th District (Republican) Rep. Niraj Antani* secured 65% of the vote in a three-way open primary to be the GOP nominee to replace term-limited Sen. Peggy Lehner.

14th District (Republican) Recently appointed incumbent Sen. Terry Johnson* defeated challenger David Uible, controversial former Clermont County Commissioner, 76-24%.

16th District (Democrat) In a three-way primary to see who would challenge incumbent Republican Senator Stephanie Kunze in November, social worker Crystal Lett flew by the competition with a massive 79% of the vote.

22nd District (Republican) Rep. Mark Romanchuk* secured the GOP nomination in a crowded 5-candidate primary with 58% of the vote. He now goes on to run to replace term-limited Sen. Larry Obhof.

28th District (Republican) Rep. Bill Reineke* successfully beat out firebrand opponent and former U.S. Senate candidate Melissa Ackison 65-35%. He now goes on to run to replace term-limited Sen. Dave Burke.

32nd District (Republican) Former repeat statewide office candidate Sandra O'Brien overcame ex-NFL quarterback Kenneth Polke to be the GOP challenger to incumbent Democrat Sen. Sean O'Brien in November.