

September 10, 2018

With Labor Day now past and early voting starting in a few short weeks, campaigns are entering the final sprint in Ohio. We thought this would be a good time to provide an update on the key races we're following that will impact policymaking in Ohio for years to come. Please feel free to contact any of us at Hicks Partners if you'd like more information about these or other contests.

Governor

While there have been few public polls released, we believe the Mike DeWine-Richard Cordray race for Governor stands at a virtual dead heat right now. Both candidates have found fundraising success over the summer although DeWine holds a sizable edge in money on hand for the final push. Both campaigns have aired fairly heavy television and social media ad buys for weeks while the candidates have been hitting parades, county fairs and festivals over the summer. Look for the ad intensity to increase dramatically in the coming weeks. DeWine and Cordray agreed to three debates – 7 PM Sept. 19 at the University of Dayton, 7 PM Oct. 1 at Marietta College, and 7 PM Oct. 8 at Cleveland State University. At this stage, the race for governor remains a toss-up and is likely to be neck-and-neck come Election Day.

Attorney General

Current Ohio Auditor Dave Yost is facing Democrat Steve Dettelbach for Attorney General. Both candidates report having over \$3 million in the bank. Dettelbach has been using his dollars to attack Yost on his handling of allegations against Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT). As a proven statewide vote getter, we believe Yost holds a slight edge in the AG's race at this stage.

Auditor

State Representative Keith Faber represents the GOP in a three-way race for Auditor of State. His opponents, former Democrat Congressman Zach Space and surprise Libertarian candidate Robert Coogan, ensure a crowded race that may prove more challenging than expected. Faber and Space have been relatively equal in fundraising over the summer, but Faber has more money in the bank for the closing weeks. Space received the endorsement of the Columbus Dispatch over the weekend that may provide him some much-needed momentum.

Treasurer

Democrat Rob Richardson will face Republican State Representative Robert Sprague in a race to be Ohio's next Treasurer. Green Party candidate Paul Curry joins the two on the ballot. Sprague was forced to spend more than a half million dollars in the primary to secure the GOP nomination, so he's been working hard to catch up to Richardson's balance on hand.

Secretary of State

The race for Secretary of State will also have three contenders this cycle. Democrat State Representative Kathleen Clyde will run against Republican Ohio Senator Frank LaRose and Libertarian Dustin Nanna. As the only woman running statewide individually (Betty Sutton runs as Richard Cordray's Lt. Governor candidate), Clyde has an opportunity to stand out on the ballot.

U.S. Senate

Congressman Jim Renacci (R) runs as the underdog against two-term Senator Sherrod Brown (D). Renacci is campaigning as an “all-in” supporter of President Trump and recent polls show the race closing. Brown, who has consistently proven his ability to win votes in tough elections, is expected to out-spend Renacci by a significant amount. Nationally, Democrats would like to make a strong push to take back the Senate and a Brown victory is critical to this effort. We expect the race to become more competitive as the election nears, but Brown is favored to win a third term.

Congressional Districts

OH-1

Republican incumbent Steve Chabot faces Democrat challenger Aftab Pureval in Ohio’s 1st Congressional District. Early signs seem to indicate Pureval making up ground on the 20-year incumbent’s lead. However, in August, Pureval came under fire after a complaint was launched against him through the Ohio Elections Commission that claims he spent thousands of dollars from his county campaign account on his current congressional campaign and failed to report it. Shortly after the complaint was lodged against Pureval, Chabot received a big endorsement and financial commitment from the Koch Brothers. Expect to see big money spent on this race as Democrats hope a blue wave will help them take this typically safe Republican seat.

OH-12

The 12th Congressional District vacated by former Congressman Pat Tiberi has been drawing national attention and a flood of outside dollars for months now. In the days leading up to the special election on August 7, both President Trump and Vice President Pence campaigned for GOP nominee Troy Balderson, while Democratic candidate Danny O’Connor raised significant funding from national groups. The 12th CD leans Republican, but a tough Republican primary and a motivated Democrat base led to the race being too close to call on election night. Three weeks later, after all absentee and provisional ballots were counted, Balderson’s victory was certified by a thin 1,754 vote margin. Balderson and O’Connor face off again in the general election where turnout is expected to be much more favorable to the Republican.

OH-16

Republican Anthony Gonzalez and Democrat Susan Moran Palmer are fighting to replace Congressman Jim Renacci in the 16th CD. Although both candidates are political newcomers, Gonzalez is far out-raising Palmer and is running in a district currently held by a Republican. He’ll have a lot of cash on hand to spend between now and the election on getting his name out in the community and reaching voters.

Ohio Legislative Races

Senate District 13

The current State Representative for the 55th District, Nathan Manning, seeks to complete a seat swap with his mother and current Senator in the 13th District, Gayle Manning. His opponent, Sharon Sweda, is a well-known realtor from Lorain County who is running in her first race. Although Sweda held an edge in campaign contributions in early summer, Nathan is expected to receive a big funding boost from the Republican Senate Campaign Committee in the final weeks. It will be hard to beat the Manning name despite a potentially difficult political climate this election.

Senate District 29

Statehouse veteran Rep. Kirk Schuring (R) is running for his old Senate seat in the 29th District this November. He and Senator Scott Oelslager have swapped seats in the past and attempt to do so again this November. As current House Speaker Pro Tempore, Schuring's fundraising has been strong. The June 15th post-primary filing showed that he has double the cash on hand than his opponent, Lauren Friedman, reported. Friedman, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, is a political newcomer and seeks to use her military background and disability advocacy skills to pull off the upset. Schuring is the heavy favorite to win.

Senate District 33

Rep. John Bocchieri (D) is attempting to regain his former Senate seat in the 33rd District after one term in the Ohio House. Bocchieri previously served in both legislative chambers before his election to Congress in 2008. Current Congressman and Senate candidate Jim Renacci unseated him in the 2010 election, forcing Bocchieri to consider other endeavors. As Bocchieri attempts to climb the ladder again, he will be well-funded in his effort to win the 33rd Senate District with a cash on hand advantage of ten-to-one over his opponent, Michael Rulli. Rulli's family owns the Rulli Brothers supermarkets in the area and he has been on the Leetonia Board of Education for the past eight years. It will be an uphill battle for Rulli to upset Bocchieri in this race.

House District 6

This southeastern Cuyahoga County district has former state representative and GOP county party chairman Jim Trakas against Cleveland City Year executive director Phil Robinson. While this district leans Republican and thus provides a slight edge for Trakas, it could become competitive given this year's political climate.

House District 19

Small business owner Tim Barhorst (R) is running against Westerville educator Mary Lightbody (D) in this northeastern Franklin County district. The district leans Republican and has been held for the last eight years by Republican Anne Gonzales. Nonetheless, the race could prove to be competitive between two relatively unknown candidates.

House District 20

The 20th House District in southeastern Franklin County has a slight Democratic leaning but may be competitive between incumbent Rep. Richard Brown (D) and political newcomer Bobby Mitchell (R). Brown, an attorney, was appointed mid-term upon the resignation of Heather Bishoff. Mitchell, a pastor, seeks to take advantage of this competitive district by using his grassroots network.

House District 21

This is a Republican leaning district in northwestern Franklin County that voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016. This open seat will be competitive between Dr. Beth Liston (D) and Stu Harris (R). Liston is a political novice while Harris has been elected to Dublin City Schools Board for over a decade. Despite that this seat has been held by a Republican for the last eight years, this race is shaping up to be quite competitive.

House District 24

The 24th district in western Franklin County has become much more competitive in the last few cycles. Republican Jim Hughes is vacating this seat to run for judge in Franklin County. Republican political insider Erik Yassenoff and Democratic healthcare policy analyst Allison Russo are seeking the now open seat. This is a true toss-up race.

House District 28

Hillary Clinton carried this northeastern Hamilton County district even though it leans Republican. Democrats are again running Jessica Miranda in a rematch of the 2016 race that they hope will have a better result given the political climate. Incumbent Republican Rep. Jonathan Dever will have to work hard and use his grassroots machine to avoid an upset.

House District 37

Hillary Clinton also narrowly won this northeastern Summit County GOP leaning seat in 2016. This district has been held by Republican Kristina Roegner for the past eight years, and in 2016 she successfully beat this year's Democratic candidate, Casey Weinstein, winning 57% of the vote. Republican candidate Mike Rasor hopes to continue the GOP success and fill the open seat left by Roegner due to term-limits. Weinstein, a Hudson City Councilman, is expected to make this race more competitive against a non-incumbent this year.

House District 43

An open seat representing Preble and parts of Montgomery counties has recently appointed Rep. Todd Smith (R) in a tough race for his first full term against Montgomery County Commissioner Dan Foley. This seat leans Republican, but the Democrats feel very strongly that this is a seat they will pick up in November.