OHLA
OHIO HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION

Government Affairs Update

November 4, 2026

Election Results Signal Change in Ohio

Nearly every day, OHLA is engaging or working with our elected officials on issues and initiatives which have a direct impact on business, jobs and profitability. Who holds those positions of elected office makes a difference in the direction and priorities of the entire state. Ohio has just seen the biggest change in these dynamics in two decades.

Candidates for Ohio Governor, Democrat Amy Acton and Republican Vivek Ramaswamy, fought through an election campaign that drew national attention for many of the wrong reasons. In the end, the election became much more about emotion and personal values than policy.

Change in party control of this office is about more than the chief executive. An entire cadre of new appointees and administrators will accompany the Governor-elect in January. Given that the new governor has not held elective office, and that Democrats have not held the seat for 20 years, this will mean an entirely new set of key players throughout state offices and departments who will make decisions that impact virtually every aspect of life in Ohio.

Dr. Acton will set the tone for economic growth and job creation in Ohio for the next four years. The Governor will set policy priorities, introduce the state budget, and control administrative agencies from Commerce to Development to Taxation.

But the results also demonstrated Ohio's habit of "ticket splitting" and ability to focus on candidates and not just party labels.

Current Republican Secretary of State since 2019 and friend of OHLA Frank LaRose won his bid to become the next Auditor of State, defeating Annette Blackwell, the Democrat Mayor of Maple Heights 51-49%. The Auditor is the state's chief compliance officer and is charged with making sure government agencies operate honestly, efficiently, effectively and transparently. The office plays an important role in ensuring public dollars are spent legally and properly.

But in races for the other statewide constitutional offices, there was a more seismic shift with the defeat of proven officeholders who have worked with our industry and the employer community for many years as Ohio has solidified its ranking as a top place to do business.

Democrat John Kulewicz, an Upper Arlington City Council member, defeated Republican Keith Faber, the Auditor of State since 2019, by less than 1%, to become Ohio's next Attorney General. This is a key position for our industry in part because of our collaboration with the A.G.'s office on anti-human trafficking efforts, as well as our push for more work on anti-crime initiatives by the state.

Filling the Secretary of State position is Democrat State Representative Allison Russo, who defeated current Republican Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague 50-47%. In addition to overseeing elections, the Secretary of State provides important services to businesses.

Finally, Democrat Cincinnati City Councilman Seth Walsh defeated Republican Jay Edwards, a former state legislator 51-49% to become Ohio's next Treasurer.

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Each election cycle, OHLA supports Ohioans for Civil Justice Reform and emphasizes the importance of Ohio Supreme Court races to our business and jobs climate. Two of Ohio's seven Justices were up for reelection this year. Appellate judge Marilyn Zayas (D) defeated incumbent Justice Dan Hawkins (R) 51-49%, and Chief Justice Jennifer Brunner (D) held off challenger Colleen O'Donnell (R) 51-49%. Even with these results, the court will maintain a strong 5 to 2 consersative majority – critical to the predictability of Ohio's overall business climate.

Ohio's General Assembly retains the Republican majority in place in both chambers since 2011, but with smaller margins of control, now 21-12 in the Senate (from 24-9) and 56-43 in the House (from 65-34). This eliminates a "supermajority" in the House, important with a new Democrat governor.

Ohio's United States Senate election ensured that the state remained at the forefront of the national political discussion in 2026, with current U.S. Senator Jon Husted challenged by former Senator Sherrod Brown, who had been defeated in his previous Senate election just two years ago by Republican challenger Bernie Moreno, 50-46%.

In 2024, with former President Trump racking up a healthy 55-44% win over Democrat Kamala Harris, Brown couldn't overcome the Republican momentum in the state despite his 32 consecutive years in Congress. This year, Brown benefited from the erosion of support for Trump and a lack of enthusiasm for the top of the Republican ticket to pull off a 50-45% win.

The return of Brown to the Senate has implications for our industry and for the business and jobs climate in general, as it contributes to the change of control of that body from Republican to Democrat. Potential negative impacts on policies which impact job creation and employers include rollback of protections for employers and a more labor union-friendly agenda, including legislative proposals such as the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, more restrictive energy policies, and more pressures on increased benefits and health care insurance mandates.

These pressures will be even greater with the change in control of the U.S. House of Representatives from Republican to Democrat, aided by the flipping of Ohio's 7th, 10th and 15th Congressional Districts, where GOP incumbents Max Miller, Mike Turner and Mike Carey all lost.

All of these outcomes underscore the need for all industries, and anyone interested in the business climate and economic growth, to rethink the plan ahead, without abandoning their fundamentals. It will be important to focus on key priorities while acknowledging that not every policy initiative in Columbus or Washington will be the "best case scenario." There can even be opportunities in recognizing how and where time and energy may be focused on less business-friendly outcomes – such as climate, or cryptocurrency, or data centers – and to provide a counterweight to that by focusing on positive action that everyone can get behind and support, such as developing our workforce pipeline, and finding ways to help control rising costs of doing business.

The importance of continued coalition-building and partnerships will remain part of how we do business and represent the industry. This will be even more important in an environment of increased anti-development – and therefore anti-growth – positioning and posturing in the wake of this year's results.

And one of the key factors in all of these outcomes – the notion of affordability – reinforces our argument against more taxes on our businesses and our guests, which only serve to make us less competitive while producing diminishing returns.

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