

The likely return of Ohio's congressional map in 2024 brings both benefits and questions to Republicans and Democrats

By Jeremy Pelzer, cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio—After months of uncertainty, it's now likely that Ohio will use the same congressional district lines next year that it did in 2022 as left-leaning groups successfully convinced the state supreme court to dismiss their own legal challenges.

The end of those lawsuits, [granted by the Ohio Supreme Court last Thursday](#), likely brings much-needed certainty to Ohio's congressional races in 2024, though it now raises new questions about what the move means for both Ohio and national politics.

The decision to drop the two cases, filed by a Democratic redistricting group and a coalition of good-government groups, respectively, was a triumph of pragmatism over principle, as the plaintiffs decided that contesting a map that the Ohio Supreme Court previously ruled was unconstitutionally gerrymandered in favor of Republicans wasn't worth the risk of Ohio Republicans – who control the redistricting process – passing an even more GOP-friendly map if the current map was thrown out.

As the U.S. Supreme Court vacated the Ohio Supreme Court's ruling earlier this year, dropping those legal challenges means that the current congressional map will be used next year unless a new lawsuit is filed, either by liberals or conservatives. So far, no such litigant has emerged, and such a challenge would need to be filed fairly quickly in order to put a different map in place ahead of Ohio's March 2024 primary.

Even if the current map stands, it will have to be redrawn after the 2024 elections, as the Ohio Constitution only allows redistricting plans passed with one-party support to last for four years.

The stability of using the current map again helps Ohio's entire congressional delegation, which consists of 10 Republicans and five Democrats. But it's particularly important for the three Democrats who won competitive races last year – U.S. Reps. Marcy Kaptur of Toledo, Greg Landsman of Cincinnati, and Emilia Sykes of Akron – as it ensures they won't end up in more conservative districts and makes it easier for them to strategize and raise money.

Following Thursday's Supreme Court announcement, Sabato's Crystal Ball at the University of Virginia's Center for Politics [changed their ratings](#) for Landsman's and

Kaptur's races from "tossup" to "leans Democratic." Sykes' seat in the 13th Congressional District is still rated a "tossup."

For Republicans, the effects of Ohio re-using its current congressional map are more of a mixed bag. Their incumbents get the same benefits from stability that their Democratic counterparts have. It will also help sort out the Republican field in the three competitive Democratic-held districts, as a number of potential candidates have remained on the fence about running up until now while they waited to see whether they would be drawn into a more favorable district.

"When you're talking about winning a war, not having a fog of war is a lot better than operating with the fog of war. We've cleared the fog of war," said Orlando Sonza, a U.S. Army veteran and assistant Hamilton County prosecutor who, so far, is the only Republican who has publicly announced a run for Landsman's seat.

However, Republicans also lost an opportunity to draw a replacement map that could potentially be closer to the congressional redistricting plan that the GOP-controlled legislature originally passed last year, before it was thrown out by the Ohio Supreme Court. That map [avored Republicans to win in 12 of Ohio's 15 districts](#).

One national Republican strategist said while there was the possibility that Ohio's congressional districts would become more favorable to the GOP if the current map was thrown out, it wasn't a guarantee. In addition, the strategist said, Republicans are still "in a really good position" to defeat Kaptur, Landsman and Sykes next year.

With the districts seemingly set, it's likely that more Republicans will publicly announce their intention to run for those three seats. Sonza said other Republicans have been eyeing a run for Landsman's seat but would only enter the race if the Democratic-leaning district was redrawn to include more conservative voters.

That's particularly true in Ohio's 13th Congressional District, which Sykes won last year even though the district, which covers Summit and part of Stark County, tilts slightly Republican. The 2022 GOP nominee, Madison Gesiotto Gilbert, recently became national spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee, and there are no shortage of Republicans who are interested in taking her place on the ballot next year.

So far, two Republicans have filed statements of candidacy for the 13th Congressional District this cycle: Greg Wheeler, a Norton attorney who lost the 2022 GOP primary to Gesiotto Gilbert, and Hudson City Council member Chris Banweg.

Former state Sen. Kevin Coughlin, of Bath Township, said in an interview that he is considering joining the GOP primary for the 13th District as well. Coughlin said he was initially looking at running based on the legislature's original map plan, which would have made the 13th District more conservative than it is right now.

“I’m not completely dismissing running for the 13th (District) as it’s currently drawn,” Coughlin said. “But it would take a little bit more analysis on my part and a little bit more talking to people before I came to any kind of a decision on that.”

Two prominent Republicans being talked about as potential candidates to challenge Sykes are state Sen. Kristina Roegner of Hudson and Jane Timken, a former Ohio Republican Party chair who ran unsuccessfully in the GOP primary for U.S. Senate last year.

However, Roegner said in a text that she won’t enter the race.

“I am incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support for a Congressional run that I have received over the last several months. However, after thoughtful consideration, prayer and discussions with my family, I have decided not to run for US Congress at this time,” Roegner said in a statement. “The voters in Summit County elected me to do a job in the Ohio Senate and that is what I am going to do. I enjoy being a state senator and will continue to work hard in that capacity to have positive impact on the lives of Ohioans.”

[Cleveland.com/The Plain Dealer](#) has reached out to Timken for comment.

In the 9th Congressional District, Kaptur is considered likely to run again in 2024.

First elected to Congress in 1982, Kaptur is the longest-serving woman in the history of the U.S. House of Representatives. Even though her district was redrawn to lean Republican last year, Kaptur kept her longevity streak alive by beating Republican nominee J.R. Majewski, who was hampered by [media reports](#) that he misrepresented his military service.

This campaign cycle, former state Rep. Craig Riedel of Defiance is the favorite to run against Kaptur, as he has been endorsed by prominent Republicans such as [U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California](#) and [U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan](#) of Champaign County.

Riedel, in a statement, called the decision to drop the congressional redistricting lawsuits “a significant victory for the voters of Ohio.”

Two other Republicans have also launched campaigns: former Napoleon Mayor Steve Lankenau, and ex-Walbridge Mayor Dan Wilczynski, who both lost to Majewski in the 2022 GOP primary. Majewski himself briefly announced earlier this year that he would run again but [reversed himself about a month later](#).

Whether Kaptur, Landsman and/or Sykes can hold onto their seats next year could have national implications. Republicans currently hold the U.S. House by only nine seats, and there are good reasons to believe that whichever party controls the House in 2025 will have a similarly narrow majority, said Kyle Kondik, an Ohio native who is managing editor of Sabato’s Crystal Ball.

“Any redistricting change – or non-change – could matter to the overall outcome,” Kondik stated in email.