

# Ex-Cleveland Brown, ex-state legislator are among Ohio's new congressional candidates

By **Sabrina Eaton**  
**cleveland.com**

WASHINGTON, D. C. - An ex-Cleveland Browns quarterback, an author and motivational speaker, and a utility worker on Wednesday filed paperwork to mount challenges to U.S. Rep. Dave Joyce, a South Russell Republican who has represented the GOP-leaning 14th congressional district since 2013.

Joyce and all the other incumbents who represent Northeast Ohio in the U.S. House of Representatives are seeking re-election to the job that pays \$174,000 per year. To achieve that goal, they'll have to defeat any challengers in March, then win November's general election.

Joyce represents a Republican-leaning district in the state's northeast corner that includes all of Lake, Geauga, Ashtabula, Trumbull counties, and all but a sliver of Portage County. He regularly faces Republican primary challengers who contend he's not conservative enough, and pivots to facing a Democrat in November who objects to the votes he's taken as a Republican.

"I'm proud of my record of delivering results for Northeast Ohio," said a statement from Joyce. "From returning taxpayer dollars through the appropriations process to protecting Lake Erie through my Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, it's been an honor to fight for hardworking Ohioans in Washington. But there is more work to be done. I look forward to earning the support of 14th district voters again so we can continue our work to secure the border, create jobs in our community, and combat out-of-control inflation."

The Republicans who want to challenge Joyce this year include [Ken Polke](#) of Saybrook Township, [Mark Zetzer](#) of Russell Township and [Elayne Cross](#) of Kent, an author and motivational speaker. The Plain Dealer has reached out to Cross for information about her campaign.

Brian Kenderes of Mentor is the sole Democrat seeking the seat. In 2022, Kenderes mounted an unsuccessful write-in campaign in the 7th congressional district. In an

email, he described himself as a retired soccer coach, mental health professional and project manager for residential construction. He cited his faith in God as a reason for running for office, and said he wanted to run for office as a Democrat because “I want be a part of a Party that serves the broken and beaten down.”

He applauded President Joe Biden’s handling of the economy, and called for ending the need for abortion by properly funding foster and adoptive care, saying “we must be able to say to our traumatized young ladies ‘America takes care of its babies,’ before we can consider ending abortion - with safety and wellbeing for our mothers as top priority always.”

Polke, a former dentist who played quarterback for the Cleveland Browns and Miami Dolphins in the 1970s and [published an autobiography](#), says he feels “the country is about ready to get flushed down the toilet,” and he’s running for Congress to help save it. Polke [lost a primary](#) for Ohio legislature in 2020, and [unsuccessfully sought a congressional seat](#) when he previously lived in Colorado.

He contends Joyce “is not really a Republican, even though he says he is,” and expressed dissatisfaction with Joyce’s support for a recent defense bill that [authorizes millions in spending for Ohio projects](#), but also includes an extension of a foreign intelligence surveillance program that [civil libertarians](#) say has allowed invasive searches of Americans’ communications.

Zetzer, who works as a surveyor, mapper and locator in the oil and gas industry, says Joyce isn’t conservative enough and votes for spending bills that have contributed to inflation. Zetzer formerly ran for city council in Shaker Heights and ran for Congress against Democratic former U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge in 2014. That year, he got [20 percent of the vote](#) in Fudge’s heavily Democratic district.

The latest reports filed at the Federal Election Commission show Joyce had \$2.3 million in his campaign account at the end of September. None of the other candidates have filed reports to indicate that they’ve raised campaign cash.

### **11th District:**

U.S. Rep. [Shontel Brown](#), a Warrensville Heights Democrat, is seeking re-election in Ohio’s most demographically Democratic district, which includes Cleveland and most of its eastern suburbs. Federal Election Commission reports show her campaign had \$486,820 in the bank at the end of September.

Former three-term [Cleveland Heights Mayor Alan Rapoport](#), an attorney, has filed paperwork to seek the seat as a Republican. He previously sought a Cuyahoga County Council seat as a Democrat, and mounted an independent bid for state legislature.

Republican [Landry M. Simmons, Jr.](#), a sheriff's deputy who last year [lost an Ohio Senate Race to Democrat Nickie Antonio](#), has also filed paperwork to seek the seat. Simmons also filed paperwork to run for Cleveland mayor in 2021 but [withdrew his name](#) after he couldn't get enough valid signatures to appear on the ballot.

Cleveland Heights home remodeler James Hemphill, [who sought the job in 2022 but lost in the GOP primary](#), is making a second try. During [his last campaign](#), he said [he](#) turned his life around after spending nearly 70 months in prison for a 1990s drug trafficking charge and hoped to help constituents avoid similar paths. He also advocated for increasing education and training for tradespeople and other efforts to boost minority ownership of small businesses.

None of the Republicans reported raising any campaign money to the FEC.

### **13th District:**

Freshman [U.S. Rep. Emilia Sykes](#), an Akron Democrat, is seeking re-election in the district that includes all of Summit County, northern Stark County and a sliver of Portage County. An experienced state legislator before her election to Congress, Sykes had \$753,192 in her campaign treasury at the end of September.

Sykes' district is one of the most demographically competitive in Ohio. The Cook Political Report describes it as a "toss up."

Three Republicans, including a pair of experienced Republican officeholders, and a congressional candidate who has sought the seat multiple times over the years, have filed paperwork to run against her.

Hudson council member [Chris Banweg](#), a health care business executive who serves as a Marine Corps Reserve lieutenant colonel, so far has the biggest campaign bankroll of the challengers. Federal Election Commission filings at the end of September shows his campaign had \$103,862 in the bank.

[Kevin Coughlin](#) of Bath Township, who served in Ohio's legislature from 1996 to 2011 and was subsequently elected Stow Municipal Court clerk, has also filed

paperwork to run. He currently runs a small business that provides strategic counsel and expertise in management, communications and public policy to businesses and nonprofits. He has not yet filed fundraising reports with the Federal Election Commission.

[Richard Morckel](#), a technician who lives in Akron, was the 2016 GOP nominee against ex-Niles-area Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan, who formerly represented Ohio's 13th district. Ryan defeated Morckel that year with more [than 2/3 of the vote](#). Morckel gave it another try in 2020, but came [in second-to-last](#) in a crowded GOP primary won by former Ohio Rep. Christina Hagan of Alliance. Ryan went on [to defeat Hagan](#) in that year's general election. Morckel told the FEC he had \$100 in his campaign account at the end of September.

### **7th District:**

Freshman Republican [Rep. Max Miller](#) of Rocky River filed paperwork to seek re-election in a Republican-trending district that includes parts of Cuyahoga and Holmes counties and all of Medina and Wayne counties. His campaign had \$442,676 in the bank at the end of September, FEC records show.

Democrat [Matthew Diemer](#), a Bay Village podcaster who got [44.6 percent of the vote](#) against Miller in the 2022 general election, is seeking a rematch. He has not filed any FEC reports that reflect fundraising since his last congressional run.

[Doug Bugie](#), a Cleveland entrepreneur who mounted an unsuccessful primary challenge to ex-U.S. Rep. Mary Rose Oakar in 1992, is also seeking the Democratic party's nomination to run against Miller. The Cuyahoga County Board of Elections says Bugie does not live in the district he's filed to represent and is currently registered to vote as a Republican. Bugie says he's running for Congress as a centrist who wants to reach solutions by getting above division and political tribalism. He has not filed any FEC paperwork to show his campaign has raised money.

### **5th District:**

Veteran [U.S. Rep. Bob Latta](#), a Bowling Green Republican, is seeking re-election in a strongly GOP district that includes all or part of Lorain, Huron, Seneca, Crawford, Wyandot, Hancock, Wood, Henry, Putnam, Paulding, Van Wert, and Mercer counties. Federal Election Commission records show he had \$1.2 million in his campaign account at the end of September.

Robert L. Owsiak, Jr., of Sheffield Lake, has filed paperwork to run against Latta in the GOP primary.

Democrat [Keith Mundy of Parma](#), a Bernie Sanders organizer who owns a legal research and delivery service, has filed paperwork to run against Latta. He does not live in the district. In 2016, Mundy unsuccessfully ran for Congress in the nearby 16th congressional district. He secured [34.7 percent of the vote](#) against ex-U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci. He has not filed FEC fundraising reports since that election.