

# Rep. Brad Wenstrup will retire in a year. Here are the 14 people who want to replace him

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Cincinnati Enquirer

When Rep. Brad Wenstrup in November announced he wouldn't seek reelection, plenty of people came forward wanting the Ohio Republican's job.

Now 14 people – 12 Republicans and two Democrats – have filed to run in Clermont County by Wednesday's 4 p.m. filing deadline. Some have also filed statements of candidacy with the Federal Election Commission and made campaign announcements.

The Clermont County Board of Elections did not release a list of candidates until Wednesday evening. The list included the names of three people who had not made official announcements or filed with the FEC: Matthew Henderson, Ron Hood and Tom Hwang.

In the weeks leading up to the filing deadline, most Greater Cincinnati county boards of elections post updated lists of candidates who pick up the signature forms needed to get on the ballot, as well as those who have turned them in. (The signatures are later validated by the boards.) Clermont County did not do that.

Clermont County Board of Elections Deputy Director Christopher Dennison, in an email to The Enquirer, said they "do not want to release any specious information."

## **About the race**

Wenstrup, a Republican from Hillsboro, said he wanted to spend more time with family. The district extends from Clermont County east across 15 counties in southern Ohio.

It is the most Republican of Ohio's 15 congressional districts, based on the 2020 presidential race results. Former President Donald Trump beat Joe Biden by about a 3-to-1 margin.

Wenstrup himself beat his most recent Democratic challenger, Samantha Meadows, in 2022 by the same margin.

Here's more about some of those who want to succeed Wenstrup.

## REPUBLICANS

### Niraj Antani

Ohio Sen. Niraj Antani, 32, wants to go from the General Assembly to Congress. Antani was elected in 2020 to represent a Dayton-area Senate district. The Republican lives in Miamisburg about 17 miles outside the congressional district. He plans to move if elected. U.S. representatives are not required to live in their districts.

If elected, Antani said he wants to rein in government spending and cut taxes. He supports efforts to aid Israel in its war against Hamas, saying both the United States and Israel are under attack by "Islamic jihadist terrorists."

### Kim Georgeton

Kim Georgeton, 52, announced her candidacy in December after she made a trip to former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. She said the president's words inspired her.

Georgeton is the chairwoman for the Hamilton County chapter of Moms for Liberty, a national nonprofit based in Florida with chapters across the country. The dark money group says its mission is to "organize, educate and empower parents to defend their parental rights at all levels of government."

Moms for Liberty activists are known for their strong opposition to school curriculum that promotes diversity and the LGBTQ community. Its members often object to book offerings in school libraries.

In June, the Southern Poverty Law Center designated it an "anti-government extremist group."

Georgeton is a Sycamore Township resident, according to Hamilton County voter records. Hamilton County is not in the 2nd Congressional District. Georgeton, in a statement texted to The Enquirer, said she's in the process of trying to move but "Bidenomics has taken a toll on everybody's plans so it has taken a little longer than expected."

### Phil Heimlich

Phil Heimlich has run in recent years as an anti-Trump Republican. In 2022, he primaried Republican Rep. Warren Davidson in the 8th Congressional District.

"I think Trumpism is the most serious threat to our country right now," he said at the time.

He now plans on sharing that message in the 2nd Congressional District. In his campaign announcement, Heimlich said he wants to restore respect for the law in the Republican Party and said many Republicans "engage in election falsehoods, misinformation, and conspiracy theories."

Heimlich, 71, previously served on Cincinnati City Council, Hamilton County Board of Commissioners and as an assistant prosecutor in Hamilton County. He lives in Symmes Township in Hamilton County just outside the district boundaries.

## Larry Kidd

When Larry Kidd, 59, of Jackson announced his congressional campaign, he touted his efforts to fight drug addiction in Ohio. Kidd and his wife, Cindy, helped their son "successfully break free" from drug addiction, according to the release from the campaign.

Kidd's campaign, in the release, said that experience led to his appointment as chairman of OneOhio Recovery Foundation, a nonprofit in charge of the \$440 million Ohio received in settlement money from lawsuits against opioid manufacturers.

Kidd owns his own staffing and employment company, Hire, which employs 400 people.

## Derek Myers

Derek Myers, 31, of Chillicothe hasn't held political office before, but his name might be familiar to some. In 2019 Myers started the news website Scioto Valley Guardian and served as its editor-in-chief until stepping down this month to run for Congress.

While covering the murder trial of George Wagner IV in Pike County, Myers' tactics drew the attention of other reporters and the judge. Myers' leaving and entering the courtroom in the middle of the proceedings resulted in him being removed from the courtroom, the nonprofit media institute Poynter reported.

Authorities in 2022 charged Myers with breaking wiretapping laws after the Scioto Valley Guardian published a recording of testimony in the trial. Journalism advocacy groups, such as the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, rallied in support of Myers. The charges were later dismissed.

In February, Myers accused former New York Rep. George Santos of sexual harassment and ethics violations, claiming he worked for the New York congressman for about a week in January before the job was rescinded.

## **Tim O'Hara**

Tim O'Hara, 46, said his background as a Marine who worked as a drill instructor will serve him well in Congress. He also owns two LaRosa's pizzeria restaurants, according to his campaign.

The Hamersville resident said he invested \$750,000 into his campaign.

"I know what it takes to whip a group into shape, and that's why Ohio should send a drill instructor to Congress," O'Hara said in a statement announcing his run for Congress. In the statement, the Brown County resident lamented the United States' "wide-open southern border," the country's foreign policy, in particular singling out China as an economic threat to Ohio farmland and workers.

## **Charles Tassell**

Charles Tassell announced his congressional campaign shortly after Wenstrup said he wouldn't run.

Tassell, 54, of Batavia, is the current Clermont County Republican Party chairman. Despite being the party leader, he did not get the county GOP endorsement. That went to assistant prosecutor and concrete company owner David Taylor.

Tassell said he will likely step down as chairman but will continue his congressional campaign.

Tassell is the chief operating officer of the National Real Estate Investors Association and previously served as a city councilman in Deer Park.

"I have almost 30 years policy and legislative experience," Tassell said.

## **David Taylor**

David Taylor, 54, an Amelia resident who owns Sardinia Ready Mix Concrete, said he made a \$1 million contribution to his congressional campaign when he launched it. He released an ad in which he describes himself as a "Trump conservative."

He also works as an assistant prosecutor in Clermont County.

In a statement, Taylor blamed Biden for inflation, crime and "chaos on the border." He also compared himself to former President Donald Trump as a "businessman and political outsider."

## Shane Wilkin

State Sen. Shane Wilkin worked his way up from county politics to the General Assembly. Now he wants a shot at Congress.

Wilkin served as Highland County commissioner for three terms before going to the Ohio House in 2018. He served as a representative for four years until winning the election in 2022 for Ohio Senate District 17, which represents 10 counties in southern Ohio.

Wilkin works as a licensed real estate agent and owns Larry's Party Shop, a carryout store in Hillsboro, according to his ethics disclosure forms filed in 2022 with the state.

## DEMOCRATS

### Samantha Meadows

Samantha Meadows, 51, of Chillicothe, ran in 2022 against Wenstrup, losing by 49 percentage points.

She's worked as an emergency medical technician, an AmeriCorps member and an end-of-life companion, who provides emotional support and practical advice for dying and bereaved people.

When she announced her candidacy, Meadows' campaign said she's "dedicated to fighting for human rights, including women's reproductive rights."

### Joe Wessels

Some may know Democratic congressional candidate Joe Wessels from his byline over the years.

Wessels, 49, of Loveland has worked as a news aide and freelancer for The Enquirer in the late 1990s. He later went on to write stories for the Cincinnati Post, Cincinnati Business Courier and CityBeat in the 2000s. Most recently, in 2018, he started Loveland Local News, covering the town where he lives.

Wessels also manages his own public relations firm and has worked in communication roles for various local organizations, most recently with the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library, a job he left this month to run for Congress.

For Wessels, this isn't his first foray into politics. He ran for Northwest School Board in Colerain Township in 1993 at the age of 19. He lost, coming in ninth

out of 11 candidates. He also worked as the communications director for former Democratic U.S. Rep. Steve Driehaus, who unseated longtime Republican Rep. Steve Chabot in 2008 and served one term.