

Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted emerges as frontrunner for JD Vance's Senate seat

Gov. Mike DeWine hasn't announced who he will appoint, but sources said the Senate seat is likely Lt. Gov. Jon Husted's if he wants it

By Haley BeMiller and Laura A. Bischoff
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Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted is the frontrunner to replace Vice President-elect JD Vance in the U.S. Senate, according to sources familiar with the appointment process.

Gov. Mike DeWine will select a Republican to join Sen. Bernie Moreno, who was sworn in Friday after defeating former Sen. Sherrod Brown in the Nov. 5 election. DeWine has not announced his decision, but sources said the Senate seat is likely Husted's if he wants it – a decision the lieutenant governor is still mulling.

"I don't know what he's going to do," one source told this newspaper's statehouse bureau. "I think Jon is really struggling. Jon is a state guy, he's never been a D.C. guy."

DeWine and Husted visited President-elect Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort last month, according to their offices. Spokespeople did not provide details about the purpose of the trip, first reported by WEWS in Cleveland, or with whom they met. Husted and his family went to Washington Friday for Moreno's swearing-in, as did DeWine and other Ohio Republicans.

DeWine spokesman Dan Tierney declined to say whether Husted is the governor's top choice.

"I have no updates on any of that that I can provide you," Tierney said.

Whoever DeWine selects will serve in the Senate through 2026 and must run that year if he or she wants to keep the job. Per Ohio law, the winner of the November 2026 election will fill out the remainder of Vance's term, which ends in 2028.

Several other Republicans have expressed interest in the Senate seat, including former Ohio Republican Party chair Jane Timken, Secretary of State Frank LaRose and U.S. Rep. Mike Carey.

If DeWine chooses Husted, the decision would shake up another hotly contested 2026 campaign: The fight to replace a term-limited DeWine as governor. Husted was gearing up for a run with support from DeWine, but the Senate appointment could clear a lane for Attorney General Dave Yost and other Republicans who want the job.

Former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, a suburban Columbus resident and Cincinnati-area native, has also been floated as a potential candidate for governor. Ramaswamy will co-head the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency with Elon Musk, but the group is expected to conclude its work by July 2026.

The timeline for DeWine's announcement remains unclear. The governor previously said he's waiting for Vance to resign his Senate seat, which could happen any time before the Jan. 20 inauguration.

Who is Jon Husted?

Husted became lieutenant governor in 2019.

During his tenure, he has championed economic development and helped DeWine persuade Intel to build a \$28 billion semiconductor plant in central Ohio. He enjoyed a moment in the national spotlight last year when he gave the vice-presidential nomination speech for Vance at the Republican National Convention.

Husted initially challenged DeWine for governor in the 2018 election and cast himself as the best choice for Republicans who support access to firearms. He dropped out of the race to join DeWine's ticket, and they defeated Democrat Richard Cordray in a year when Democrats won big nationally.

Prior to that, Husted served as secretary of state, speaker of the Ohio House and state senator from the Dayton area.

If Husted heads to Washington, DeWine would need to appoint someone to serve as lieutenant governor for the next two years.

(This story was updated with additional information.)