

How can Dave Yost overcome Vivek Ramaswamy's early advantage in the Ohio GOP governor's race?

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—Vivek Ramaswamy burst into the Ohio governor's race this week, flexing his political muscle with a campaign launch blitz that was amplified by getting a quick and potentially decisive endorsement from President Donald Trump.

It's a start that puts Attorney General Dave Yost, the only other major Republican candidate in the governor's race so far, at an immediate disadvantage. Even [a Yost campaign memo](#), issued last week, asserted that whoever Trump endorsed "would enjoy instant frontrunner status to become the next Governor of Ohio."

But Yost says he's not leaving the race. And, at least so far, there's no immediate reason for the Columbus resident to do so. The May 5, 2026, primary election is still a distant 14 months away, which is more than enough time for a campaign-altering faux pas, major shifts in voter sentiment, and for additional candidates (like, potentially, Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel) to enter the race.

Add in Yost's years of preparation and campaign experience – not to mention the \$2.5 million in his campaign's bank account, at last check – and he's bought himself at least some time to kick Ramaswamy out of the driver's seat.

All that Yost needs to do now is figure out exactly how to do it.

State office, national vibe

Ramaswamy formally kicked off his gubernational campaign on Monday with campaign rallies that, at times, looked more like events for his 2024 presidential campaign than for state-level office.

His first campaign rally in Cincinnati on Monday [drew a crowd of hundreds](#) -- an impressive turnout for a February campaign event held so far ahead of an election. At [a second campaign stop in suburban Columbus](#), he was joined by a trio of Ohio statewide candidates and potential 2026 gubernatorial candidates in California and Colorado, then followed his speech with a live, prime-time interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity.

Ramaswamy has controlled the tempo of the GOP gubernatorial primary race since last month, when news reports emerged that Trump was pushing for Gov. Mike DeWine to appoint Ramaswamy to now-Vice President JD Vance's open U.S. Senate seat.

When DeWine named his lieutenant governor, Jon Husted, to the Senate instead, Ramaswamy quickly pivoted to the governor's race, leading Treasurer Robert Sprague [to abandon his gubernatorial plans](#) and [forcing Yost to announce his campaign](#) a month earlier than planned.

He also has been snapping up endorsements from other prominent 2026 GOP candidates, like Sprague, Secretary of State Frank LaRose of suburban Columbus (who's running for state auditor) and state Sen. Kristina Roegner of Hudson, who's running to succeed Sprague as treasurer.

While Trump's decision to endorse Ramaswamy was widely anticipated, the timing of the president's endorsement was unexpectedly swift, further boosting Ramaswamy's attempt to establish himself as an unbeatable political juggernaut.

Yost stays put

Yost, meanwhile, has [spent years](#) laying the foundation for a more traditional gubernatorial campaign, similar to those run by DeWine and ex-Gov. John Kasich.

In addition to his haul of campaign donations, Yost has a network of relationships with local Republican leaders and activists around the state, built up over the course of running statewide races four times in the last 15 years (twice for state auditor, then twice for attorney general).

However, Yost -- who [initially criticized Trump back in 2016](#) while backing Kasich's presidential run -- has also tried to establish his pro-Trump bona fides.

The Ohio attorney general's office has filed legal briefs taking Trump's side in several cases -- [including Trump's assertion](#) that he has presidential immunity from prosecution for his involvement in the Jan. 6, 2021, storming of the U.S. Capitol and backing the president's review of U.S. immigration policies that allowed thousands of Haitian refugees to resettle in Springfield, Ohio.

Amid Trump's continued (and baseless) claims of rampant voter fraud around the nation, Yost also indicted six people for voting illegally ([One one of whom turned out to be dead.](#))

Following Trump's endorsement announcement on Monday, Yost issued a statement congratulating Ramaswamy. But Yost also indicated he will try to get the president to change his mind.

"I support President Trump and hope to earn his (support)," Yost said. "Our campaign continues."

The Plain Dealer/cleveland.com has reached out to Yost's campaign for additional comment on how he intends to win the nomination.

What happens now?

Barry Bennett, a veteran Ohio GOP political strategist and former Trump political adviser who managed Ben Carson's 2016 presidential campaign, said that when you're a pro-Trump candidate who doesn't get Trump's endorsement, the best tactic is to just stay the course.

"The last thing you want to do is provoke (Trump), so you just continue being the pro-Trump candidate," he said.

Swinging against Trump in a GOP primary has shown at times to be a floor-raiser for a candidate, but not necessarily a winning strategy. Former state Sen. Matt Dolan ran in the Republican primary for U.S. Senate in 2022 and 2024 without actively courting Trump's endorsement.

Dolan finished both races unexpectedly high -- including earning about a third of the vote in a three-way primary in 2024 -- but never seriously threatened to win the GOP nomination.

In both those races, Trump-endorsed candidates won the Republican primary. JD Vance is now Trump's vice president, and Bernie Moreno is in the first months of a six-year term.

Bennett said he anticipates that the GOP gubernatorial race is far from over, given how much time is left for the race to develop and change. He predicted that both Ramaswamy and Yost will be equally known by Ohio GOP voters by the time they start casting ballots next year.

Rather, he said, the race will come down to the policy proposals that each candidate lays out – not on national issues, but Ohio-centric issues such as job creation and college affordability – and how much they resonate with voters.

"It's gonna be a battle of ideas, not name IDs," he said.