

# Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine picks former OSU coach Jim Tressel to serve as Lt. governor

*Gov. Mike DeWine on lieutenant governor pick Jim Tressel: 'He is a born leader'*

**By Jessie Balmert  
Columbus Dispatch**

When Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine had to replace now-Sen. Jon Husted as lieutenant governor, the Republican governor knocked on an unlikely pick's door: former Ohio State University head football coach Jim Tressel.

Tressel, who retired as president of Youngstown State University in early 2023, was equally shocked.

"It was a surprise, for sure," Tressel, 72, told reporters during the Monday announcement. "I thought he was just coming to watch a couple of grandkids play basketball."

But he was eager to promise Ohioans the same devotion he once promised Ohio State fans.

"I remember about 25 years ago, I said to a group in Columbus that I had my sights set on 310 days later and that was my singleness of focus," said Tressel, referencing his pledge to defeat the Michigan Wolverines during his introductory news conference. "Now, I have a 699-day singleness of focus."

President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance's 2024 victory set off a chain reaction of political vacancies in Ohio. DeWine appointed then-Lt. Gov. Husted to fill Vance's U.S. Senate seat.

DeWine didn't say if he was creating another Republican contender to replace him in 2026. Former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy and Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost are expected to contend for the role, which Husted also had an eye on before heading to the Senate.

DeWine asked Tressel to sign up for just under two years of public service. "And that's what he's agreed to do."

"He knows Ohio," DeWine said of Tressel. "He is a born leader. He's been a leader wherever he has been."

For Tressel to become Ohio's next lieutenant governor, a majority of lawmakers in the Ohio House and Senate must approve him. Republicans hold a veto-proof majority in both chambers.

Senate President Rob McColley, R-Napoleon, praised Tressel for his career dedicated to "guiding our youth on both the gridiron as a coach and in the classroom as a college president."

## **How did Jim Tressel become DeWine's pick for his No. 2?**

DeWine approached Tressel about the job on Feb. 1, visiting the former football coach's home. Tressel called his wife, Ellen, who was golfing out of town, for advice on their next steps.

He recounted her response: "It sounds like God has more work for you to do, and you know we owe just about everything in our blessed lives to the state of Ohio."

Plus, "I've flunked retirement so far," Tressel said.

Tressel, a Mentor native, served as Youngstown State University's president from 2014 to 2023.

Before that, he worked as Ohio State University's head football coach from 2001 to 2011, winning the national championship in 2002. Tressel's nickname was "the senator" for his diplomatic demeanor despite never serving in public office.

Tressel resigned from that role amid an NCAA investigation into improper benefits, including tattoos, that his players received during the 2010 season. Ohio State vacated its wins from that season as a punishment.

Prior to his job at Ohio State, Tressel served as the head coach at Youngstown State University from 1986 to 2000 and as a position coach at Syracuse University and Miami University.

## **What will Tressel do as lieutenant governor?**

Most lieutenant governors hold another role, which increases their workload and salary. State officials did not know Tressel's salary as of Monday.

Husted, for example, led InnovateOhio, which sought technology solutions to basic government problems. DeWine said he would lean on Tressel's experience in higher education and partnering with businesses.

Tressel will still have a learning curve as someone who has spent more time on football fields and university halls than at the Ohio Statehouse in recent years.

“I’m going to work like crazy to try to learn all that I can learn and contribute all that I can contribute,” Tressel said.

His passion for competing with Michigan might cross over to his new job. Tressel said he doesn’t accept Ohio losing marijuana sales to its northern neighbor. (Although, DeWine just proposed doubling marijuana taxes.)

“No. I’m not good with that in any arena.”