

Vivek Ramaswamy launches 2026 Ohio governor campaign, picks up Trump endorsement

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NEW ALBANY, Ohio — Republican Vivek Ramaswamy publicly launched his campaign for Ohio governor on Monday, pledging that – if elected – he will push for merit-based pay for teachers, universal eligibility for publicly funded vouchers for private schools, and eliminate the state income tax.

At least one Republican liked what he heard: President Donald Trump, who Monday night endorsed Ramaswamy over his lone primary rival to date, Attorney General Dave Yost. Ohio's current governor, Republican Mike DeWine, is term-limited.

Ramaswamy, a 39-year-old biotech entrepreneur and investor in the Columbus area, spoke during campaign rallies here in suburban Columbus, as well as in his hometown of Cincinnati earlier in the day.

During Monday's events, Ramaswamy portrayed himself as an outsider who, as governor, would shake up Ohio's state government the same way Trump has challenged long-established institutions and norms at the federal level via his Department of Government Efficiency initiative.

Ramaswamy co-chaired that initiative until last month, as he unsuccessfully [sought a U.S. Senate appointment from DeWine](#) and [began preparations to run for governor](#).

The message is also in keeping with Ramaswamy himself, a 2024 GOP presidential candidate whose populist policy proposals, brash debate performances and enthusiastic defenses of Trump rocketed him to national prominence.

Trump, posting on his Truth Social social-media account following Ramaswamy's rally Monday, endorsed the nascent candidate as "young, strong, and smart" and "a very good person, who truly loves our Country."

Here's more on what Ramaswamy said he would push for if elected governor:

Teacher merit pay

Changing Ohio law to pay teachers based on performance rather than seniority has been attempted before, but it's been defeated amid opposition from teachers unions and other lobbying groups. In 2011, then-Gov. John Kasich signed such a measure into law via Senate Bill 5, a controversial collective-bargaining reform law, but it was overturned by Ohio voters later that same year.

Ramaswamy hasn't yet released details about what his merit-pay plan would entail.

Phase out Ohio's income tax

There has also been [growing support among many Ohio GOP lawmakers](#) in recent years to phase out the state income tax — something that's long been considered a conservative pipe dream.

However, Republicans [like DeWine](#) and House Speaker Matt Huffman of Lima have expressed hesitation to end the income tax entirely, saying the significant income-tax cuts they've passed in recent years have already lowered barriers for Ohio to attract major economic-development projects. Most Democrats also have objected to income-tax cuts, saying they disproportionately help the wealthy.

Ramaswamy hasn't so far offered specifics about how he would wind down Ohio's income tax, which currently consists of three tax brackets based on income level, with a maximum tax rate of 3.5%.

Ohio took in nearly \$10 billion from its income tax last fiscal year, [according to state figures](#). If that revenue goes away, state officials will either have to raise other taxes (such as the state's sales tax) and/or demand an unprecedented shrinking of state government in ways that every Ohioan would notice.

School voucher expansion

Ramaswamy called for allowing every family in Ohio to be eligible for full school vouchers, including for private schools and for home schools.

DeWine and state lawmakers already dramatically expanded publicly funded school vouchers [in the state's 2023 budget bill](#), offering universal eligibility but reducing the maximum amount families can get as their household income increases.

With state finances now falling back to earth as billions of dollars in federal COVID-19 aid are spent, there's been little talk so far during this year's budget negotiations about escalating that to offer full voucher scholarships regardless of income.

Other education changes

Ramaswamy vowed to, as governor:

- Bring healthier food to school cafeterias
- Require every high-school senior to pass the U.S. Citizenship Test in order to graduate
- Ban cellphones from classrooms
- Put a police officer in every school
- Encourage vocational programs

While Ramaswamy hasn't run for statewide office before — or, until now, focused much on Ohio-centric issues central to the job he's now seeking — he starts the campaign with good name ID built up from his presidential run and frequent media appearances, as well as a likely ability to capitalize on that name recognition to raise money.

Trump's endorsement also immediately propels him as the frontrunner in the still-young GOP gubernatorial primary. The president's endorsement played an important role in deciding the winner of other recent Ohio GOP primaries, including now-Vice President JD Vance in the 2022 U.S. Senate primary and now-U.S. Sen. Bernie Moreno in last year's U.S. Senate primary.

Trump's endorsement of Ramaswamy didn't come as a major surprise, given Ramaswamy's backing of the president and his assembling of a political team with close ties to Vance, [Trump's political heir](#) and Ramaswamy's friend since they attended Yale Law School together.

The winner of the 2026 Republican governor primary is expected to be the favorite in the November 2026 general election, given Ohio's rightward turn in recent years.

Yost, who launched his gubernatorial campaign last month, wasted little time in needling his opponent.

"I welcome Mr. Ramaswamy to the race for however long he sticks around," Yost said. "We'll see if he actually stays in — Mr. Ramaswamy quit on President Trump and DOGE on day one, he quit on Ohio and moved his company to Texas, and he quit his presidential campaign after a devastating fourth-place finish in Iowa."

Ramaswamy's entry in the race was also ridiculed in statements issued by the Ohio Democratic Party, as well as Dr. Amy Acton, a former state health director who, so far, is the only Democrat to launch a campaign for governor.

Both latched onto Ramaswamy's [controversial social-media comments](#) last month in defense of a federal program to give immigration visas to highly skilled workers. It [drew a sharp backlash](#) from some Trump supporters.

"It's clear Vivek Ramaswamy doesn't know the same Ohioans I do. Where he sees laziness and mediocrity, I see our strength, our grit, and our opportunity," Acton said in a statement. "Where he sees an opportunity to gut Medicare, Medicaid, and attack a woman's right to choose — I know my job as governor will be to stand up for Ohioans against powerful billionaires and bad actors who don't have our best interests at heart."

Ramaswamy shot back at Acton during Monday night's rally, calling her an "Anthony Fauci knockoff."