

Ramaswamy, Yost split Ohio sheriff endorsements in 2026 Republican governor's race

By **Jeremy Pelzer**
cleveland.com

Correction: An earlier version of this story stated, in error, that Vivek Ramaswamy was endorsed by Ralph Fizer, Steve Leahy, David Lucas, and Larry Sims, the former sheriffs of Clinton, Clermont, Belmont, and Warren counties. Rather, the current sheriffs of their respective counties have endorsed Ramaswamy: Doug Eastes of Clinton County, Chris Stratton of Clermont County, Barry Riley of Warren County, and James Zusack of Belmont County.

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Ohio county sheriffs are starting to take sides in the 2026 Republican race for Ohio governor between former presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy and Attorney General Dave Yost.

Yost, the state's top law-enforcement official, trotted out endorsements Monday from 30 county sheriffs from around the state, including several from Northeast Ohio.

But 21 sheriffs – including one Democrat – are instead backing Ramaswamy, a biotech entrepreneur from suburban Columbus who unsuccessfully sought the 2024 GOP presidential nomination.

So far, Ramaswamy and Yost are the only two major GOP candidates to enter the race to succeed term-limited Republican Gov. Mike DeWine next year. Campaigning has started unusually early, with the May 5, 2026, primary election still more than 14 months away.

Ramaswamy, [who hit the campaign trail last week](#), has picked up endorsements from [President Donald Trump](#), Secretary of State Frank LaRose, Treasurer Robert Sprague, and state treasurer candidate Kristina Roegner, a Republican state senator.

Since [launching his campaign on Jan. 23](#), Yost has [announced an endorsement from former Secretary of State Ken Blackwell](#).

Ottawa County Sheriff Stephen Levorchick, said in an interview that he “fell in love” with Ramaswamy the first time the two of them spoke a few weeks ago.

“He brings an energy that I have not seen in Ohio politics for a number of years. He brings a fresh outlook as to how to grow Ohio, how to strengthen Ohio,” Levorchick said.

Levorchick said he thinks that, as governor, Ramaswamy would bring economic-development projects to Ottawa County and other parts of Ohio outside Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. As for law-enforcement issues, Levorchick said he thinks Ramaswamy would do more to improve police training.

“There are some (training) videos that are on the computer that our deputies will watch, and they’ll watch them for three years in a row,” Levorchick said. “I think our training can be improved.”

As attorney general, [Yost has launched an initiative](#) to modernize police training in Ohio, including using virtual reality in courses and an increased focus on helping officers deal with people in crisis situations. However, [Ohio still has no permanent source of funding for police training](#), meaning it’s left to the whims of state lawmakers to decide how much money to provide for it in every two-year state budget.

When Levorchick was pressed on why he prefers Ramaswamy as governor over Yost, the sheriff said he wanted to “stay positive” and not talk negatively about the attorney general.

Ramaswamy himself, in an interview, said he was grateful for the sheriffs’ endorsements and considers them “close allies.” He said he also considers improved police training a priority, as well as ensuring that jailed Ohioans in need of mental-health treatment are sent to psychiatric facilities.

“I know it’s a big deal for them to make this kind of endorsement this early, and especially in the contours of this particular race,” Ramaswamy said, referring to the sheriffs backing him over the state’s top law-enforcement official. “That says a lot, and I take that responsibility seriously.”

The sheriffs endorsing Yost, meanwhile, including Richard Jones of Butler County, whose national media appearances, trademark handlebar mustache and enthusiastic backing of Trump and other GOP candidates have made him [perhaps the state’s most well-known sheriff](#).

“I’ve known Dave for more than 20 years. I’ve seen him fighting crime and looking out for the people of Ohio. I cannot think of a better partner, and he’ll make a great

governor,” Jones said in a statement. “His leadership and skills make him uniquely qualified for the job.”

In a statement, Yost said he was “deeply honored” to have the backing of Jones and the other 29 sheriffs.

“But,” Yost added, “the endorsement I covet the most is the endorsement of the people of Ohio.”

A few of the sheriffs to endorse Yost come from Northeast Ohio, including Bill Niemi of Ashtabula County, Frank Leonbruno of Lake County, and Bruce Zuchowski of Portage County.

The sheriffs closest to Northeast Ohio who are backing Ramaswamy include J. Steve Sheldon of Richland County and Fredrick W. Stevens of Seneca County.

All of the sheriffs to endorse Ramaswamy or Yost are Republicans, except for Democrat Jeffrey Paden of Guernsey County (who is backing Ramaswamy) and independent Orvis Campbell of Tuscarawas County (a Yost supporter).

The other sheriffs to endorse Ramaswamy include:

- Matthew Treglia of Allen County
- James Zusack of Belmont County
- Chris Stratton of Clermont County
- Doug Eastes of Clinton County
- Christopher Michael Walters of Coshocton County
- Alex Lape of Fairfield County
- Matthew Champlin of Gallia County
- Keith Everhart of Hardin County
- Timothy Zimmerly of Holmes County
- Daniel John Weckesser of Knox County
- Donald Fitch of Meigs County
- James R. Fisher of Morgan County
- Jason Mackie of Noble County
- Barry Riley of Warren County
- Mark Warden of Washington County
- Thomas Edwin Kochert of Williams County
- Jeffery S. Lawless of Lawrence County

Other sheriffs who have endorsed Yost include:

- Kurt Schneider of Ashland County

- Michael Vorhees of Auglaize County
- Christopher Clark of Clark County
- Brian McLaughlin of Columbiana County
- Jeffrey Balzer of Delaware County
- Vernon P. Stanforth of Fayette County
- Scott Anger of Greene County
- Todd J. Corbin of Huron County
- Randall J. Dodds of Logan County
- Matthew Bayles of Marion County
- Dave Duchak of Miami County
- Rob Streck of Montgomery County
- John L. Hinton of Morrow County
- Matthew O. Hafey of Pickaway County
- Tracy Evans of Pike County
- Brian S. Siefker of Putnam County
- George W. Lavender Jr. of Ross County
- Chris Hilton of Sandusky County
- David Thoroughman of Scioto County
- Jim Frye of Shelby County
- Eric Weisburn of Stark County
- Mike Justice of Union County
- Ryan Cain of Vinton County
- Thomas Ballinger of Wayne County
- Todd Frey of Wyandot County