

U.S. Sen. Jon Husted has million-dollar start to 2026 campaign

By **Jeremy Pelzer**
Cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio—During his first 10 weeks as a U.S. senator, Jon Husted's nascent 2026 campaign collected more than \$1 million, campaign-finance records show.

While that's a drop in the bucket compared to what other recent U.S. Senate candidates in Ohio have spent, it's a respectable showing given that Gov. Mike DeWine [catapulted the Columbus-area Republican from lieutenant governor to the Senate](#) in mid-January.

The \$1,061,010.52 that Husted for Senate accepted between Jan. 20 and March 31 includes nearly \$399,000 from individuals, about \$317,000 from political action committees, and more than \$345,000 transferred from [his joint fundraising committee](#) and other affiliated groups, [according to the Federal Election Commission's website](#).

After taking a few weeks to get his sea legs on Capitol Hill [and hire from scratch a staff](#) for both his Senate office and campaign, Husted started campaigning back in Ohio this week. A gauntlet of elections looms. To hold his Senate seat, Husted will have to win a special election in November 2026, then triumph again in 2028.

As expected, Husted [has so far been a reliable vote for President Donald Trump's policies](#) and administration nominees. With Ohio now firmly a red state, it's a line Husted toes to reassure conservative voters that he's pro-Trump enough that they needn't try to replace him with another Republican on the 2026 ballot.

So far, there's been no sign that Husted will face a primary challenger next year. [Trump himself endorsed Husted last week](#), making it even more difficult for potential GOP rivals to run against him.

Nor has there been any indication yet who his Democratic opponent might be. Ex-U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, who lost reelection last year, [has so far remained mum](#) about his political future, and 2022 Senate nominee/ex-U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan has mostly been [discussed as a potential candidate for governor](#), if he runs at all.

If Ohio's 2026 U.S. Senate race ends up being anything like the state's 2024 Senate campaign between Brown and now-U.S. Sen. Bernie Moreno, a Westlake Republican, Husted will have to keep his foot on the gas of his fundraising machine.

More than \$483 million was spent in total on last year's Senate race, making it the most expensive non-presidential political campaign in U.S. history, [according to AdImpact](#), a political ad tracking firm.

Brown's campaign spent about \$78 million, while Moreno's campaign spent about \$21 million, according to AdImpact. The remaining spending came from outside groups, mostly on a barrage of television ads.

Prior to his Senate appointment, [Husted had been angling for years to succeed DeWine as Ohio governor in 2026](#). A couple years ago, DeWine gave him sole control of the DeWine/Husted gubernatorial campaign fund, which as of Jan. 31 had more than \$6 million in the bank.

The problem for Husted now, though, is that he can't use any of that money for his Senate campaign. Political contributions to candidates for state-level offices like governor are forbidden to be spent on campaigns for federal office, like U.S. senator.

That means Husted has had to start fundraising from scratch.

Not surprisingly, the list of contributors in Husted's initial campaign-finance report shows many of the same Ohio-based names who previously contributed to his gubernatorial campaign, as well as his 2010 and 2014 campaigns for secretary of state.

Contributors who gave Husted's campaign \$7,000 (the maximum amount allowed by law) included:

- Forest City Enterprises Co-Chairman Emeritus Al Ratner
- Steven J. Boone, who heads a Columbus-area property management company
- Cincinnati-based lobbyist Chip Gephardt
- Columbus developer Jeffrey Edwards (and his wife Lisa)
- Cincinnati Reds owner Bob Castellini (who also gave \$25,000 to Husted's joint fundraising committee)
- Gary Cooper, who runs a farm and food company in Western Ohio
- Rick Germain, a Columbus-area car dealer, as well as his wife Libby (the couple gave an additional \$15,000 to Husted's joint fundraising committee)

Two former Republican members of Congress from Ohio also wrote checks to Husted's campaign: ex-U.S. Rep. Anthony Gonzalez of Rocky River gave \$5,000 via his political action committee, and ex-U.S. Rep. Steve Stivers of suburban Columbus contributed \$2,000 from his old congressional campaign and \$1,000 personally.

Husted has had some new benefactors, too, such as Eric Mandelblatt, a hedge fund founder from Colorado who gave \$7,000.

In a statement, Husted's campaign touted the fundraising haul as evidence that there's "growing support" for him and his campaign.

"Ohioans know Jon Husted is a conservative fighter with a proven record of delivering results," campaign spokesperson Tyson Shepard said in a statement. "This strong start adds to the momentum we've built heading toward one of the most important Senate races in the country."