

Democrat Tim Ryan eyes 2026 Ohio governor's race despite earlier denials

By **Jeremy Pelzer**
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COLUMBUS, Ohio—Democratic ex-U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan is “seriously considering” running for Ohio governor in 2026 as he ramps up TV and in-person appearances, according to a close adviser.

Ryan’s move comes after [he told The Plain Dealer/cleveland.com last summer](#) that he wasn’t interested in running for office in 2026 because of his [lucrative gigs with the cryptocurrency and natural gas industries](#) and desire to coach his 10-year-old son’s sports teams.

But Dennis Willard, Ryan’s communications adviser, said in an interview that the 2022 Democratic U.S. Senate nominee has changed his tune.

“He really has a lot of vision for things he wants to do if he would become governor,” Willard said. “I think he sees the governor’s office, also, as an opportunity to really have an impact on the future of Ohio.”

If he decides to run, Ryan would be the second Democrat to enter the race for governor. Dr. Amy Acton, the former state health director, [launched her campaign last January](#).

During the past few months, Ryan has ramped up his national TV appearances – including [on HBO’s “Real Time With Bill Maher” in February](#), where he waved off Maher’s questioning about a potential gubernatorial run.

He is also starting to accept speaking engagements in Ohio. He [spoke about ex-President Joe Biden’s legacy last month](#) at the University of Mount Union in Alliance, and he’s slated to [attend a local Democratic fundraising dinner in Champaign County](#) this Thursday.

Ryan himself hasn’t returned phone calls over the past couple months seeking comment about his 2026 plans.

While Willard emphasized that Ryan hasn't made any decision yet about whether to enter the governor's race, Ryan himself [dashed off a social-media post Friday](#) expressing confidence that if he did, he would defeat Vivek Ramaswamy, the frontrunner in the GOP primary.

"If I decided to run, which I haven't, I'd beat (Ramaswamy) by 5 pts AT LEAST," Ryan asserted in the post. He added that he would probably win "a bunch" of counties along the Ohio River that have dramatically shifted more Republican during the past 15 years.

Ryan represented the Youngstown area in the U.S. House for 20 years, unsuccessfully challenging Nancy Pelosi for House speaker in 2016 and briefly running for president in 2020. He then ran a surprisingly competitive race for U.S. Senate in 2022, [losing to Republican JD Vance](#) (who's now vice president) by about six percentage points.

Since losing the Senate race and leaving Congress, Ryan moved from Niles to suburban Columbus, [taking a job with a refrigerant company](#), serving as an adviser to the [natural gas](#) and cryptocurrency industries, and becoming a fellow at the University of Chicago's Institute for Politics.

The Democratic slate for 2026 is still forming up, even as a host of Republicans have already made pronouncements about their intentions to run for statewide office.

It remains to be seen whether the state's most powerful Democrat, former U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, will decide to run for governor as well – and, if he does, whether that would lead other Democratic gubernatorial hopefuls to run instead for other offices.

So far, the Democratic field for Ohio's 2026 U.S. Senate race remains empty. But Willard said Ryan has no desire to run for Senate again as he wants to remain in Ohio.

"He wants to be there for his son as he grows up," Willard said of Ryan.