

How Vivek Ramaswamy has steamrolled the GOP field in Ohio's governor race

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—It might still be too early to call Vivek Ramaswamy the presumptive Republican nominee for Ohio governor in 2026.

But, as of now, there's no reason to presume the Columbus-area entrepreneur won't win the May 2026 GOP gubernatorial primary.

Ramaswamy grabbed the initiative in the governor's race even before he formally launched his campaign back in February. He's kept a tight grip on it since, thanks to a combination of skill, political connections, good fortune, and a relentless determination to deprive his opponents – both declared and potential – of any possible way to gain traction against him.

His three main would-be primary rivals – Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, Treasurer Robert Sprague, and Attorney General Dave Yost – are now out of the way. [Husted was appointed to the U.S. Senate in January](#). Sprague [changed gears to run for secretary of state](#) in February. [Yost suspended his campaign last week](#).

That leaves Ramaswamy's only GOP opposition as a couple of marginal candidates, as well as the specter of Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel, who has [rather ambivalently said that he's considering entering the race](#) but so far has taken no steps to do so.

In theory, there's still plenty of time for Tressel or some other Republican to enter the race – Ohio's last two governors, Republicans [Mike DeWine](#) and [John Kasich](#), didn't launch their respective initial campaigns until June of the year before the election.

But Ramaswamy has been doing everything he can to block a challenger from gaining steam.

He's locked down the two most important endorsements in the race: first [from President Donald Trump](#) on the day of Ramaswamy's campaign launch in February, then [from the Ohio Republican Party](#) earlier this month.

Trump's endorsement [has repeatedly proven to be political gold in Ohio](#), propelling (now-Vice President) JD Vance and Bernie Moreno to victory in competitive GOP U.S. Senate primaries. The state party endorsement, meanwhile, gives Ramaswamy access to party resources that his primary challengers can't get, among other benefits.

He's also unveiled endorsements from Moreno, U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan of Champaign County, a majority of Republicans from the [Ohio House](#) and [Senate](#), and (in a poke in the eye to Yost, the state's top law-enforcement official) [more than 30 county sheriffs](#).

While Ramaswamy's campaign won't have to file its first campaign-finance report until July 31, [NBC News reported](#) his campaign raised \$1 million in its first two weeks alone. Ramaswamy himself is far richer than the average Ohio gubernatorial candidate; last month, [Forbes estimated](#) he had a net worth of about \$1 billion.

The pro-Ramaswamy's super PAC "V-PAC: Victors Not Victims," meanwhile, [spent more than \\$2.2 million on TV ads](#) back in March – far earlier than when ads for Ohio governor usually start airing.

Ramaswamy was already pretty well-known when he began the race, from his 2024 presidential campaign and his frequent TV appearances. The task for him has been to turn his celebrity into votes, and to build personal relationships with rank-and-file Republicans around the state.

In the past couple months, that's exactly what Ramaswamy's focus has been: so far this year, he's attended more than 30 Lincoln Day dinners, which are annual fundraisers held by county Republican parties around Ohio.

Jai Chabria, senior strategist and general consultant for Ramaswamy's campaign, said Ramaswamy will continue such campaigning whether he has a major primary opponent or not.

"I think having an aggressive campaign is absolutely intentional, and I think it's also reflective of how he governs -- with an aggressive vision designed to bring back prosperity in the state," Chabria said. "He moves at a very quick pace, and he works very hard."

Will Tressel run?

Right now, the main threat to Ramaswamy's hold on the GOP gubernatorial nomination is the potential entry of Tressel, picked in February by DeWine to finish Husted's last two years as lieutenant governor.

Tressel, on paper, could be a formidable political threat. While the Medina Republican hasn't run for political office before now, he's famous in Ohio for his time as football coach for the Ohio State University Buckeyes, where he won a national championship in 2002 and at least a share of six Big Ten titles.

After leaving football, Tressel served as president of Youngstown State University -- where he had another legendary run as head football coach before his move to Columbus -- from 2014 until 2023.

On the eve of the Ohio Republican Party endorsement vote earlier this month, [Tressel issued a statement](#) asserting that he had "not ruled out a run for governor" in 2026. He's also been speaking at a number of Lincoln Day dinners himself recently.

However, Tressel hasn't said when he intends to make such a decision. And, speaking with reporters last week, he said that, so far, he hasn't hired any political staff or consultants to help him prepare for a potential campaign.

"I'm in kind in a fact-finding, learning mode," he said.

The longer Tressel holds out, the more difficult it could become to overcome Ramaswamy. His public indecision gives Ramaswamy more time to consolidate support and further box out a late entrant -- formidable as he might be in a state crazed over Buckeye football.

Whether Tressel runs or not, as long as he can continue to hold out the prospect that he might run for governor, he and DeWine can use that to help avoid being becoming lame ducks that can be safely ignored by state lawmakers, according to one Republican strategist.

When it appeared that Husted was in line to succeed DeWine as governor, the strategist said, many lawmakers held their fire so they could still angle for possible jobs in the next administration. But if Ramaswamy -- who's hardly a DeWine ally -- becomes the presumptive nominee, there's no longer a need for such restraint.

"The moment that Jim Tressel officially isn't a candidate for governor, it makes it even more difficult for the governor to try to push through an agenda with a conservative general assembly that's grown tired of him anyway," the strategist said. "So, I think he has to try to find whatever ways to stay relevant in the conversation, but he's being dwarfed by Vivek and Trump and everything going on in D.C."