

2010 Election Battles Brewing Already

The 2010 general election may seem like a long way away. But, often one general election bleeds into the next as candidates try to clear the field by getting a head start on their campaigns. In the next several issues of *Ohio Matters*, this column will take a look at some of the major 2010 races and how they're shaping up – already!

Most political pundits predicted a tough 2010 U.S. Senate race in Ohio months ago. Ever since then-Congressman Sherrod Brown (D) knocked off incumbent U.S. Senator Mike Dewine (R) in 2006, many were convinced Sen. George Voinovich (R) would face a serious challenge in 2010. Maybe it was the prospect of a hard-hitting race, or maybe it was finally deciding four decades in public service is enough for anyone, but whatever the reason, on January 12 Sen. Voinovich announced he will not seek re-election.

Nothing attracts political candidates like an open seat. So, the ink was hardly dry on the "Voinovich to Retire" stories before possible successors started trumpeting their plans to replace him.

On the Republican side of the aisle, former Congressman Rob Portman was the first to announce his candidacy. In addition to serving 12 years in Congress representing the 2nd district in southwest Ohio, Portman served as U.S. Trade Representative and Director of the Office of Budget & Management under President George W. Bush. But, some political insiders believe Portman's greatest weakness could be his Bush connection. To view Portman's U.S. Senate Web site, go to www.robportman.com.

A political new-comer who recently announced his plan to replace Voinovich is Tom Ganley, a Cleveland-area auto dealer. He lacks name recognition and a political network, both of which are important in any state-wide race, but he's a successful businessman and may be able to bank-roll the campaign himself. He appears to be counting on successfully branding himself as the political outsider rather than a "career politician."

State Auditor Mary Taylor is the only Republican to hold a state-wide constitutional office, so speculation about her future always seems to be a topic whenever there's an open seat. Although she hasn't announced her intention to run for the U.S. Senate, she hasn't put the speculation to rest, either. Republican leaders are almost certainly hoping to keep Taylor where she is, since her chances of winning re-election appear strong.

There are plenty of candidates on the Democratic side of the aisle and two long-time friends are leading the pack. Even prior to Voinovich's announced retirement, many political insiders were putting their money on Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher as the one who would take him on in 2010. The lieutenant governor announced his intention to run on February 17, just hours after his good friend, Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner made it known she planned to challenge him for the seat.

In addition to his current position as lieutenant governor, Fisher has served as Attorney General and a member of the Ohio Legislature. In 1998 he lost an extremely tight race for governor against Bob Taft. Fisher is a prolific fundraiser and well known in the Democratic-rich northern part of Ohio. To learn more about Lt. Gov. Fisher's campaign, log on to www.fisherforohio.com.

Brunner, on the other hand, completed her first state-wide run in 2006 when she captured the Secretary of State's office. She previously served as a Franklin County Common Pleas judge and was a well-known elections attorney. Brunner's U.S. Senate campaign Web site can be found at www.jenniferbrunner.com

Four other Democrats have announced their interest in the Senate seat. They are Ohio Rep. Tyrone Yates, from Cincinnati; Hamilton County Prosecutor, Todd Portune; Cuyahoga County Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones; and Christopher Celeste, former Gov. Dick Celeste's son. None of them come close to having the strong state-wide campaign organizations of Fisher or Brunner, nor are they as well-known, but they could be spoilers in a heated Democratic primary, especially since Brunner is the only woman running in the field to date.

When it comes to Ohio's open U.S. Senate seat, the 2010 general election campaign is sure to be exciting. But the May 2010 primary election could prove to be just as interesting as a number of candidates battle it out for their party's nomination.