



OHIO HOUSE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

2024 State of the State Response

Today we heard from Ohio's governor about his hopes for the state in the coming year. But what we didn't hear is how he plans to get anything done in this current political environment.

The reality is that rigged, one-party rule and Republican infighting seems to have no end in sight. In fact, in the sea of controversy that the legislature has become, people take a backseat to politics. Extremism— not common sense— is the currency to get anything done. By choosing politics over people, the past year has seen a rise in the attacks on our fundamental freedoms to decide our own future as Ohioans, the draining of billions of dollars in school funding from public schools and gifting it to private and unaccountable schools, and the shifting of taxes on to local homeowners and seniors to make up for state cuts to local communities and tax giveaways to the wealthiest few.

The real state of the state is one where too many Ohioans find themselves living in a state they believe is headed in the wrong direction, mainly because the politicians in charge do not reflect our values as Ohioans.

The real state of the state is Ohio is one of the worst states for access to childcare. While the number of children benefiting from publicly funded child care in Ohio has plummeted over the past several years, the number of child care workers has dropped too.

We can, and should, put our children first by fairly funding childcare in Ohio. Instead, what we heard from the governor is his plan to upend his own system's failure on how it rates and subsidies child care that amounts to a shell game, shifting existing funding around instead of taking responsibility to ensure every child in Ohio can reach their full potential.

The real state of the state is Ohio remains one of the weakest states when it comes to gun safety laws, ranking 33rd in the nation. On average, more than 1,600 people die by guns in Ohio every year, we have the 17th-highest rate of gun deaths, and the leading cause of death among children and teens in this country is not cancer or accidents, it is guns.

The real state of the state in Ohio is that after we finally started to emerge from the COVID pandemic, Ohio's economy is now growing slower than almost every state in the union, ranking 45th in the nation over the past three years.

For all of us to have better and brighter futures, we must continue the fight to put people first. Putting people first will ensure all Ohioans—no matter your race, gender or economic status—have the freedom to be who they are, the dignity of a safe community and secure job, and the opportunity to thrive.

We know putting people first is good for Ohio because we know it's what Ohioans want and we know it works.

By putting people first, House Democrats are investing in the dignity of work for our hard working families. Investments that will incentivize the hiring of our veterans, investments in growing paychecks and achieving equal pay for women.

We've also been able to pass bills that support paycheck transparency, ensure employees have easy access to their paycheck records, and require workers to be paid what they're owed on time.

Putting people first includes bipartisan legislation we helped pass that is rebuilding our communities by solving problems, like providing access to housing for returning citizens after paying their debt to society, or giving our police departments the ability to fill positions that have been held vacant for way too long.

People first means fighting for and funding Ohio's future. That means investments we have introduced for mental health services and suicide prevention, investments in raising the salaries of our public school educators, investments in helping working families thrive with necessary tax credits:

These are victories not for Democrats or Republicans, they are victories for the people of Ohio. But because of inaction from my colleagues across the aisle, nearly none of these bipartisan bills that would improve the lives of millions of Ohioans have been even taken up for consideration.

Perhaps the greatest victory Ohio has recently achieved when we choose people over politics is the fight over the right many of us always knew belonged solely to us, but one we now have as a constitutional right- a women's own bodily autonomy when it comes abortion access and reproductive rights. A bipartisan majority of Ohioans made clear that a woman's right to choose is between her and her doctor, and NOT one for extremist politicians.

Despite that historic victory and so many other bipartisan victories, the real state of the state remains one where extremist, special interest groups, and selfish politicians' own self interest continues to be put before the people's best interest.

In our efforts to find common ground to better the lives of all Ohioans, House Democrats remain steadfast in our position of never being beholden to these forces, no matter the cost. That's why we stand firmly against any and all attacks on the freedom, dignity, and opportunity of any citizen of Ohio.

As Ohio strives to be a leader in the future of innovation and technology, we must level the uneven playing field that continues to benefit crooked politicians, greedy corporations and the wealthy few over the rest of us.

Ohio's tax code has been rigged against seniors, homeowners, and middle-and-working class families to fund tax giveaways for the wealthiest few. They're not cutting taxes- they're shifting taxes.

Additional proposals to kill the income tax would only make matters worse, shifting taxes onto the rest of us by forcing communities and local homeowners to pay more than their fair share to keep police, fire and safety personnel on the streets and seniors in the homes.

Historic giveaways to the wealthy and private schools mean local homeowners have been forced to do more as the state walks away from its commitment to Ohio's small towns, villages and cities. By shifting taxes from the wealthy onto the backs of working families, they are robbing our public education system, robbing our public safety funds, and they are robbing Ohioans of a chance at the American dream. It is time corporations and the wealthy pay their share.

Ohio's battle with greed is no stranger in this building. Five years ago this month, House Bill 6 was introduced, beginning the largest, most shameful political corruption scandal in our state's history. To this day, not one bill has been passed that would prevent another HB 6 scandal from happening again. It's a fact that the highest levels of the DeWine-Husted Administration acted on behalf of corporate interests— against the public interest, against taxpayers and consumers. That failed leadership is why Ohio remains one of the most corrupt states in the union. Ohioans deserve better.

Taxpayers deserve to know why elected officials at the highest level of government don't support reforms. Elected Republicans' failure to act is not putting people first, it's putting politics and special interest groups first.

Democrats have introduced legislation to prevent this from ever happening again and we have introduced legislation that would refund consumers still paying the corruption tax on HB 6. Republicans have failed us and Ohioans deserve better.

When we put people first, we come closer and closer to building better and brighter futures for all Ohioans. That's why I call on my Republican colleagues to do the work that is necessary and act on bipartisan solutions sitting in front of them.

We've passed landmark legislation that will allocate \$2 billion in state funds towards initiatives aimed at driving economic growth and expanding opportunities throughout the state that can lead to better jobs, wage growth and an economy that works for all of us.

Without the federal dollars Ohio receives regularly thanks to the American Rescue Plan Act and the the federal CHIPS Act passed by congress and under the leadership of Democrats like Sherrod Brown, Ohio wouldn't have the funds we need to fix the Brent Spence Bridge in Cincinnati, or be the first in the country in building electric vehicle charging stations across Ohio's interstates. We wouldn't have the \$20 billion dollar investments from Intel for a revolutionary computer chip plant, and we wouldn't have the recent investment of \$64 million to expand access to healthcare for thousands of Appalachian children and families.

Those A-R-P-A dollars have an expiration date though. Of the \$5.4 billion in federal funds we received, Ohio has failed to obligate \$2.5 billion dollars...about 46%...of that money which needs to be spent by the end of next year. This is money we can use to empower childcare funding, support public health initiatives, raise wages for essential workers and improve water, sewer and broadband infrastructure across Ohio. The time to act is now. To the DeWine-Husted administration I say, "stop sitting on this money and get it out the door and into the hands of our communities and citizens who need relief.

Ohio is also home to some of the worst pro-gun crime, anti-cop laws in the country, and nothing's been done about it. Democrats have introduced several commonsense gun reform bills we know a bipartisan majority of Ohioans support and want to see passed. The time to act is now.

And if you don't act, this November it will be citizens not politicians that will act. Because the key to unlocking Ohio's future does not rest in the hands of the governor, nor does it rest with this dysfunctional and extreme General Assembly or any elected official. It rests where it belongs- in the hands of the people. It's the people that will unlock Ohio's future and that's why we will always put people first. Thank you. I'd now like to turn it over to Representative Terrance Upchurch, the president of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus.