



To: Ohio Democratic Party Executive Committee
From: Ohio Democratic Party Candidate Screening Committee
Date: 1/25/24
RE: Candidate Screening Committee Report

Overview of the Process

On Saturday, December 21st, the Candidate Screening Committee of the Ohio Democratic Party Executive Committee met in Columbus to screen 11 candidates who applied for the party endorsement. The committee was composed of members of the Executive Committee who encompassed the party's values of diversity and representation to ensure that various perspectives were included in this process.

Committee Members:

Chair, David Farrell
Vice Chair, Patricia Frost Brooks
Andre Washington
Lili Sandler
Dave Brock
Sophia Rodriguez
Mike Sexton
Melissa Hedden
Jeremy Blake
Courtney Belcher
Martha Campbell

The committee screened candidates only in races where one or more candidates requested an endorsement. Statewide candidates were screened for 30 minutes and congressional candidates were screened for 15 minutes. Candidates running for the same seat were screened consecutively. The committee received copies of candidate questionnaires, and for the Supreme Court screening, supplemental materials including the internal research ODP conducted on each candidate. Candidates had the opportunity to introduce themselves, and then were asked a number of questions until their time expired. Candidates running for the same seat were asked the same questions in the same order, unless there were questions unique to their candidacy or the committee ran out of time.

After all candidates had been screened, the committee met to discuss and formally vote on recommendations. All relevant ODP processes and bylaws were followed by the Committee.

Recommendations from the Committee

In the contested primary for the open Ohio Supreme Court seat, the committee recommends the endorsement of Lisa Forbes. 10 members of the committee voted to recommend Lisa Forbes for endorsement. One member of the committee voted against recommending Lisa Forbes for endorsement. The vote to recommend Terri Jamison for the endorsement failed 1-10.

In the contested primary for OH Congressional District 2, the committee recommends the endorsement of Samantha Meadows. The vote to recommend Samantha Meadows was unanimous.

In the contested primary for OH Congressional District 7, the committee recommends the endorsement of Matt Diemer. The vote to recommend Matt Diemer was unanimous.

In the contested primary for OH Congressional District 10, the committee recommends the endorsement of Amy Cox. The vote to recommend Amy Cox was unanimous.

In the contested primary for OH Congressional District 15, the committee recommends the endorsement of Representative Adam Miller. The vote to recommend Representative Adam Miller was unanimous.

Summary of Screenings

The committee first screened candidates for the Ohio Supreme Court.

Judge Terri Jamison highlighted her prior run for statewide office, community activism, and experience in Franklin County as her reasons for seeking the endorsement. She declined to answer questions regarding consultants and specific endorsements she received or was seeking. When asked about applying the law equally to all people, including whether her personal beliefs on LGBTQ issues and reproductive rights would impact her rulings on the court, she cited past rulings and affirmed that her personal life or beliefs do not impact how she applies the law. When asked what went into her decision to run for this seat, she explained that her website and email list was still active from the 22 cycle, and she informed Chair Walters that she was still receiving donations, met with Alexis Neilson, and was waiting to hear about the endorsement process.

Judge Lisa Forbes highlighted her experience on the Court of Appeals and her intent to protect democracy and defend voters against the conservative activist agenda as her reasons for seeking the endorsement. She referenced that she was recruited by ODP and initially wanted to defer to other candidates with statewide experience, but after deliberation with family and friends, and after other targeted candidates declined to run, felt that she needed to do their part to ensure that ODP had a strong candidate. She responded thoroughly and enthusiastically to questions about her campaign team and strategy, advocacy for all parts of the democratic coalition including LGBTQ people, and past campaign experience.

In the Congressional District 15 primary, only one candidate chose to submit a questionnaire and attend the screening.

Representative Adam Miller discussed his progressive, blue collar family and upbringing, experience as a teacher, attorney, school board member, and legislator in his introduction. He wants his candidacy to help Senator Brown and President Biden at a grassroots level, and use the opportunity to discuss education, social justice and environmental rights, justice, and his personal experience with addiction in his family on the trail.

In the Congressional District 10 primary, four candidates chose to submit a questionnaire and attend the screening.

Tony Pombo is a first time candidate who has been following politics his entire life and is frustrated with how things are going politically. He said wants to work across the aisle and does not identify as a “crazy socialist democrat,” but shares most of the same values as the Democratic Party.

Joseph Kuzniar is a first time candidate, a veteran, and said his top issues were revitalizing Wright Patterson Air Force Base, addressing veteran homelessness and retirement, and protecting social security.

David Esrati brought materials from his prior campaigns. He is a marketing professional, and said he wants to make healthcare, age limits for politicians, and AI as top campaign issues.

Amy Cox previously ran for the state legislature, and has a background as a teacher and small business owner. She has previously received the endorsement of Senator Brown, said she feels confident in her fundraising efforts, and wants to be a mouthpiece and advocate for marginalized voters in her district.

In the Congressional District 7 primary, two candidates submitted a questionnaire and attended the screening.

Doug Bugie ran in 1992 as a Democrat and said he is self proclaimed Republican who wanted to try to moderate the Republican party but was anti-Trump and now running as a Democrat. He is a businessman and entrepreneur, does not currently live in the district, and spoke for the entire 15 minutes which meant the committee members did not have an opportunity to ask him any questions.

Matt Diemer was the candidate for CD7 in 2022, and is running again because he said his district deserves a good democrat in Congress to pass a Democratic agenda. He was knowledgeable about the district, has plans to learn from and improve upon his last run, and is assessing how the dynamics of his opponents (Kucinich, Miller) will impact his message and strategy.

In the Congressional District 2 primary, two candidates submitted a questionnaire and were screened.

Samantha Meadows was the candidate for CD2 in 2022. She explained that in that race, she was underfunded, less organized, and didn't have the staff and volunteer support, but worked hard to go to all 15 counties. She feels that she has a solid foundation and a better strategy to run this year, and wants to be the voice in rural Ohio that spreads the message of President Biden, Sherrod Brown, and other democrats to parts of the state they may not be able to reach themselves. She also expressed frustration at running against a Republican in the primary.

Joe Wessels was a reporter in Southwest Ohio and said he was encouraged to run by a political consultant in the area and sees this as a great opportunity to run in an open seat. He said he has spoken with David Pepper, Mark Mallory, and Steve Driehaus about his race, and wants to focus on infrastructure and the opioid crisis as major issues on his campaign. He explained he plans to focus on a social media presence to bring awareness to the district, and house parties to reach voters. He also wants to help drive votes in the district for Senator Brown.