

The Two Leaders of the 135th Ohio General Assembly (Starts January 23) Are Universal Voucher Advocates.

The thread that runs through the Senate President's legislative career is "a voucher for every student". The Speaker-designate for the "135th" is a co-sponsor of HB290—the universal voucher bill. See the [Dispatch](#) article below.

The "135th" will be veto proof; hence any of the Governor's views, if contrary to the legislature's enactments, will not matter. That leaves the court and the Ohio citizens to counter the voucher crusade.

The push for school vouchers is centered in a few powerful organizations and individuals. Voucher proposals have failed in every state where the issue has been on a statewide ballot. The more folks understand about the voucher scheme, the less supportive they are.

Some public school officials and advocates are concerned about the current make-up of the court. The Ohio Supreme Court in the DeRolph school funding case ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, even with a 5-2 majority of one party. There is always a chance that court members will not be influenced by politics.

Ohio citizens need to be informed about the trauma associated with the universal voucher system, which is the destruction of the public common school. Article 1, Section 2 still reads that all political power is inherent in the people:

"All political power is inherent in the people. Government is instituted for their equal protection and benefit, and they have the right to alter, reform, or abolish the same, whenever they may deem it necessary; and no special privileges or immunities shall ever be granted, that may not be altered, revoked, or repealed by the General Assembly." (*Article 1, Section 2*)

The folks just might reach the conclusion that enough is enough.

Four things to know about Ohio's new House speaker, Derek Merrin

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The Columbus Dispatch

Ohio state Rep. Derek Merrin, R-Monclova Township, will become the new House Speaker when the 135th General Assembly convenes in January 2023.

A 36-year-old realtor and real estate investor who launched his political career before he could legally drink is about to become one of the most powerful lawmakers in Ohio.

State Rep. Derek Merrin, R-Monclova Township, was chosen by his fellow House Republicans to be the new speaker when the 135th General Assembly starts in January 2023.

"I am deeply humbled and honored by the trust and confidence the members have placed in me..." Speaker-elect Merrin said in a statement Wednesday night. "Working together, we can conquer any challenge and help forge an even brighter future for the great state of Ohio."

House speakers have significant power when it comes to passing laws in Ohio. Known as a pocket veto, speakers and their counterparts in the state Senate decide which bills get votes and which do not. That puts Merrin in a position to decide whether legislation about abortion, school vouchers, medical marijuana, and income tax increases or reductions become law.

Here are a few facts about the man who is about to be one of the most powerful state leaders in Ohio:

1) Wunderkind of Waterville

A decade before he joined the Ohio House, Merrin (then 19) won his first political election to the Waterville City Council. Two years later, the 21-year-old was elected mayor and became Ohio's youngest local leader.

Merrin served in that role from 2008 to 2011 where he pushed for an investigation by the state auditor into whether the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority misused public dollars when it loaned money to Citizens For TARTA for levy campaign costs.

Ohio's auditor agreed with Merrin and demanded the money be paid back.

"I think he has a phenomenal record of being an advocate for taxpayers," Americans For Prosperity's Ohio Director Donovan O'Neil said.

2) Ohio tax policy wonk

Since being appointed to the Ohio House in 2016, Merrin has focused on changing Ohio's tax laws.

The New York native has passed laws to make it easier for voters to understand the fiscal impact of levies, limited how schools can challenge property tax values, and mandated stickers for all retail fuel pumps that display the federal and state fuel tax rates.

"He's been excellent on transparency and making it so normal people can understand what's going on," Buckeye Institute research fellow Greg Lawson said. "Tax policy can be complicated and hard to understand. Rep. Merrin, to his credit, wants to help people frankly not get snowed by a bunch of technical jargon. I think he deserves a lot of credit for that."

He's also spent the last two years serving as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, which oversees tax policy legislation.

Both Lawson and O'Neil anticipate seeing more tax policy changes in the next budget.

3) Derek Merrin wants to push a 'bold conservative agenda'

Merrin told reporters after his election that he plans to push a "bold conservative agenda" in the next General Assembly.

He didn't elaborate on what that might include, but Merrin helped shepherd the 2019 "heartbeat bill" through the House Health Committee where he served as chairman.

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That bill, which Gov. Mike DeWine later signed, was the law of Ohio after the overturning of federal abortion protections this summer until a judge put it on hold in October.

4) School choice supporter

When the next two-year legislative session gets underway, the leaders of both the Ohio House and Senate will be strong supporters of expanding school choice.

Senate President Matt Huffman, R-Lima, is known around the statehouse as the school voucher guy, and Merrin co-sponsored the backpack bill. That's a plan by House Republicans to make every K-12 student in Ohio eligible for a tuition voucher to private school.

"Speaker-elect Merrin has been a strong supporter of funding students, not systems," Center for Christian Virtue President Aaron Baer said.

Baer worked closely with lawmakers on House Bill 290, which was introduced more than a year ago. The legislation still hasn't been expanded beyond a few lines expressing the author's intent to offer scholarships to all students but Baer and Lawson think next year's budget will be where the details get fleshed out.

"I would imagine that the expansion of options for families is going to be a big topic in the budget," Lawson said.

Buckeye Institute generally supports the idea of universal vouchers but Lawson said this kind of massive change must be done responsibly. "I think (Merrin) will be very helpful in that."

Anna Staver is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.

[New Ohio House Speaker Derek Merrin to push 'bold conservative agenda' \(dispatch.com\)](https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/politics/2022/12/02/new-ohio-house-speaker-derek-merrin-to-push-bold-conservative-agenda/7000000001)