

# 131<sup>st</sup> General Assembly Freshman Interview Collection



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21 West Broad St., Suite 1000 Columbus, OH 43215  
(614) 227-5820 info@hannah.com

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Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Niraj Antani**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 23

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** BA from Ohio State University in political science; attending law school

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to

42nd House District following death of Rep. Terry Blair (R-Centerville); defeated Democrat Patrick Merris in general election; appointed to the 130th General Assembly following the November election

**Marital status:** Single

**Religion:** Hindu

**Birth date:** Feb. 26, 1991

**Website:** [www.nirajantani.com](http://www.nirajantani.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/niraj.antani](http://www.facebook.com/niraj.antani)

**Twitter:** @nirajantani

Amid international attention, Niraj Antani has kept his cool.

Antani's own attention isn't on his young age but on making his hometown of Miamisburg and its district thrive with jobs and a skilled workforce to match. He calls himself a populist.

Seated in the 42nd House District chair as Ohio's 130th General Assembly finished out its lame-duck session, the young Republican was able to begin his preparation for the term ahead. Antani's trip to the Legislature followed the June death of Rep. Terry Blair (R-Centerville), with Republicans nominating the 23-year-old for the district seat. He secured a win against challenger Patrick Merris in the general election.

He says being seated early afforded him time to settle in, while he made the rounds to learn about the majority caucus members he was joining. "I think every freshman should be required to sit through farewell speeches," he muses about the session's goodbyes,

noting the finesse and energy of outgoing legislators, political party aside.

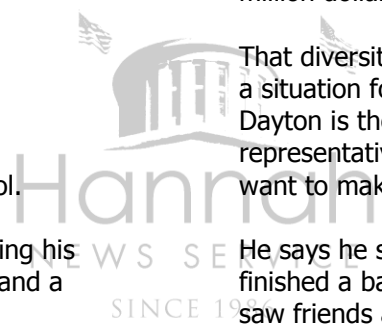
It also was training, readying him during an intense period that he says should help prepare him for the budget ahead. "Even a month helps you."

His district covers southern Montgomery County, including Miamisburg, Moraine, West Carrollton and Germantown. Within that area, Kettering Health Network is the largest employer and many people commute to work in downtown Dayton. Manufacturing is found in the district's north end, with the townships varying from very rural to very affluent, and everything in between, he says. "I can be in a cornfield at 11 a.m. and then at 1 p.m. I could be in a million dollar house."

That diversity and the differences in priorities for constituents create a situation for which Antani wants to find a balance. Although Dayton is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the state, the representative says the area doesn't receive enough attention. "I want to make sure that Dayton has voices that are for Dayton."

He says he sees people his age also being overlooked. After he finished a bachelor's degree at Ohio State University, Antani says he saw friends and high school classmates in Miamisburg working at jobs that weren't lucrative careers, showing what he calls a gap between K-12 education, higher education and industry.

He cites figures that indicate the vast majority of Ohioans graduate with a high school-level education -- 89 percent, according to the Legislative Service Commission -- but only about 25 percent earn a bachelor's degree. He says that identifies a group of individuals able to get other types of degrees, such as vocational and technical degrees, but who haven't. Making a four-year college experience affordable and accessible holds its own importance, he notes, but there's an industry need for creating a skilled workforce.



The Yaskawa Motoman robotics company, with headquarters in West Carrollton, is so desperate for employees, Antani says, that the business is entering into a partnership with Sinclair Community College, paying the school to train people so they are qualified enough to hire. "Not every company can afford to do that," he says. "So, my legislative priorities deal with how can we supply good paying jobs for the majority of people. And the majority of people do not necessarily go to a four-year college."

And students aren't being given options, Antani says. He hears "college or nothing" from high schools.

He wants to pinpoint "finding a way legislatively to make sure at the high school-level students know what their options are. I don't want to tell anyone where to go, but if you're at the high school level, that school needs to be required to ensure you know [those vocational options]," he says.

"If you're interested in IT," he says, "here's how you become a computer science engineer, here's how you become an electrical engineer, but also, here's how you become a coder, here's how you become something else in information technology that doesn't need a four-year degree."

Businesses Antani has talked to say, "We want to get into these high schools because we have jobs that pay \$70,000 that are unfilled. And we don't think that they know that this is an option and this is a good career." He asks, "And part of it's a stigma, right? It's breaking the stigma that these are in fact good careers and that success is through these jobs."

Instead of giving high schools a nod for their college rates, a focus should also include categories like career placement rates or vocational school rates. "We should be rewarding schools if they're preparing their students for a career, for a technical school, for an associate degree or for college -- and not just college," he says.

Besides wanting to give young students career options, Antani also says demonstrating to them that the Republican Party fights for young people and ethnic minorities is pivotal. He is the second Indian-American legislator to serve in Ohio's General Assembly.

"The Republican Party is the party of opportunity, but we also have to show that we're inclusive and that we are wanting to provide opportunities for all Ohioans, and Americans in that case."

Earning a spot on Forbes' 2015 "30 under 30" list for young law and policy leaders helps to support that notion, he says.

"To me it's about a recognition that young people deserve a voice. There are 132 members of the state Legislature who are Republican, Democrat alike, and it's the Republicans that have the two people who fall in the 18- to 29-year-old [category], and I think that says something," Antani says, also referring to Rep. Christina Hagan (R-Alliance), who's 26. That age demographic makes up about 19 percent of the electorate, he notes.

There's evidence, Antani says, of changing currents among the Republican Party.

"We have the first Asian-American speaker who is 33. So I think it's an absolute testament to where our party needs to go, and also what we need to work on legislatively -- that young people are going to be the future and are really the present," he says. "That list [from Forbes] has a lot of entrepreneurs and financial types that are going to create the next industries, and that if we had them in Ohio, we'd be creating jobs."

A look to the future includes using younger viewpoints, like in education, he says. For example, SmartBoards appear in every classroom in his alma mater, and the use of the interactive whiteboards was something just starting when he was in high school. "SmartBoards are pretty advanced technology for someone who may have not grown up with it. So I think different perspectives are helpful."



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Janine Boyd**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 42

**Occupation:** Federal policy advocate for Ohio Guidestone

**Experience:** Cleveland Heights City Council

**Education:** BA in Spanish, Hillsdale College; MA

in speech-language pathology, Michigan State University

**Path to General Assembly:** Won election to the 9th House District seat in the General Election, succeeding her mother, Rep. Barbara Boyd (D-Cleveland Heights), who was term-limited

**Personal:** Engaged, approved as adoptive parent

**Website:** [www.janineboyd2014.com](http://www.janineboyd2014.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/pages/Janine-Boyd-for-Ohio-State-Representative-D9](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Janine-Boyd-for-Ohio-State-Representative-D9)

**Twitter:** @Boyd4OH\_D9

Janine Boyd built a career in human services advocacy and spent life watching her mother shape policy in Columbus but said until a few years ago she'd have never considered seeking elected office.

That changed in 2012 with a nudge from her mother and a longtime family friend and a few days at the Democratic National Convention in North Carolina.

Boyd's mother, former Rep. Barbara Boyd, and the late Phyllis Evans, a Cleveland Heights councilwoman, implored her to consider a bid to take Evans' place on city council. Evans stepped down in 2012 because of health problems and passed away the next year.

Boyd, a speech-language pathologist by training and government affairs advocate for Ohio Guidestone, accompanied her mother to the DNC later that summer and felt inspiration from the speeches of President Barack Obama and others.

"If affected me," she said. "When I returned from the convention, I applied for the seat."

She won the appointment in late 2012 and subsequently was elected to finish the term in 2013, knowing she'd soon need to consider whether to make a bid to succeed her mother, who faced term limits at the end of 2014.

"I care about where I live, and I care about our state, and I just want to do what I can to help," Boyd said.

"I've been directly involved with policymaking and advocacy for over 10 years now, and it's just my hope that I can contribute to policy that builds people's lives, that really gives people an opportunity to grow and communities the opportunity to do more than just survive," she said.

Boyd lists policy priorities including support for the public education system, restoration of local government funding and ensuring workforce development programs have a broad reach across populations. She cited the challenges faced by foster youth aging out of the system as one example.

"I'm interested in making sure that workforce does not exclude the under- and unemployed populations, some of the harder to employ, whether they be returning from the prison system ... if they're veterans returning to the workforce, if they're seniors looking for new skill sets," she said. "We have such talent here that goes untouched because they might need additional support to be successful long-term."

Boyd said her goal is to work with fellow lawmakers to "create policy that is not limited by our party affiliations."

"I want to say that I built some really solid professional relationships and found some really important common ground with my colleagues who didn't naturally value some of the issues I share with them," she said. "And I learned more about what they value and

their constituents value, and together we found ways to compromise and also different ways of achieving our goals together.”



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Tom Brinkman**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** B.A. History, Political Science,  
George Washington University

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Rep. Peter Stautberg (R-Cincinnati) in the primary for the 27<sup>th</sup> House District, and Democrat Joe Otis in the General Election  
**Personal:** Married, six children

Not many freshmen legislators can say they were able to move legislation in the General Assembly even though they were not yet a part of it.

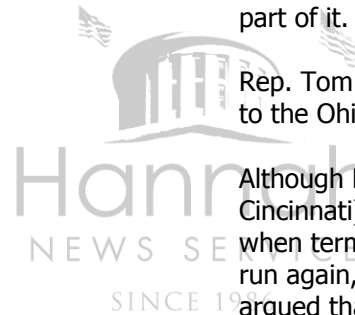
Rep. Tom Brinkman (R-Cincinnati) isn't a typical freshman, returning to the Ohio House after serving from 2001-2008.

Although Brinkman tried to unseat Rep. Peter Stautberg (R-Cincinnati) in 2012 after the statutory time had passed between when term limits forced him from the Legislature and when he could run again, Stautberg easily prevailed in the primary. Brinkman argued that the election came down to name recognition, and Stautberg prevailed.

In 2014, he was urged to challenge Stautberg again, this time by parents in the district unhappy with the Common Core. He said they felt Stautberg was not doing enough to address the problems of Common Core.

On the campaign trail again, Brinkman said Common Core became the overriding issue among the people he talked to in the district.

“I would actually bring up issues that I also thought were important, and people said, ‘that’s all well and good, but Common Core is the main issue we are most concerned about,’” he said.



Brinkman defeated Stautberg in the primary, and the race caused House Republican leadership to take notice. In the fall, they began hearings on legislation to repeal the standards.

"I called and talked to a guy who's a lobbyist, and he said, 'Oh yeah, I know you Brinkman. You're the one who's already got a bill moving through the Legislature and you're not even here yet,'" he said. "It was dead in the water until I won the primary, and then all of a sudden they said we need to pay attention to this."

Brinkman said there are a lot of reasons to be against Common Core, listing that it wasn't voted on by elected officials, that it is being "forced down" by the federal government instead of being created by an act of Congress or state legislatures, that it includes data mining that puts information about school children in the hands of private companies, that it focuses on many high stakes tests that children are forced to take, and that some of the methods don't make sense. He said it is better to have local standards adopted by local school boards.

He said he isn't looking to start his own legislation against Common Core, but supports the work started in the last General Assembly by Rep. Andy Thompson (R-Marietta). He said the state needs to get rid of the PARCC tests and start work on its own new standards.

Among other items on Brinkman's to-do list are passage of the Heartbeat Bill, which bans abortions when a fetal heartbeat can be detected, as well as some labor reforms such as right-to-work, limiting when prevailing wage can be used on a project, and making it so workers must actively direct their money to unions instead of it being an automatic paycheck deductions. He also said that he would like to see lower taxes and a flatter tax system, as well as cuts to government spending.

On right to work, he noted that many of Ohio's neighbors, including Indiana and Michigan, have adopted the legislation. He said he would rather see it adopted as an act by the Legislature rather than a ballot initiative, although he would support such a ballot measure.

"All around us right to work continues to be a hot topic and has moved along, so it is time for Ohio to step up," Brinkman said.

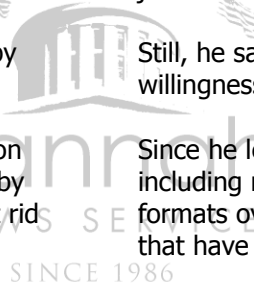
During his first tenure in the Ohio House, Brinkman was known for voting on his principles, rather than party. Already into this session, Brinkman has shown that he is not afraid to challenge his own party's leadership on issues.

Brinkman said that an overwhelming majority for Republicans may not be a good thing for conservatives. He called the last election "an aberration," with Republicans having greater successes because of poor Democratic turnout due to a poor candidate at the top of the ticket. He said that put some Republicans into the Statehouse that may not normally have won, and those legislators may not be as conservative and may want to move an agenda to save their own jobs.

Still, he said Speaker Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville) has indicated a willingness to work with conservative members of the Legislature.

Since he left in 2008, Brinkman said there have been a few changes, including more security. He also said there is more use of electronic formats over paper. He said he is still seeing if there are other things that have changed since he last left.

As a legislator, Brinkman said he doesn't see the need to be the one out in front leading on an issue, especially since others may have good work already put into it. He said he doesn't need to lead the wagon, and is more than happy to help push it instead.







Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Hearcel Craig**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 65

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Master of Science from Central Michigan University

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to the 26<sup>th</sup>

House District, defeating Republican Dustin Pyles in the General Election, following term-limited Tracy Heard (D-Columbus)

**Marital status:** Married

**Spouse's name:** Linda

**Birth date:** July 1, 1949

From a West Virginia coal mining town, Hearcel Craig's mother decided to move her family to Ohio for a better future. Today, her son represents the district in which she bought her first home, and he speaks of her with much admiration.

"That's the only house that she was ever able to purchase. She worked all of her life and literally would sweep the streets," he says. "She was a person from which most of my service -- my very early glimpses of community service -- was from her experience."

Rep. Craig (D-Columbus) became the first in his family to attend college, and he notes his mother's self-taught education continued throughout her years of working in the school system and helping seniors find employment opportunities. "So education for me really has been the tool, the impetus for much of my life's journey," he says.

"She continued to be a life-long learner and [I'm] just so amazed with her ability and her willingness to give." Providing quality education for Ohioans and their children, finding opportunities for veterans, and focusing on job growth all top Craig's priorities for the 131st General Assembly. He has worked in every sector of government, from his experience in the military to the state

level as legislative liaison for Department of Youth Services (DYS), to the community relations director in the Franklin County Clerk of Courts and eight years on Columbus City Council.

"Through all of those experiences, it's really helped me to begin to shape and think about policy that can help support, help think critically about those things that will influence the lives and opportunity for the residents of the state of Ohio," he says. "And certainly in the 26th District."

His district covers 15 wards in southeast Columbus and Franklin County that include a range of socioeconomics and is home to manufacturing businesses like heavy trucking companies and Crane Plastics. Community-oriented residents stand out to Craig, along with the racial and economic diversity he sees throughout the whole district. The Berwick area, in particular, "really has been a template, a model for the nation; it continues to be," he says.

Craig's time in the U.S. Army in the 1970s undoubtedly shaped his vision to strengthen support for Ohio veterans. He is the ranking member of the House Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee, and wants to make sure those who've served their country have salaries, health insurance and job security intact. The newly configured committee is "really a whiteboard at this point. We're going to have a lot of discussion," he notes.

Securing essential resources for veterans and their families through entrepreneurship is something he worked toward during his near-decade on Columbus City Council.

"One of the things I was most interested in doing was codifying things in law," Craig says. "I was able to ensure that our veterans were certified to do business with the city of Columbus on par with minority and female businesses. So we begin that process of thinking, 'Well, how can we help our veterans, our men and women that have served this nation, and risking their lives, paying the ultimate price for all of us' -- in real substantive ways."

He notes the “continuity of that thought” continues in his and Rep. Niraj Antani’s (R-Miamisburg) co-sponsored veteran business tax credit bill, HB102. It will provide a 5 percent bid preference for veteran-owned businesses for contracts with the state and will provide personal income and commercial activities tax (CAT) credits for businesses who hire veterans for at least a year. (See *The Hannah Report*, 3/4/15.)

“I think it’s a win-win for business, certainly, and it’s certainly a win-win for our veterans. They are highly skilled, they are highly motivated, they’re highly directed; so this is another way that we can do some substantive things,” he says.

Craig has chaired and worked on numerous city council boards, such as the recreation and parks committee, and received public servant of the year in 2011 for his dedication to the job. During his inaugural leadership of the council’s veterans committee, he says \$700,000 was directed to veterans and their families for infrastructure work to enable them to stay in their homes.

His work with the Columbus chapter of the NAACP as state education chair and on a Franklin County drug prevention board also contributed to his decision to run for the Statehouse, he notes.

In March, Craig was made an honoree member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart for his contributions to supporting veterans. “Those men and women that serve every single day ... the least that we can do is ensure that they’re coming back and have opportunities for employment,” he said at the ceremony, speaking about preserving opportunities for housing and education and medical care issues. “Truly, this is one of the highlights of my life, and I’ll never forget this.”

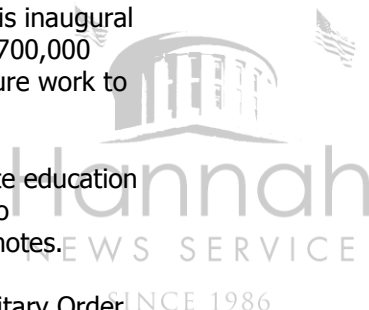
He was also appointed by Attorney General Mike DeWine to the Military Veterans Resource Center board designed to work with veterans to identify their skills for post-military work, which he currently serves on. In the House, he’s a member of the Economic

and Workforce Development Committee and the Financial Institutions, Housing and Urban Development Committee.

Craig doesn’t want to arrive at decisions for the big problems facing Ohio without “thoughtful deliberations,” he says, and tends to work on the weekends, focusing on listening to others, reading and reviewing information.

“We’ve got, certainly, enormous challenges in our state, but we have tremendous opportunities,” he says.

“This just gives me another opportunity to serve with laser-like focus on a district ... a tremendous opportunity to serve and make an impact.”





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Robert Cupp**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 64

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Political science and law degrees from Ohio Northern University

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to the 4<sup>th</sup>

House District, defeating Democrat Bo Huenke in the General Election, following term-limited Matt Huffman (R-Lima)

**Marital status:** Married

**Spouse's name:** Libby

**Religion:** Methodist

**Birth date:** Nov. 9, 1950

**Website:** <http://www.bobcupp.org>

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/bob.cupp.5>

This "freshman" legislator in the House of Representatives happens to have a substantial career spanning each sector of government. He's worked as a commissioner in his home county, for four terms in the Ohio Senate, and on the bench of the state's highest court.

Rep. Bob Cupp (R-Lima) comes back to the Ohio Legislature chairing the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, and looking toward picking up where he left off.

"I found that the Legislature is a good place to solve problems. Many times it gets no public notice, but it can be really, really helpful," he says. "And so, just being able to look at a problem, look at the options on how to resolve it or solve it, and then put them together and get enough votes ... to get it passed and enacted gives me a great feeling. I feel like I've accomplished something."

Cupp fills the open seat left by former Republican Rep. Matt Huffman who faced term limits, after winning the General Election to the 4<sup>th</sup> House District in his home of Allen County.

He wrapped up the House's busy start to session with the finance subcommittee, saying he was pleased with his group's work on the budget, HB64 (R. Smith), and hopes for concurrence in the Senate.

"For the vast majority of schools, it'll be an increase in funding. ... But the formula is going to channel more money to districts that are at least able to raise it on their local property tax base, which is the way a formula should operate," he says.

"Usually the changes to school funding are done at the end of an economic cycle, and then you crash into recession and then everything you did gets undone because there isn't any money for it," Cupp says. "This is, I think, a historic opportunity, because we're on the upswing of an economic cycle, so it'll give it a little time to get rooted and get fully into effect.

"So hopefully, it'll have some staying power and continue to have the effect of supporting districts that have a relatively low property tax basis."

The recession had a very "disruptive" effect on school funding overall, he says, with about four formulas put in place over the last decade. The economic downturn made funding amounts unpredictable, so administrators and school boards couldn't plan. Various approaches have been tried with "mixed results" -- all setting the stage to "look at what kind of formula really might do the best job."

"Some of that includes reaching back to before *DeRolph* and pulling some of the good elements or in the aftermath of *DeRolph* and pulling some of those good elements forward into a new formula, one which will hopefully have a long life," Cupp says, referring to the 1997 court case declaring Ohio's school funding process unconstitutional.

He is also a member of the House Education, Finance, Judiciary and Public Utilities committees, of which he sees public utilities as one of

the more fascinating groups keyed into deregulation, alternative energy and issues in the ever-advancing telecommunications sector.

Cupp says his community in Allen County is an active one rooted in agriculture and manufacturing jobs, and there he can be found with his rose bushes and gardens -- and the llamas his wife raises. "It's a community where people really pitch in and help each other. There's lots of activities going on."

The 4th District is one of five districts that encompasses an entire single county. It has higher education and career center options, a symphony orchestra, and is the home to the Lima Army Tank Plant, manufacturing Abrams tanks. There's also resident concern about job security, safe communities and over-testing in schools.

"It's been hit hard by the recessions over several decades, but I think things are kind of coming together now, and we've got a good base on which to grow jobs," he says. "And one of the important things is being able to have a quality education so we can develop a skilled workforce."

Cupp's work in education goes back to his 16-year run in the Ohio Senate from 1985 through 2000, as a member of the chamber's education committee, and includes a certain document that's come to be known as "The Cupp Report."

"Senate Education Committee heard testimony on the budget, and so people would come in, and I needed to find out a little bit what their district was like," he says.

His remedy to that problem was the District Profile Report, which aggregates school district data to make it readily accessible for legislators in the committee process to "give you a little snapshot of every district." The Ohio Department of Education updates the report, with categories such as property valuations, millage amounts, teacher-to-student ratios, and ethnic division. And his work is still in play.

"It's, I think, gratifying to see that something one has done survives and is helpful to a lot of people. It grew out of my frustration, I guess, of not knowing what kind of school districts were coming and testifying. Didn't know much about them, and so it provided some information to provide context for what was being told. So it's been useful for a lot of things."

Cupp also held the president pro tempore leadership spot during his years in the Senate.

He continued his tour of the branches of government while serving one term as an Ohio Supreme Court justice, from 2007 to 2012, though losing a second bid to the bench to Justice William O'Neill.

Perspective has come out of his time as justice, senator, Allen County commissioner, and Lima city prosecutor. In understanding how each faction of government works, he says, that experience can shape how one drafts proposed legislation, so that a bill will comply with the constitution. Now in the Judiciary Committee, he says he's mindful if the legislation is drafted in a manner the courts will understand, with the goal of minimizing disputes in policy meaning. He's become aware of the strengths and limitations of each legislative body, too. "The House works different than the Senate, so if you understand how the Senate works, you can, I think, be more effective getting proposed legislation through both houses," he says.

Cupp notes issues have a tendency of "finding you." In his district, he says constituents and organizations have often supplied him with insight for problems out on the horizon. A bill regarding alibi defense and pre-sentence investigations he co-sponsored with Rep. Greta Johnson (D-Akron) passed the House in May, and he has introduced legislation making it illegal to commit a crime with unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), or drones.

He calls his new workplace in the House an energetic one, with creative members throughout. The large freshmen class has strong potential after gaining more experience, and he says he appreciates the collegiality from both sides of the aisle.

He's also interested by how much constituent communication is electronic, having left the Senate in 2000 during the Internet's takeoff. Viewing bills online was just starting then, with Cupp co-chairing the legislative information systems committee with Rep. Ron Amstutz (R-Wooster) to put those systems in place.

He muses, "There's very little [written] correspondence. So I tell my constituents if you really want to register with your legislator, send a letter, because it will be so different from what everybody else gets and it'll stand out."

How quickly he jumped into House budget hearings gave Cupp a bit of a surprise, and he hopes to have made a difference in the committee process.

"I always thought if you can do something to make things better, then you really have an obligation to do it."



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Jonathan Dever**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Occupation:** Attorney

**Education:** Bachelor's Degree, University of Cincinnati; master's degree, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; J.D., Capital University

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to the 28th House District, defeating Democrat challenger Micah Kamrass in the General Election

**Marital status:** Married

**Website:** [www.jonathandeever.com](http://www.jonathandeever.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/JonathantDever](http://www.facebook.com/JonathantDever)

**Twitter:** @Jonathan\_OH28

Jonathan Dever says he had resisted requests to run for the Ohio House of Representatives numerous times. He describes the calls from party leaders and others in the community as "repetitive," and sometimes coming several times a day.

Finally, he told one supporter that he would explore it if the individual would give him a break. Then he started to talking to people in the district.

"I realized very quickly the concerns that they had. People weren't listening to them," he says, which swayed him to run for an open 28<sup>th</sup> House District seat. Expected to be a hotly contested race before Rep. Connie Pillich (D-Cincinnati) chose to run for state treasurer, Dever defeated two others in the Republican primary and Democratic challenger Micah Kamrass in the General Election, winning with 55 percent of the vote.

Dever is an attorney by trade, although he views it more as a business that provides a service. He says the nature of his practice is to explore answers, and that concerns given to him on the campaign trail sometimes need a legislative fix. Sometimes, however, it may be



connecting people to services they do not know are out there, he says.

Dever says public service has run in his family in one way or another for generations, dating back to the French and Indian War. Still, he says he was reluctant because he has a young family. But he started thinking about how the state could move forward, and how the Legislature could build something that would keep his kids in Ohio after graduation, says Dever.

"To me that was an emerging theme -- to work together to make this a state where not only my kids stay here, but because the economic opportunities here are so good, they'll put their kids in the same public schools that they're in," he says.

Dever says he wants to see an Ohio where the middle class feels more empowered, noting that when he was a child, people in the neighborhood could regularly afford to buy a new car. Today, he says, people drive their car longer because they can't afford to go out and buy a new one.

Asked why so many Ohioans encouraged him to run, Dever says he is known for not giving up, working for something, and not quitting. Still, he doesn't expect to be confrontational with his new colleagues, saying he doesn't think there is such a thing as a bad idea. He notes that during freshmen orientation, new lawmakers from both sides of the aisle seemed to agree on what the important issues are.

"My strong suit has always been drawing people around a common theme," he says. With some, he says you can agree on 80 percent of an issue. "So let's focus on that." The other 20 percent "we probably shouldn't work on anyway."

Dever says the themes outlined by Gov. John Kasich and House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger are all good issues to pursue. He says those on his side on the aisle might question how to pay for it, while those on the other side might question cutting something on which

so many people rely. He says he prefers to step back and be creative and find a way to make things work.

Dever is already working on legislation and says he has about 10 bills he wants to introduce. He knows some may take longer than this term and hopes he will be able to get the trust of his constituents for another term to continue the work.

He's already introduced HB40 to give the State Medical Board the ability to impose fines rather than license suspensions for not complying with continuing education requirements, and HB46 to require the treasurer of state to establish the Ohio State Government Expenditure Database, which he co-sponsored with Rep. Mike Dovilla (R-Berea).

Dever is also eyeing foreclosure law reform, saying he wants to fix the laws in a way that not only protects creditors and investors but also allows people to keep their homes, which he says is the American dream. He says there needs to be due process that is fair and doesn't cost so much that a person can't afford to fight to keep their home.

Other priorities include prison reform, especially for those who have addiction issues, and improving the business climate so small entrepreneurs can get an idea to market without too many barriers. He also would like businesses to be able to hire and add layers without too many compliance headaches, while at the same time balancing the rights of employees.

Dever says he intends for all 10 bills to be introduced by the end of this General Assembly.

"All good projects take time. I don't like the idea that things happen quickly. It's not necessarily a good thing because someone didn't get a say," he says.



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Tim Ginter**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 59

**Occupation:** Pastor, Church at the Center in Salem

**Education:** Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs, CO, and Mount Vernon Nazarene

University in Ohio

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Rep. Nick Barborak (D-Lisbon) in the November election to win the 5th District House seat

**Personal:** Married, one daughter, three grandchildren

**Spouse's name:** Pam

**Website:** <http://www.ginterforohio.com>

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/electtinginter>

**Twitter:** @electtinginter

After three decades in the ministry, Tim Ginter saw a legislative seat as a logical step in fulfilling his desire to serve people.

"There are many issues that as a pastor, as a minister, you deal with. You deal with social issues, you deal with the very practical needs of families, day-to-day needs, not just issues of the soul but issues of the body -- economic issues and financial issues and the other various stresses that affect families," said the new representative for House District 5. "So I see this as an opportunity to serve them in a somewhat different role but nevertheless serve them in a capacity that I can affect positively families and the lives of people in my hometown and in my district."

"Serving God and serving people, I see those as one and the same," he said.

Ginter has been a minister for 34 years and leads the Church at the Center in his hometown of Salem. He hopes to keep his leadership role at the church while serving in the General Assembly.

"We're making some adjustments in our church to see if we can make that happen," he said.

Ginter was in pre-med studies in Colorado, aiming to become a general surgeon, when he felt a call to the ministry. "I felt a very strong direction," he said.

Aside from service as a pastor, he's worked in construction and manufacturing and as development director of an IT business that offered training software. He interacted with state government in that role, representing the company in meetings in Columbus and Pennsylvania.

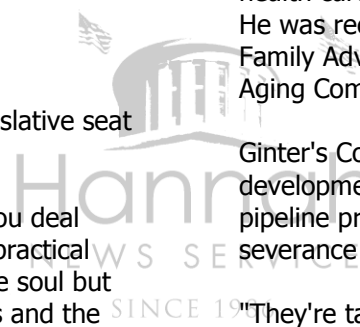
Ginter says his policy priorities include serving the elderly, lowering health care costs, energy and fighting the wave of drug addiction. He was recently named vice chairman of the new Community and Family Advancement Committee and as a member of the Health and Aging Committee and Public Utilities Committee.

Ginter's Columbiana County district is on the edge of the shale gas development region, with some well pads operating and a large pipeline project in development. He describes his views on the severance tax, likely to be an issue again this session, as "balanced."

"They're taking a resource out of the ground that's irreplaceable. So for us to say something shouldn't be repaid to the state or even to the county I represent, I don't think that's wise. On the other hand, I don't want a tax rate that's so high that it inhibits the development of gas and oil in our county," Ginter said.

For upcoming budget deliberations, Ginter is interested in addressing the Local Government Fund, particularly to assist townships, which is the form of government representing a large majority of Columbiana County residents.

"What happens with the Local Government Fund in this upcoming budget is going to be extremely important and interesting," he said.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Steve Hambley**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 60

**Occupation:** Legislator, professor

**Education:** B.A. in General Studies from Kent State University; Master of Arts in Urban Studies, History of Transportation, Political Science and

Statistical Research Methods from University of Akron (UA); Ph. D in History from UA

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to the 69th House District, defeating Democrat challenger Richard Javorek in the General Election

**Marital status:** Married

**Religion:** Christian

**Birth date:** Aug. 30, 1954

**Website:** <http://www.stevhambley.com>

**Facebook:** <http://on.fb.me/1MjOlNk>

Speaker of the House Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville) won't be the only representative starting out the 131st General Assembly attempting to fill the shoes left by term-limited former House Speaker William Batchelder.

Rep. Steve Hambley (R-Brunswick) said continuing the legacy of Batchelder, who served 38 years in the House including the past four as speaker, was part of the job description when he decided to run for the outgoing leader's seat in the 69th House District.

"I've known Bill since I was in high school ... he's been my political mentor for years," Hambley said of the fellow Medina resident.

"Ultimately, when he decided that he was finally going to be retiring ... it was time for me to step up."

Hambley, who has spent the past 18 years as a Medina County commissioner and the past 20 years as a history professor at Lorain County Community College, will immediately step into the role of

vice chairman of the House Financial Institutions, Housing and Urban Development Committee. He has also been assigned to the Local Government Committee and the Ways and Means Committee.

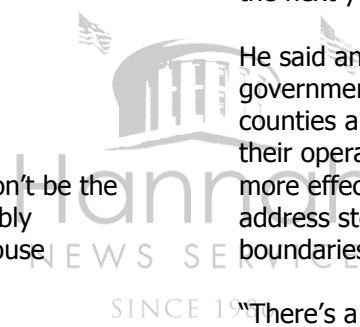
He said he has spent a lot of time considering housing issues, noting he has served as president of the Medina County Housing Network. He said he has been involved in getting local agencies to work together to receive state funding for housing for seniors and people with disabilities. He said he has also been involved in a number of development projects during his tenure as commissioner, noting Medina has experienced much growth during his time in the office.

"Obviously I will provide some experience when it comes to housing and urban development issues that the committee might hear over the next year," Hambley said.

He said another issue he wants to address is giving local governments more flexibility in how they provide services. He said counties and townships are often too restricted on how they can run their operations. He said localities should be able to work together more effectively to, for example, provide for snow removal or address storm-water management issues that may cross county boundaries.

"There's a lot of complication to it, and it really shouldn't be that complicated to fix problems. When you've got flooding going on, a lot of people look to the solution ... not how do you get three or four public entities to cooperate as to whose fault it is. Sometimes there are situations where there is a clear fix, and nobody wants to take responsibility and everybody puts the blame on some other jurisdiction. I've seen that too often over the years," Hambley said.

"We ought to have a lot more options when it comes to the expenditures, and certainly, when it comes to how county government is organized," Hambley continued. "There's a lot to be said in terms of there is a lot of leftover requirements, a lot of mandates for counties that the state imposes. The state ought to be looking at that. ... Every county is different. Every community is





different, and I think changes need to be accomplished to reflect those differences.”

Hambley said he shares the philosophy of Sen. Larry Obhof (R-Medina) when it comes to his legislative agenda, which is, “you go after the singles and the doubles, not the home runs.”

“That’s what I’m going to be interested in. What can I do to help incrementally improve the local and county governments to make them more flexible, meet the needs of the 21st century, and be much more efficient for the taxpayers,” Hambley said.

He said he also agrees with Senate President Keith Faber’s (R-Celina) recent comments calling for a “deregulation” of higher education, adding that K-12 education needs reforms in testing and other areas.

“We have a Common Sense Initiative for the regulation of business. We need a common sense initiative for the regulation of public education. We over-test. There are way too many high-stakes tests. We’ve taken out the joy of learning and the joy of teaching,” Hambley said. He noted there should be more options for local school districts to achieve goals set by the state, including the third grade reading guarantee.

He said he agrees with Gov. John Kasich that the state should be there to help people up, noting he has needed some help from the state personally in the past. He said his late first wife had muscular dystrophy, and worked two jobs and was a councilwoman in Brunswick before she died in 2008. She was in a wheelchair for much of her life.

“We never took welfare, but we did have help from the state. Our first van that she had to take her to work was purchased by the state,” Hambley said. “We bought at least three other vans after that, without state help.

“It’s about the help up, and that’s what we do in public service. We give the help up, because it’s that spirit -- we try to instill that spirit - - and people want to thrive, they want to do better, and they want to help others, and that’s what I learned from my wife.”

He noted he has since remarried and has been with his new wife for four years now.

“God has blessed me twice in my life,” he said.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Stephanie Howse**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 35

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in civil environmental engineering from Florida A&M

University, master's degree in environmental studies from Cleveland State University

**Path to General Assembly:** Won election to the 11th House District seat in November 2014 to succeed then-Rep. Sandra Williams (D-Cleveland), who was term-limited and ran successfully for the Ohio Senate.

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/StephanieHowseOH>

Boosting her constituents' civic engagement and empowering them to advocate effectively at the Statehouse is the top goal for Rep. Stephanie Howse (D-Cleveland), the new occupant of the 11th House District seat.

"When you look at voter turnout, no one is winning," Howse said. "When the overwhelming majority of the people have checked out, we are failing people."

"Success for me is more engagement for people in House District 11. If I cannot get more people involved, then I have failed. That is my litmus test for success," she said. "I need more people, when things are happening, to make sure that they're calling, emailing and setting up meetings with people here in the Legislature, so that they know we exist and our problems are real and we have solutions to the problems, and the people who are making decisions are going to consider what we're putting forth, and that you can act on something."

Howse sat for an interview with *Hannah News* at the height of recent unrest in Baltimore and said the situation there resonated with her.

"This Baltimore thing is so real. Oh my goodness, it's so real. In Cleveland you have the Tamir Rice case," she said. "It's a very unsettling time and I feel like now it's my responsibility ... What can I do to help guide this ship in a way that's helpful and healing and productive and not destructive?"

Howse, who was on Cleveland City Council, said she was hesitant to enter the crowded primary to succeed term-limited Democrat Sandra Williams, who's now in the Senate.

"In looking at the position of a Democrat, you can be intimidated and think 'I'm not really going to be able to make a difference.' But on the other side of that, I think it is a real opportunity ... for me to really work to build relationships so that I can communicate many of the struggles the people in my district face," she said. "Sometimes you really have to weigh the huge responsibility to serve people. It really isn't something to be taken lightly, but after I did that, prayed about it, I said 'Why not?'"

Howse says with the scope of challenges faced by residents she represents in Cleveland, Garfield Heights and Newburgh Heights, she's trying to focus on a few key issues: job growth and opportunity, early childhood education, and general community building.

On the jobs front, she notes her introduction with Rep. Robert McColley (R-Napoleon) of HB145, a STEM pilot that would have students receiving job training while earning high school and college credit simultaneously, so they're career-ready at graduation.

"We have been sending this message of go to college ... go to college ... go to college ... but right now in Cleveland only 17 percent of people have a degree," she said. "We're not talking to the

majority ... Hope for some great things, but you have to be realistic in the here and now."

Howse has worked in education, and she was perplexed initially at encountering high school students who couldn't perform mathematical functions like multiplying by a negative number. That changed when she moved into an elementary setting and discovered most of the kindergartners in her building weren't on a pre-reading level, lacking familiarity with the alphabet and the use of writing implements. Hence her focus on early childhood education.

"One bad year at the beginning for a child is very hard. Two years, it's virtually impossible to catch back up," she said.

As for community building, "It's about regular, every day women and men, when you see a need, say something and help in the way you can."

"What does that look like? ... We will never have as much money as we want to address the problems and challenges of the day, but I'm a big advocate around volunteerism," she said. "We have to be better brothers and sisters, and I'm talking in a holistic manner, of being in service and guiding people."



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Stephen Huffman**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 50

**Occupation:** Physician

**Education:** Earned undergraduate degree from the University of Toledo (UT) and medical degree

from UT School of Medicine

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to the 80<sup>th</sup> House District, defeating Democrat Jonathan James Michalski in the General Election.

**Marital status:** Married

**Religion:** Catholic

**Birth date:** Nov. 14, 1964

**Website:** [www.steviehuffmanforohio.com](http://www.steviehuffmanforohio.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/staterepstevehuffman](http://www.facebook.com/staterepstevehuffman)

The newest representative for the 80<sup>th</sup> House District isn't planning on letting his new job get in the way of his medical missionary work overseas.

Rep. Stephen Huffman (R-Tipp City), who has been an emergency room physician for 18 years, said he will lead his eighth mission trip with high school students to the Central American country of Belize this summer. He said he has done this work with the Catholic Church all over the world, visiting locations such as Saint Lucia, Saint Croix, Saint Thomas, Cameroon and Australia.

"I don't preach. I let my medicine speak for itself," Huffman said, noting those experiences have helped him understand the importance of working to provide care to those who are underserved.

Huffman, who is the cousin of former representative and current Senate candidate Matt Huffman, is putting his experience to work as vice chairman of the House Health and Aging Committee. He said he

will use the position to "make Ohio a better place to practice medicine."

"I don't have any specific law or agenda to push, but when things come before the committee, I want to make sure it is the right thing to do for the practitioner and for the patient," Huffman said.

The former Miami County coroner, who also serves on the House Education Committee and House State Government Committee, said he will employ a politically and strategically conservative approach to legislation.

"I'm a very fiscally conservative person, and I also believe that -- at times -- the best new law is no law at all," Huffman said. He noted he doesn't think any specific laws necessarily need to be repealed, but that he wants to curb regulations that "over-burden" Ohio citizens and businesses.

He said the goal during his first term is to better understand his constituents' needs and learn the process of moving bills efficiently. He said this learning curve might not be as sharp for him as for other freshmen lawmakers, noting his cousin and Rep. Jim Buchy (R-Greenville) have been effective mentors.

"I've understood the process, and have been educated by them on how things work around here," Huffman said. He said his cousin's best advice to him was to "keep an open mind and get along as well as you can with everyone."

Regarding specific policy, he said the General Assembly needs to "take a serious look at" the Common Core state education standards.

"The best people to make the decision about children and their education are in their own specific school district," Huffman said.

He also said Gov. John Kasich's third grade reading guarantee has "caused a great deal of stress among 8-, 9- and 10-year-olds that

should not be there. We need to take a serious look at that to see if that is in the best interest of all involved."

He said he agrees with Senate President Keith Faber's (R-Celina) comments about reigning in the cost of higher education. (See *The Hannah Report*, 1/5/15.)

"We need to look at the state schools to justify those continued increases and seriously look at a reduction in tuition in our state schools," he said.

He said manufacturing and agriculture are the top industries in his district, which includes Southern Darke County and all of Miami County. He said it is important to reduce regulation on manufacturers that "hinders" the industry.

"I would support Ohio becoming a right-to-work state," Huffman said. Right-to-work laws typically prohibit mandatory union membership at workplaces.

Back on the topic of health care, he said Medicaid expansion will likely have unanticipated problems in the near future.

"The one thing that people aren't really talking about is we're going to have an access problem in medicine," Huffman said, noting doctors have taken a "40 percent pay cut" now that Medicaid no longer pays doctors at the same rate as Medicare under the federal Affordable Care Act, or "Obamacare."

"There is going to be an access problem, and people on Medicaid or Obamacare are not going to be able to find a primary care physician to take care of their needs. That is a problem that needs to be addressed going forward."



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Greta Johnson**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 38

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Bachelor's, master's and law degrees from University of Akron

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to

35th House District, defeating Republican challenger Linda Robinson; defeating incumbent Rep. Zack Milkovich (D-Akron) in the May 2014 primary

**Marital status:** Married, two children

**Spouse's name:** Michael

**Birth date:** May 2, 1977

**Website:** [www.gretajohnson.com](http://www.gretajohnson.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/ElectGreta](https://www.facebook.com/ElectGreta)

A career anchored in public service has led one freshman legislator from the Summit County and Akron prosecutor's offices to her new workplace in the Ohio House of Representatives, because "when you can do more, you should do more."

Greta Johnson, the Democrat representing the 35th House District in Summit County, looked to her years of involvement in the public sector and the local relationships she'd made, which propelled her to take the next step. Her commitment to her new fulltime job is fueled by wanting to work for what's best for her constituents in the Northeast Ohio working-class district.

"I feel like my priorities are their priorities," she said. "I want my kids to be able to go to good schools. I have two small children who I want to grow up in this district knowing about it, knowing the gems that are there, even the hidden ones. And I feel like it reflects my family and my values."

Her own family's experience mirrors the lives of her constituents, she says, with a husband who is a third-generation police officer and other union-employee family members.

"I'm a hard worker who wants to do better for my community, and I feel like that's a real theme throughout the district," Johnson said. "I think that my background, my family's background, and my husband and his family are very representative.

"And I think that, or at least I'd like to hope that, when my district looks at me they look at somebody who represents them well -- well-educated, able to make a difference in Columbus and bring that information back to them."

A resident of her district for 15 years and an Akronite for 20, the Democrat represents the area covering Barberton and South Akron, including Kenmore, Goodyear Heights, Ellet and her home of Firestone Park. The blue-collar, working-class area encompasses union and municipal workers, and traditional families seeking to raise their children in respectable school systems.

"These are people who want to work and who want to stay where they are because they love their community and want to make it better," she said.

With tire companies Goodyear and Firestone both headquartered in the 35th, keeping strong relationships with those businesses and maintaining the local economy's job force is a must, Johnson said.

Public safety also tops the area's list of important issues. Public safety and infrastructure go hand in hand in the district, she said, noting recent concerns of flooding. When the city of Barberton saw cuts to its Local Government Fund, she said, the city turned to a local levy to finance resurfacing its streets.

Prepared with a "laundry list" of adjustments she would like to see addressed in the criminal code, legislatively Johnson is planning on "working on what I think are easy changes, things that can be

cleared up rather than dramatic changes. Let's make the small changes that can be done and shouldn't face a whole lot of resistance," she said.

"I want to make sure that while I'm here I also take care of the community, not just my district, but the community I've worked in for so long, which is the criminal justice community."

The 37-year-old Johnson first worked in Mahoning County out of law school before her eight years overseeing felony cases in Summit County as an assistant prosecutor. A change to become the city of Akron's assistant prosecutor and police legal adviser in 2012, Johnson, instead of working with cases behind the scenes, was then advising and working with the police on the front side of investigations.

She is a member of the Akron Crime Clinic, a group made up of police officers, judges, probation officers and others who've been involved in the city's safety. The clinic holds monthly presentations about ongoing issues in the region. Her public service involvement continues with the work-in-progress Akron's Children's Museum, an interactive place for kids to get engaged in the arts and learn about other fields like science and citizenship. Johnson is a board member of the museum that is still in its fundraising and planning stages, but said it will be an opportunity to bring businesses to Akron and improve quality of life in the city and its surroundings. She noted the area boasts a significant arts history.

Johnson said the voice of the 35th District has been rather muffled. Communication will lead her effort to restore some credibility to the position, both in the capital and at home.

"I don't feel that the community really knew their representative. I don't feel that the local leadership really worked together with the representative, and my track record of working with the local leadership in the county will lend itself to really being able to move forward in a positive way," she said.

Years building relationships with county officials and a desire to keep the area's residents in touch with and trustful of their government means Johnson plans to exercise those long-refined connections in order to hear their input before participating in a House vote.

"It's very easy for me to call the mayor of Barberton right now, or the Summit County executive right now, and say, 'This is what's pending. How do you think this is going to directly impact our county or our city?'" she said. "Being able to do that gives me an upper hand; I don't know many other people who can do that. I'm hopeful that other reps have that, but I feel really lucky, and I feel like it's just the right time for me to try and move it forward."

In addition to giving a say to her district, Johnson said she hopes the "bipartisanship landscape" laid out at the beginning of the 131st General Assembly will carry through the session.

"My number one job is to get to know people and to understand the lay of the land and to establish some relationships," she said, "so that we can move forward with the positive work we can do here rather than just talking about what's wrong with what's going on."

Becoming oriented with the process that comes with her new title, Johnson said that overwhelming feeling was eased as she learned about the resources and people available through the Legislative Service Commission and the House itself.

"In my head it felt very much that all of the weight was on me, to draft the bills, to do all of that," she said. "I'm very grateful that this is not something I have to go alone."



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Kyle Koehler**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 53

**Occupation:** Vice president of design and development at K.K. Tool Co. Inc.

**Education:** B.S., Computer Science, Wright State University

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Springfield Democrat Darrell Jackson in the General Election. He replaces term-limited Rep. Ross McGregor

**Marital status:** Married

**Religion:** Christian

**Birth date:** Oct. 5, 1961

**Website:** <http://www.votekylekoehler.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/votekoehler>

**Twitter:** @votekoehler

Rep. Kyle Koehler's (R-Springfield) first electoral defeat didn't discourage him -- it actually played a role in propelling him to a higher office to start his career in public service, the small business executive told *Hannah News*.

He said he actually held the lead at the end of Election Day for the Clark County Commission seat he was pursuing in 2012, but eventually lost to long-serving term-limited former Rep. David Hartley by 259 votes after provisional ballots were counted.

"Nobody thought I would do that well in my first time running," Koehler said. "It prepared me for the [Statehouse] race itself. Also, people began to know who I was, what I stood for. I stand for small business, low taxes, small government -- letting businesses create the jobs that we so desperately need. When I started talking about that, people responded."

The people of the 79<sup>th</sup> District, which comprises most of Clark County including the city of Springfield, responded in 2014 by

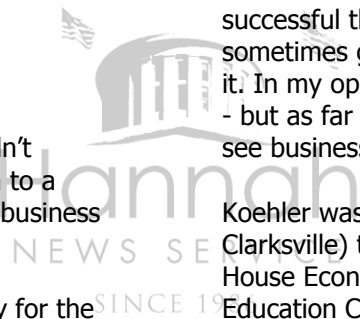
electing him with more than 60 percent of the vote over Clark County Sherriff's Deputy Darrell Jackson. The district leans Democratic, voting in favor of President Barack Obama 50 percent to 47 percent in 2012.

Koehler is vice president of design and development for his family business, K.K. Tool Co. Inc. He said the manufacturing company is involved in tool and dye work for the trucking and appliance industry, as well as production machining. He said his personal work in small business helped draw him to public service, because he wants to help others achieve the same success.

"I don't think there's anybody that gets into business to ... create jobs. That's what they do when they're successful. They usually start a business so they can provide for their family, but when they're successful they invite other people to join in," he said. "Government sometimes gets in the way of that, and thinks they're the catalyst for it. In my opinion they provide the infrastructure -- roads, fire safety - - but as far as creating the jobs, that's what the people do. I want to see businesses flourish, grow and create the jobs we need in Ohio."

Koehler was appointed by House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville) to serve on the House Commerce and Labor Committee, House Economic and Workforce Development Committee and House Education Committee. He said he is "excited" to serve on all three committees.

"I think they all relate to moving people ... workforce and economic development is an area where we can create jobs for them whether they want to go to college and get a job or come out of high school and get a job, we want to be able to be a part of helping them move from high school to their eventual career," he said, noting he was the first person in his family to graduate from college. "I understand the benefits of college. But we employ a lot of people ... you can make a good living coming out of college and creating jobs or [alternatively] working for a manufacturing firm like ours. Kids need to know that today. They think, 'I gotta go to college.' Well that's not always the choice that they can or should make. ... We employ some



people who are making a good living, providing for their families ... having an income that allows their children to go to college, something they maybe never thought they could do."

Koehler said he is "not here to create new laws," necessarily.

"Maybe we can improve some of the laws that are out there," he said, noting he will co-sponsor legislation seeking to allow those with a concealed carry permit to have their weapon with them while dropping off children at school. "I'm not looking to pass new laws, I'm looking to get government out of the way."

He said he wants to make sure he is representing not only Republicans, but everybody in his district.

"For the Republicans I'm going to try to send as little of your tax dollars to Columbus as possible. To the Democrats, I'm going to try to bring as much of your tax dollars that we sent over there back. And for the Independents, I'm going to make sure that folks spend your money as judiciously as possible."



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Steven Kraus**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 55

**Occupation:** Legislator, realtor and auctioneer; U.S. Air Force (retired)

**Education:** Associates degree in avionics systems from Community College of the Air Force; bachelor's degree in electronic engineering technology from Troy State University

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated former Rep. Chris Redfern in the November election for the 89th District

**Marital status:** Single

**Religion:** Christian

**Birth date:** July 28, 1959

**Website:** [krausreportingforduty.com](http://krausreportingforduty.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/KrausReportingForDuty](http://www.facebook.com/KrausReportingForDuty)

**Twitter:** @TEAMKRAUS

The man who defeated former state representative and Ohio Democratic Party chairman Chris Redfern has drawn more than the usual amount of attention in his rise to the General Assembly.

Steven Kraus narrowly lost to "Joe the Plumber" Wurzelbacher in the 2012 Republican primary for the 9th Congressional District held by U.S. Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo), followed by a second-place finish that year to the incumbent Democrat in the Erie County Commission race. He finally prevailed last November in a Democratic stronghold against Redfern, who exited the Legislature and the party chairmanship all at the same time.

Kraus, a Tea Party member, had enjoyed strong backing from Ohio Citizens PAC but "little support" from the Ohio Republican Party, the PAC would later say. His election gave the House majority an unexpected victory and those who questioned the Tea Party's future something to think about.





"I think people are tired of the double talk. They want a public servant," says Kraus.

The former Air Force staff sergeant and civil service lieutenant colonel says many Democrats supported him in 2014 after Redfern "stepped on a lot of toes, including people in his own party."

"We're all Ohioans that want to do the right thing," he says. "I'm for good ideas. I don't care where they come from."

Kraus came of age in the armed forces, enlisting at the age of 18 and later signing on as an embedded field engineer in the Government Civil Service, which he left in 1995. A fiscal conservative, he witnessed firsthand the misuse of public tax dollars, he says, listing "corruption in politics" among his lead concerns.

A career as a licensed auctioneer and real estate professional followed his work in national defense, capped by a recent turn as an energy consultant.

"A lot of power plants are being shut down because of the Obama administration's war on fossil fuels," he says, suggesting the long-term impact on one of Ohio's largest natural resources has been over-exaggerated. "Coal will survive."

All the while, Kraus continued to watch the political scene, seeing his latest opportunity in the 89th District.

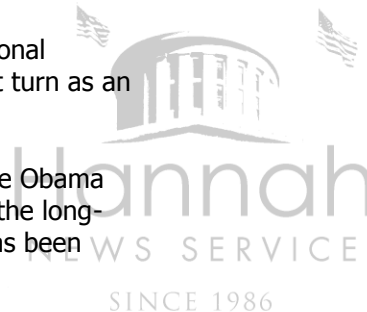
"After much prayer, I decide to run," he says. "I believe God had a hand in this race."

Kraus says unlike some public officials, he won't take a "self-serving" approach to his time in Statehouse.

As for a pending indictment against him for burglary, breaking and entering, and theft, Kraus says he's "innocent." His arrest and the claim he had removed items from a house for auction have been widely reported in the press.

"I'm going to defend myself vigorously in court, and I believe it will all come out in the wash," he says, pointing to some key figures in the local scandal.

"I have never been accused of anything until I became involved in this race," says Kraus.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Christie Bryant Kuhns**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Occupation:** Attorney, Small Business Owner

**Education:** B.S. Psychology, University of Cincinnati; J.D., University of Cincinnati

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated

Republican Bryan McIntosh to succeed term-limited Rep. Dale Malory (D-Cincinnati) in the 32nd House District

**Website:** [www.votechristiebryant.com](http://www.votechristiebryant.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/christiebryantkuhns](http://www.facebook.com/christiebryantkuhns)

**Twitter:** @ChristieKuhns

With a background in business and public sector work, Rep. Christie Bryant Kuhns said her experience will be a good fit in the General Assembly.

Approached by party leaders in Hamilton County to run for an open seat after Rep. Dale Mallory (D-Cincinnati) was term-limited, Kuhns said she reached out to Reps. Alicia Reece (D-Cincinnati) and Denise Driehaus (D-Cincinnati) before deciding to put her hat into the ring.

She has experience working as an attorney for large corporations and as a small business owner. She currently owns Records Requests Ltd.

As the ranking member of the Financial Institutions, Housing, and Urban Development Committee, Kuhns said she has a lot of interest in revitalizing neighborhoods. She said she wants to use small business development to bring back neighborhoods where mom and pop shops have closed up, and said it can be done in a number of ways.

She also advocates for getting work for people who live in poor neighborhoods where public projects are under construction, pointing to the MLK Interchange in Cincinnati. She said some

neighborhoods are facing up to a 40 percent unemployment rate, and said it is unthinkable to see money spent on a large project without giving the chance for employment to those who live in that neighborhood. She calls bills that would bar local governments from having a requirement to hire local residents "problematic," and dismisses arguments that the work will come for those who are truly qualified for those positions.

"When you are looking at unemployment in the high double digits, the organic way of finding employment is not working. It's easy to make that argument here at the Statehouse. It's a little bit different to make that argument standing in that neighborhood and looking into the faces of people who haven't worked who are looking and are not finding anything and saying 'We know this project could be an opportunity for you but we feel like there are other ways for you to find work,'" she said.

Kuhns said some neighborhoods also suffer from issues such as lack of access to healthy foods, recreation and parks, and good health care. And some of those issues are so bad, she argues, that it is seeping into surrounding areas.

She said she was working on legislation that would incentivize grocers to open stores in "food deserts" where it is more difficult to find stores that offer healthy food, but said she found out that a provision addressing the issue had been put into HB64 (R. Smith). Kuhns said she now advocates for the Senate to keep the provision in the House-passed version of the budget.

Kuhns also said she believes there needs to be more done to let businesses know about existing economic development programs that will help them start businesses in these neighborhoods.

A member of the House Health and Aging Committee, Kuhns said she wants not just access to health care, but that it should be quality health care. She said the reimbursement rate should be examined to encourage more doctors to serve underserved areas, noting a

person on a public assistance program on Medicaid should not be forced to go to just the few that accept those patients.

Quality health care and infant mortality has become a personal issue for her. Earlier this year, she gave birth to her son, Kai. She said she wants to make sure women have access to the quality care she had through private insurance.

The start of her family has Kuhns also examining the issue of paid maternity leave. She said she has been looking to what other states and other countries are doing, and said she doesn't think it would be a burden when many major corporations already offer the benefit. She said there would likely be exceptions for businesses that could not afford it or that are too small, or suggested public funding could be used to help offset the cost.

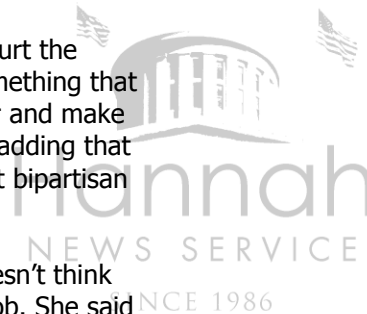
"I definitely don't want to introduce something that will hurt the business community. That's why I haven't introduced something that would be just a statement bill where I get up on the floor and make a speech but I don't think it will go anywhere," she said, adding that if it is something she truly believes in, she will seek to get bipartisan support.

With maternity leave earlier this year, Kuhns said she doesn't think she has missed too much in her first few months in the job. She said she kept in touch with her aide, even while in labor, and her committees only recently began to hear a full schedule of bills.

The harder transition, she said, is being away from her son while in Columbus, making it through the day through pictures and videos sent from her husband.

Kuhns said her biggest goal is to improve constituent services, noting on the campaign trail she would often run into residents who did not know what a state representative does. She said she is reaching out to the government entities in the district and plans to hold regular office hours in the district.

In the end she said she wants all of her constituents, even those that may not have voted for her, to feel that she is representing them in Columbus.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Sarah LaTourette**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 32

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** B.A. from Miami University in political science and history

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Linda O'Brien in the 76<sup>th</sup> House District primary and Democrat Joseph Lanese in the General Election

**Marital status:** Married

**Birth date:** May 25, 1983

**Website:** [www.sarahlatourette.com](http://www.sarahlatourette.com)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/LaTouretteforOhio>

**Twitter:** @LaTourette4Ohio

Even though this freshman legislator initially thought politics wasn't her "cup of tea" after working for the Lake County Republican Party right out of college, she finds herself following in her father's footsteps to the Statehouse.

Rep. Sarah LaTourette (R-Bainbridge), daughter of former Congressman and state Rep. Steve LaTourette, said her dad was skeptical when she first told him she wanted to run for the seat in the 76<sup>th</sup> House District, which covers parts of Geauga and Portage counties.

"When I first called him and told him ... his response was, 'What are you crazy? Have you not been paying attention for the past two decades?'" she said. "He's much more moderate than I am, and so he was really getting it from both sides and wasn't getting anything done, so he thought I was absolutely insane."

However, she said he was "very supportive and very helpful" in her run to take the seat, which was previously held by former Rep. Matt Lynch, who opted not to run for re-election and instead lost a

primary bid for Congress against U.S. Rep. Dave Joyce (R-Twinsburg).

She said her passion for the nonprofit sector was a major contributing factor in her decision to run for the seat, which is her first elected office. She has worked for Adoption Network Cleveland and nonprofits dedicated to supporting rescue animals and those with Parkinson's disease.

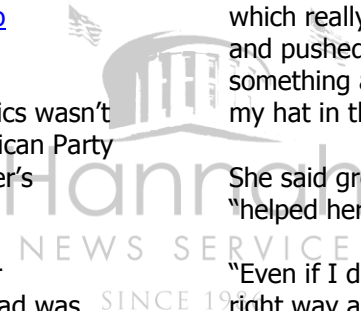
"More than anything, I looked at it just as a better way to serve my community on a much larger scale," LaTourette said of the office. "That's really what pushed me to run. ... Adoption Network Cleveland helped move some legislation through last year that helped open up birth certificates for people who were adopted between 1964 and 1996, and at the end of the day my representative voted against it -- which really made me start paying attention and looking into things, and pushed me over the edge -- realizing, 'Hey I could have done something about this,' had I just had a voice. So I decided to throw my hat in the ring and I'm not regretting it yet."

She said growing up in politics and working for a local party has "helped her realize there is a process for a reason."

"Even if I don't always agree with the leadership, I know there is a right way and a wrong way to go about showing my disagreement. The temperament is what I really learned from working in politics. It's great to have strong beliefs and to push for them, but a lot of it is in the approach," LaTourette said. "Whether or not you agree with the system you have to work within the system. ... I don't think everyone has learned that yet."

She said working in nonprofits has "opened her eyes" in a variety of ways.

"I think it's really easy, particularly as a Republican, to say, 'We need to cut funding, we need to make sure to reduce spending here, we need to cut this program,'" LaTourette said. "But when you're working with people that are most affected by that every day, I think



you look at it a little bit differently. So when I go to cast a vote to cut funding for a certain program, it's something I'm going to take very seriously and make sure there are no other options on the table first. I do think we need to spend responsibly and live within our means, but I've seen some of the people most affected by funding cuts, and that's something I plan on taking with me to the floor."

LaTourette was recently named by House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville) to the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, House Health and Aging Committee and House State Government Committee. She said the appointment most important to her was being on the agriculture committee, as she lives in a rural district.

"I think that's where I'm going to be able to make the biggest impact for my district," she said. "Farming is definitely our biggest industry. ... [The district] is a very small town, very rural, very agricultural ... conservative district."

She said her appointment to the health committee is also important to her, because she would like to address the heroin problem in her district.

However, she anticipates doing a fair amount of "listening" in her first year in the General Assembly.

"I know a lot of people have different approaches -- some people will come in and introduce a bunch of legislation right off the bat -- I intend to be a little bit more thoughtful about it," LaTourette said. "I intend to learn the process, the procedure -- make sure I understand to the best of my ability so when I do go in and introduce something it has its best shot at moving forward. For the first year, I'll cosponsor legislation here and there. ... I plan on meeting with people who have been here much longer than I have to just get some input on how to move forward with things."

She said one situation she may have to address legislatively right away, however, is four school districts in her area that are

potentially seeking to consolidate. Also, she said many people in her district are "up in arms" about septic regulations being enforced by the Ohio Department of Health, so she may have to address that soon as well.

She said she wants to make sure her constituents are being heard this legislative session.

"I think that's been their biggest concern. A lot of people don't feel like they have a voice, that they've been heard, that they've even had a chance to express their opinion," LaTourette said. "At the end of the day, I'm not going to agree with them all the time on everything, but I want them to feel like they were heard."





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **David Leland**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 61

**Occupation:** Partner, Carpenter Lipps & Leland law firm

**Education:** Bachelor's Degree, Ohio State University; J.D., Capital University Law School

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Republican Andrew Hall to win the 22<sup>nd</sup> House District, succeeding Rep. John Carney, who ran for state auditor.

**Birth date:** Sept. 18, 1953

**Website:** <http://friendsofdavidleland.com>

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/DavidLelandForStateRepresentative](http://www.facebook.com/DavidLelandForStateRepresentative)

**Twitter:** @repdavidleland

Rep. David Leland (D-Columbus) said he may have the second longest tenure between terms in the General Assembly.

Leland first served in the Ohio House in the 1980s, and with an open seat for the 22<sup>nd</sup> House District after Rep. John Carney chose to run for state auditor, Leland said he decided it was a good time in his life to return.

Coming back to the institution has been a blast for him so far.

"I'm having a great time. I love getting up in the morning and saying what are we going to do today to help the district and the people of the state of Ohio. And I can't wait to get started. I feel like I'm 20 years younger," Leland said.

He said he has a passion to try to get things done, and he felt he could either sit on the sidelines and say, "this is the way things ought to be," or "suit up, and get into the game yourself."

"Because I had all the passion about my community and the process, I decided to get in the game," he said.

Leland said many view the Legislature as the first step in their political career, but it is not for him. His political career includes four terms as the chairman of the Ohio Democratic Party, as finance chair for Gov. Ted Strickland's 2006 gubernatorial campaign and as president of the Strickland-Fisher Inaugural Committee. He said now it is just an opportunity to serve the people of his district and to make an impact on issues he cares about.

Much has changed since his first term in office. Leland said the offices are better, noting the Vern Riffe Center did not exist the first time he was in the House. He also said that changes in the ethics laws made the process better, with rules allowing lawmakers to focus on the idea or merits of an issue rather than what can be done for them personally.

"I just think it was a distraction, you were focusing on the wrong things," Leland said of the climate during his first term. "I still think being a lobbyist is an honorable profession and can be a valuable asset for the members of the General Assembly, but they do that so they can present a strong argument because they provide good information. That's more front and center now because of rules and regulations."

He said he is already working on legislation that would make it easier for police and code enforcement officers to shut down facilities and properties that are causing problems or are unsafe. He said right now, law enforcement and code enforcement officers can use the nuisance law to go to court and shut down an establishment for violations such as selling alcohol to underage patrons, prostitution and selling drugs, but violence is not included in that. He said the bill would amend the nuisance law to include that.

He said he also wants to help the constituents in his district, noting that there are many things that can be done to help the community that doesn't always involve legislation.

On bigger issues, Leland said he is concerned about Gov. John Kasich's budget and the proposed tax cuts that he said are going to the wrong people.

"I think it is exactly backwards of what we need to do in the state of Ohio. In order to produce jobs in the state of Ohio, we need to put more money in the hands of working middle class families working on byproduct services from companies," he said.

Leland said it's a question of which economic policy will stimulate the state's economy. He said income tax cuts have been tried, but now other things like a sales tax cut should be tried instead.

He also said he is going to look for every opportunity to reduce Ohio's carbon footprint, calling climate change "the moral issue of our generation."

"I think 50 years from now people will look back at all of us and say what did you do or what didn't you do when confronted with this crisis," he said. He said it may just be a matter of using his position in the Legislature as a bully pulpit, but there may legislative opportunities to reduce Ohio's carbon footprint.

He knows he is coming into one of the smallest minorities in decades, but said he is encouraged that Republicans have been willing to work with Democrats on issues. He added that one never knows when there might be an opportunity to make an incremental change.

"That's what I'm really looking for, an incremental change. I'm not trying to change the world. I may have wanted to do that when I was 28, the first time I was here, but now it's all about incremental changes and can we make incremental changes that benefit people," Leland said. "I think both Democrats and Republicans at the end of the day want to do that. We may have different views on how to get there, but everyone comes to this job with the goal of making their community better. We just have to figure out what the common ground is to make that happen."



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Michele Lepore-Hagan**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 60

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Ohio University, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance; studied at Youngstown State University and American University

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to 58th House District after running unopposed, succeeding term-limited Rep. Bob Hagan (D-Youngstown).

**Marital status:** Married

**Spouse's name:** Robert Hagan

**Religion:** Catholic

**Birth date:** April 4, 1955

**Website:** [www.micheleleporehagan.com](http://www.micheleleporehagan.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/micheleleporehaganforstaterep](https://www.facebook.com/micheleleporehaganforstaterep)

**Twitter:** @mleporehagan

Michele Lepore-Hagan has energy.

Energy for her district, the 58th Ohio House seat in Mahoning County that's seeing high-tech industries on the rise. Energy for her priorities to advance women, children and public education, using her own woman's perspective in the House of Representatives. Energy for her new fulltime commitment to represent and fight for the wellbeing of her hometown.

The representative, who secured her seat after winning the primary race against four others, follows her term-limited husband, former Rep. Bob Hagan (D-Youngstown), after an unopposed General Election race to the Statehouse. She says she wants to continue his work in the district and bring her own passions to the area.

One of those passions is the arts. Lepore-Hagan's background includes studying modern dance at Ohio University, and serving as

the director of Youngstown State University's (YSU) Performing Arts Series from 2001 through last year. The Youngstown Democrat says she grew up "in a world of artists," with two brothers who also were modern dancers and her sister, Nanette Lepore, who's a fashion designer in New York. Her father is an abstract painter; her late mother was an educator.

"I think that having parents that were involved in the community and involved in the arts just sort of encouraged us to always color outside the lines and think outside the box," she says.

With an understanding of her district and the Legislature from her own political activism and years as a spouse during her husband's time in the General Assembly, she says the Statehouse made for a "natural fit."

"And it is the citizens' Legislature, and I think that we need people from all walks of life. And having a strong arts background is an asset -- and being a mother and a working woman and understanding what women go through in the workforce, too."

She's worked with community and nonprofit organizations, such as the Youngstown Area Arts Council and Ballet Western Reserve, and notes how the arts contribute to a cultural vibrancy. "I really believe that in order to have a complete community, you need to really support the arts and the cultural aspects of your community," she says.

Lepore-Hagan's district covers the northeast part of Mahoning County, including Youngstown, Austintown, Campbell and Struthers City. The area is a budding scene for high-tech industries like additive manufacturing, or 3D printing, which she says will be a concentration of hers. The district is also home to YSU, a General Motors assembly plant and America Makes, a manufacturing innovation institute that trains workers in 3D printing technologies.

"It's a blue collar district," she says. "It was a thriving industrial area, then it went into the Rust Belt, and now it's an emerging high-tech belt area. It's having a renaissance."

On the other side, Lepore-Hagan says the average income of the 58th District is about \$25,000, and 36 percent of the people are unemployed. Youngstown ranks second highest in childhood poverty in the nation of communities with more than 65,000 residents, just behind Flint, MI.

"We need the rest of the state to understand that this area at one time was a thriving industrial area that carried a lot of the state. And now we need help," she says. "And that I think is my duty here, in the Legislature, to make sure that I let the other legislators know and the other people across the state of Ohio that we need some help now in our district."

Her appointment to the newly formed Community and Family Advancement Committee, she says, will be good for her community because of other key issues in the region like a lack of family planning resources, and high teenage pregnancy and infant mortality rates. "I'm anxious to learn and see what we can do."

"As a ranking member of the Commerce and Labor Committee," she says, "I want to make sure that we protect collective bargaining, and I'll fight against any effort to make Ohio a right-to-work state. I really want our working families' wages to catch up with the cost of living because we seem to have more cuts to the Local Government [Fund], which just affect middle class and poor families."

Those cuts disadvantage local security, police and fire, and the roads, she says, and she is looking to restore the funding. "We really need more of the Local Government Fund to help us, because we are crumbling," she says, noting large potholes and poor infrastructure in the district. She is a new member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

She also holds an interest in working with Sen. Joe Schiavoni (D-Austintown) on transparency with charter schools, and says with her



husband, Bob Hagan, a newly elected Ohio State Board of Education member, she wants to partner on public school issues to remedy the academically distressed Youngstown City Schools.

"My mother was a kindergarten teacher and my father was a professor at the university, which is both extreme ends of the spectrum," she says. "They both at one point were teachers at the Youngstown City Schools, so I have a really connection to the Youngstown City Schools and to education because I was raised by educators."

Lepore-Hagan says she met her husband when he was working as a locomotive engineer and running for the House. They were married between the primary and general election in 1986.

"I fell in love with him, and with the district and with campaigning. I felt that I had for 28 years been a part of this political process, and when we were looking at term limits -- he was facing term limits -- I just wanted to continue a lot of the good work he had started. I'm just as passionate about the issues as my husband is. And I think it's important to have more women in the Ohio House.

"I never really thought that I would run for office, but I was really encouraged by the women that were my husband's colleagues in the House," she says. "And by women that were members that were part of [political action committee] EMILY's List, encouraging women to become involved and try to make a difference and speak in the Legislature with a woman's perspective, a woman's voice."

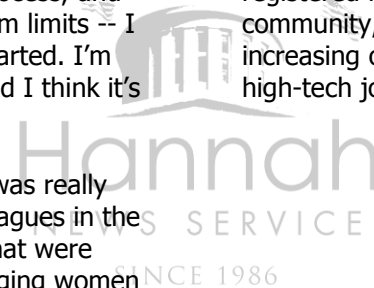
Her appointment to serve on the Health and Aging Committee may help to offer that voice.

"I know there have been definite attacks on women's health issues," she says. "I want to uphold the law of the land and I want to make sure that women have the right to make decisions about health issues that affect their bodies, and I want to make sure I fight against that -- against other people deciding what we should do with our own bodies."

Lepore-Hagan resigned at the end of 2014 as director of YSU's Performing Arts Series, after the university decided not to keep her in the leadership role because of her new legislator position. "We had an agreement and they changed their minds, and I understand that," she says. "I'm excited to be a fulltime legislator, and there's a lot that I can do and there's a lot I need to do as a legislator."

She was also the theater manager in YSU's College of Fine and Performing Arts for many years. The Democrat says the state needs to restore funding cuts to higher education, of which art programs are often one of the first categories to go.

"I will miss the students, because I know how hard they work, especially at a school like Youngstown State University," she says. "I had student employees that had two other jobs besides being a registered fulltime student. So I know it's a hard-working community, and I think we need to help our higher education by increasing our funds ... to help create a better workforce for our high-tech jobs and enhance our communities through education."





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Nathan Manning**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 33

**Occupation:** Legislator, attorney

**Education:** BA in political science, Denison University; J.D., Capital University

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Democrat Brendan Mackin to succeed term-limited Rep. Matt Lundy (D-Elyria) in the 55th House District

**Marital status:** Married

**Spouse's name:** Jennifer

**Birth date:** Jan. 13, 1982

**Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/nathanmanningforstaterrepresentative](http://www.facebook.com/nathanmanningforstaterrepresentative)

**Twitter:** @Manning\_Nathan

A former prosecuting attorney for North Ridgeville in the 55th House District has a job in Columbus, just like that area's state senator, Gayle Manning, who happens to be his mother.

He's also the co-sponsor of the 131st General Assembly's first House bill that proposes establishing a workforce grant program, promoting education along with job training. Helping small businesses tops his legislative agenda as an owner of a family law firm and a few real-estate ventures.

Rep. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) has co-sponsored HB1 with Rep. Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) to create a grant program that would give the recipient an income tax credit of 25 percent of the student loan payments he or she makes each year. It combines education, jobs and small business, he says.

"It's education-based, and it's also workforce development- and small business-based, where these students can go through the process of schooling, get some help with it, the businesses can get

involved and they get some actual practical experience," Manning says. "And we get to keep the kids in Ohio, in the area, rather than getting the education going somewhere else.

"These businesses can actually get their employees trained, and then the students don't have to pay as much for their college or for their training, and they also get a tax credit at the end."

Manning serves the constituents of Lorain County, which encompasses a diverse cross-section of rural, urban and suburban communities, contributing to the area's uniqueness in a compact district, he says. Covering Avon Lake, Elyria and parts of North Ridgeville, Grafton and Eaton, the district has access to downtown Cleveland and Lake Erie, with "typical Northeast Ohio industry" like manufacturing, health care services and a Ford plant.

The lawmaker, 33, flipped his district seat to Republican in a race he wasn't always expecting to run. He's seen both of his parents in the General Assembly; his father, the late Jeff Manning, was a former state representative in the early 2000s, and Gayle Manning won her race this past fall as the incumbent for the 13th Senate District.

"When I went back to my hometown and opened up a [law] practice with my sister, it wasn't necessarily a goal of mine, but something I always aspired to, something I always respected," he says. "When the opportunity presented itself with an open seat, I thought it'd be a good fit for me."

Manning calls himself more of an introvert, but says his listening skills and law background can serve him well. "If someone met me, they wouldn't say, 'Oh he should run for office,' necessarily. And my dad was. He was more of an outgoing type of person," he says.

"Him guiding me in that direction gave me the confidence. Just because I have a different personality than maybe what you might think a typical politician is, doesn't mean that I can't do a good job and bring a different perspective to the House."

While Manning earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Denison University in Granville, his college's proximity to the Statehouse during the time his father served in the House let Manning see him in action. With his parents' experience on Capitol Square, including his father's involvement in local politics for many years, Manning notes he's more prepared, and that he and his mother can reach out to each other to collaborate on different issues.

"It gives me somebody I can rely on, an ally down here that I know I can certainly 100 percent trust. She's been down here four years. She can point me in the right direction."

His family is made up of educators -- his mother is a retired teacher and his wife, aunt and sister-in-law are teachers, too -- making it a passion to advocate for them, he says, which he can show in his work on the House Education Committee.

With his sister, he owns Manning and Manning Attorneys at Law, which they started in 2007 during the economic downturn and a poor business climate. "It was a struggle to learn how to manage a business and try to learn how to practice law at the same time. But it was a good experience and we're still going," he says.

He's served as a defense attorney, a prosecuting attorney for the city of North Ridgeville, and works in a variety of areas for his private practice, all which he notes will benefit him as the vice chair of the House Judiciary Committee.

"I think my experience can really help me here, because there are so many different issues that are going on at the Statehouse that a lot of times you spend a lot of time educating yourself," he says. "But it's nice when you already know the issues and you can just try to fix it rather than going through the process of obviously educating yourself and then trying to do the right thing."

That puts him in a position to work to change some smaller things, like portions of the criminal code that he says need to be updated or

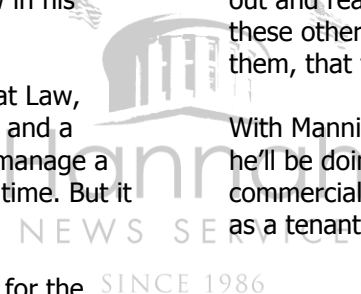
areas that weren't thought out how they'd turn out in practice when they were first put into writing.

As a prosecutor, he liked the legal aspect. "But the best part about it was either helping people, whether it was the defendant trying to get their life back on track, or whether it was the victim trying to make sure that this wouldn't happen to them again."

About five years ago, Manning and a friend in real estate went to an auction in downtown Elyria. He bid the minimum on a commercial building, thinking it might be a good deal. What came of it, he says, is a fun side job to his law practice that bolsters his business knowledge.

"Not only being a small business owner in the sense of renting things out and real estate business, but having the store fronts, you see all these other small businesses, what's helping them, what's hurting them, that type of thing," he notes.

With Manning's committee appointment to public utilities, he says he'll be doing a lot of learning but has some experience with his commercial and residential property management, as a landlord and as a tenant.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Robert McColley**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 30

**Occupation:** Legislator, attorney

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in business and finance, Ohio State University; J.D., University of

Toledo College of Law

**Path to General Assembly:** Won election to the 81<sup>st</sup> District in November 2014, succeeding term-limited Rep. Lynn Wachtmann (R-Napoleon)

**Religion:** Lutheran

**Birth date:** Oct. 14, 1984

**Website:** [www.mccolleyforOhio.com](http://www.mccolleyforOhio.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/McColley4Ohio](http://www.facebook.com/McColley4Ohio)

**Twitter:** @Rob\_McColley

The 81<sup>st</sup> District's new representative hopes his economic development experience in the trenches of northwest Ohio will aid the Kasich administration's dual focus on workforce expansion and business attraction through ongoing tax reforms.

Rep. Robert McColley's (R-Napoleon) work as economic development director for the public-private Henry County Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) is not unlike the mission of the nonprofit JobsOhio, and the attorney says he is well acquainted with the job skill and life skill issues faced by many existing and potential Ohio companies looking for qualified workers.

"Instead of waiting for something to come down from Columbus, we decided to take things into our own hands locally," he says of the CIC.

A creature of Ohio Revised Code 1724.1-11, the "quasi-public, quasi-private" corporation is run by a board that includes county, municipal, township and school district officers and private members

nominated by CIC subscribers and appointed by the board. It eventually turned to the challenging topic of workforce development.

"We had a meeting in May of 2013 and said let's stop pointing fingers and start finding solutions," says McColley, who believes a CIC is uniquely situated to accomplish public policy goals.

"It can perform some functions of a public agency, but it's a little more flexible than you would be under a township, municipality or county. It's a little easier to do some things not subject to public record laws until a project is finished," he says, explaining a fundamental reason why local companies became willing to participate in a new mentorship and college credit program.

"Businesses could not find enough skilled labor that could pass a drug test and show up at their facility," according to McColley.

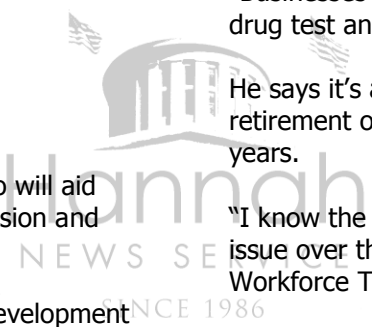
He says it's a problem further exacerbated by the projected retirement of 40 percent of his district's labor force over the next 10 years.

"I know the governor has been taking great strides to address this issue over the last few years," he says of the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and Executive Workforce Board.

The CIC's work is complicated, however, by that fact that neighboring Indiana and Michigan have something Ohio can't offer companies wishing to locate near the turnpike, McColley says.

"I'm the only district in the state that borders two right-to-work states," he says, describing the mindset of many growing businesses he has dealt with: "We don't care whether it's Ohio, Michigan or Indiana -- let's just see where the best fit would be."

He says his district has lost out to Michigan and Indiana on more than one occasion, but doesn't anticipate a right-to-work bill any time soon.



"I think the governor has been clear that he doesn't want any of that to happen, whether its public sector or private sector," McColley observes, though he thinks many Republicans are ready to vote for right-to-work legislation.

He supports the governor's push for additional tax cuts -- another way to make the state more business-friendly, says McColley.

"For inspiration that Ohio can do better, one needs to look no further than our neighbor to the west," he says.

McColley also shares his predecessor's, pro-life support for heartbeat legislation, one of several issues that won him 70.4 percent of the 81<sup>st</sup> District vote in the November election.



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Michael O'Brien**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 59

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Bachelor's Degree from Youngstown State University

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to the 64<sup>th</sup> House District, defeating Green Party Candidate Elaine Mastromatteo and Republican Randy Law in the General Election.

**Birth date:** June 18, 1955

**Facebook:** <http://www.facebook.com/electmichaelobrien>

After serving nearly 30 years in local government, the new O'Brien in the General Assembly said his move to Columbus has been a "natural progression."

"It's all about public service and assisting the person next door," Rep. Michael O'Brien (D-Warren) said from his desk in the Vern Riffe State Office Tower. "I've done that my whole life, and this is just another extension of that."

The lawmaker -- not to be confused with unrelated Rep. Sean O'Brien (D-Hubbard), who represents the other part of Trumbull County (they still call each other "cuz," he said) -- was a Warren city councilman for 10 years, a Trumbull County commissioner for 10 years, and most recently mayor of Warren from 2005 to 2012. He said his mother was the first woman elected to city council in Warren, his father was a firefighter, and his siblings are school teachers.

"Public service runs through our family," O'Brien said. "At the dinner table when families talk about their businesses, our family talks politics."



He acknowledged it will be more difficult to enact his desired policies in the Statehouse, citing his position as a freshman legislator in a sizable minority.

"As mayor, if I wanted something done I'd direct the departments to do it, and as commissioner, I would convince one or two other commissioners that this is what we need to do," O'Brien said, noting he remains optimistic this General Assembly will address the "key issue" of restoring Local Government Fund (LGF) dollars to counties, cities and townships.

"I see that as a very bipartisan issue, because in my experience in Warren, we used to receive \$2 million of LGF, and that would go directly into the general fund. Ninety-two percent of general fund dollars are spent on police and fire services," O'Brien said. "When you take \$2 million out of the general fund, you're eliminating eight police officers and eight firefighters. Cities are raising taxes only to be where they used to be. You can look at counties throughout Ohio who have three Republican commissioners and Republican mayors -- and they're feeling the same pinch. This is the number one bipartisan issue."

He characterized the loss of funding as a security and health problem, noting the increased pressures felt by law enforcement, firefighters and emergency medical service providers as a result of increased dangerous drug use in the state.

"Crippling safety forces at a time when the heroin epidemic is greater than ever in the history of this country ... now is not the time to be reducing law enforcement budgets," O'Brien said. "Law enforcement is absolutely bipartisan."

He said he is hopeful discussion regarding LGF cuts in the House Finance Committee will resonate into restoration of funding.

O'Brien serves on the Finance Committee, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and the Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee. He is ranking member for the House

Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources.

He said it is a particular "honor" to serve on the Finance Committee and as ranking member on the agriculture subcommittee as a freshman. He said his experience in local government lends itself well to the ongoing budget deliberations.

"The interesting thing about my experience is we don't really need testimony from a mayor. We don't need testimony from a county commissioner. We can just look down to the other end of the table, and I can give the authentic story of how it affects local government," O'Brien said. "But I will bring in the mayor, auditor and commissioners to explain how [the loss of LGF dollars] has crippled local government."

He said crafting budgets that solve problems is a vital function of government and shows where a lawmaker's priorities really are.

"It's important. Problem solving is not just lip service. Your policy and your budgets represent your thoughts -- not just saying what you want to do but doing it through policy decisions and changes in the budget," O'Brien said.



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Jeffrey Rezabek**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 46

**Occupation:** Attorney

**Education:** Bachelor's and law degrees from University of Dayton

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected to 43rd House District, defeating incumbent Rep. Roland Winburn (D-Dayton)

**Marital status:** Single

**Religion:** Catholic

**Birth date:** March 27, 1969

**Website:** [www.voterezabek.com](http://www.voterezabek.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/Rezabek](http://www.facebook.com/Rezabek)

**Twitter:** @voterezabekOH43

The day Jeffrey Rezabek passed the New York Bar exam he got a job offer at a small law firm in Dayton, OH. So he had to take the test again — in what became his permanent home since the early 1990s.

The attorney, originally from Grand Island, NY, is the new Republican face for the 43rd Ohio House District with a legislative philosophy: "See if it's good for the 43rd District, that's my first responsibility. Then is it good for the state of Ohio? Well, great, now let's work on it if those two answers are 'yes.'"

Following the country's economic downturn, Rezabek says his district was inundated with the negative effects of the recession and felt the 43rd had little representation in Columbus trying to address the issues. Wanting to promote business in his area, Rezabek says the district, nestled between interstates 70 and 75, offers a suitable place for logistics centers and transportation. He is directing his attention to working with local leadership "getting the environment right so that we can attract businesses," including small manufacturing companies.

"I think if you bring those manufacturing and logistic industries into the area, again that spurs the economy, that spurs higher employment amongst the small businesses, and that's where we're trying to focus in on," he said.

The district includes the entirety of Preble County and parts of western Montgomery County. What Rezabek calls the 48 and 49 corridor, based around those two state routes, is a spot near Trotwood and Clayton in the district's eastern region that's also suffered with the slump of retail stores, like the area's mall, in the 1990s.

"Years ago it was a booming area, especially on that 49 corridor, and we've lost that edge and we've got to get that edge back to make sure that businesses and families want to move back into our district," he said.

Rezabek, 45, calls his district a "mini Ohio," with suburban, rural and urban regions — it includes one ward of Dayton — all contributing to its economic diversity. The new lawmaker says his constituents are pushing the district to where they hope to see it go.

"The communities are a bunch of great communities, and some of those communities have suffered in last number of years, and they are resilient to say, 'Hey, we want to make our city and our township and our district better; what do we need to do?'"

Rezabek said he's already met with district leaders who are showing motivation as the 131st General Assembly begins. "I think they see that energy from me, and I see that they're excited that I'm representing them up here. And I think that's going to be a great combination."

The representative runs his own Dayton law practice that he began in 2003 focusing on criminal, juvenile, probate and civil law. After earning undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Dayton, Rezabek has been in the Buckeye state to stay since 1993,

calling his current district home since 2007. He was also a substitute magistrate for the Dayton Municipal Court.

"I thought I'd always be a prosecutor because I have that kind of mindset. And I then became a criminal defense attorney," he said, noting he's well known for representing parents and children in juvenile court in the area.

Attorneys should give back to the community and do service, he notes, saying once he saw an ad for a court appointed special advocate, who represents and protects children in juvenile court, he knew that would fit just right.

"I got involved in that and didn't realize that would become such a big part of my practice," he said. "That service is really what spurred me on to do a lot of these additional things." Eager to be out working with families, he says he looks to spending much of his time with his constituents.

Term limits pose as beneficial deadline to Rezabek. He said he's realistic about time restraints a House session can pose, but wants to see what he can accomplish before 2016. It doesn't matter who gets the credit for legislation, as long as the district is improving for its residents.

"I think all political office should be short term because you should have those ideas to come in, better the community, better the environment and making sure that we're moving forward and doing well, then go back to what your regular job was," he said about the model of public service.

"I think it's an important thing about making sure we don't make bad legislation, and we don't just pass bills to justify our positions," he said.

Years in the justice system undoubtedly sparks Rezabek's interest in the House Judiciary Committee. He also notes enthusiasm to possibly work with the economic development and education

committees to make sure kids and young adults are ready to join the workforce, and to ensure decision-making stays local in schools districts. Interest with agricultural and natural resources is a definite, as a large portion of the 43rd District is centered on ag practices, he says, wanting to guarantee he's at the forefront of what's happening in the industry.

There's an innovate spirit around Dayton and the 43rd District, which could play into the region's becoming more advanced in how it protects children and helps families through its services, he said. As a member of the alumni board of trustees for University of Dayton's law school, Rezabek also teaches about giving and encouraging alumni to partner with programs like Toys for Tots in order to show children about the needs of others.

He said he is optimistic for businesses small and large to come into or get ready to move into the district during the next legislative session, and that the district needs to keep demonstrating its worth to those companies.

"Ohio is going in the right direction. It's not there yet, where we need to be. And I think people are excited that once you start that train rolling in the right direction, that we really can get it moving well," Rezabek said. "Just asking for help from the rest of the state to get our area moving -- we want to join that Ohio experience. And I think with the leadership within the district and with me up here [in Columbus], I think we can do a great job in promoting what we are basically setting our goals to be: prosperous and a great place to live."





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Scott Ryan**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 50

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Bachelor of Science in business administration from Miami University

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Democrat

Ann Rader in the General Election

**Marital status:** Married

**Spouse's name:** Shellie

**Religion:** Christian

**Birth date:** April 6, 1965

**Website:** [www.votescottryan.com](http://www.votescottryan.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/votescottryan](http://www.facebook.com/votescottryan)

Seeking to build consensus rather than take hard stances on issues, Rep. Scott Ryan (R-Newark) told *Hannah News* his main goals in the General Assembly will be improving communication and increasing trust in government.

"In my campaign, I wasn't forced to -- and I was very careful not to -- get out there on issues, because I didn't want to divide," Ryan said from his desk in the Vern Riffe State Office Tower. The former Licking County treasurer easily won the heavily Republican 71<sup>st</sup> House District with nearly 67 percent of the vote over Newark Democrat Ann Rader.

"My whole thing is trying to get some consensus and some confidence. ... I've got a unique opportunity here to pull some people together," said Ryan, who noted his experience in the nonprofit sector gives him a "360-degree" perspective on a variety of issues.

"My main goal would be to slightly bump the needle on public confidence in their government," Ryan said. "I think as a general public we tend to say, 'They did this and they did that.' I'd like to

move the needle ever so slightly ... to, 'We did this and we did that.' It is our government and we need to act as such."

Ryan, who serves as vice chair of the House Local Government Committee, said he wants to be a catalyst for better communication among state government and local government and organizations. He said he is developing eight communication "pods" in his district that he described as a "two-way communication tool on issues" such as health care, education, economic development, human services and others.

"I really want to utilize those groups both for input and for helping keep them informed of what's happening in Columbus. This process is very confusing if you're not invested in it every day," Ryan said. "There are about 60 people who have already agreed to serve on these pods, and they all have their circle of influence and relationships. I'm really trying to get a flow of information started that will bump the understanding and hopefully confidence level in what's going on at the Statehouse."

Ryan will have plenty of topics to cover with his constituents, as he serves on the following three committees in addition to his number-two role on the local government panel: House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, House Public Utilities Committee and House Ways and Means Committee.

He said he wants to focus on practical solutions for challenges local governments face on a regular basis.

"My hope is that we can look top to bottom in how we deliver services and do it in the most efficient way," Ryan said, noting he would like to cut down on the finger pointing that often occurs in funding disputes. "The general public looks at it like -- 'I want my road paved. I'm not concerned whether the state does it, county does it, or the township does it.'"

He also talked about his interest in influencing economic and workforce development, noting his experience working for a family

business for 25 years. He said he is interested in keeping the economic "engine running" toward job creation, which also plays a role in funding government services on which many people rely.

Those watching Ryan recently were able to catch a glimpse of where he stands specifically on one piece of legislation dealing with a controversial issue -- HB69 (Hagan-Hood), also known as the "heartbeat bill." Ryan was one of 10 House Republicans to vote against the measure, which would ban abortions after a fetal heartbeat can be detected, which often occurs in the sixth week of pregnancy.



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Kent Smith**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 48

**Occupation:** Legislator, roller derby announcer

**Education:** Miami University bachelor's degree; master's degree in urban studies from Cleveland State University; studied in the Ph.D program for

economic development at Cleveland State

**Path to General Assembly:** Won election in November 2014 for the Eighth District seat to succeed term-limited Rep. Armond Budish (D-Beachwood).

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/kentksmith](http://www.facebook.com/kentksmith)

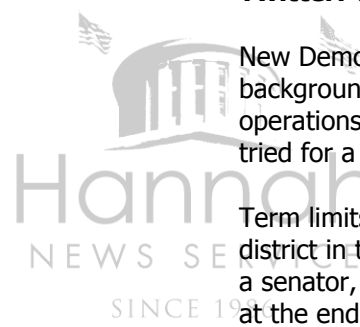
**Twitter:** @KentKSmith

New Democratic lawmaker Kent Smith comes to the job with a background in local government, policy research and campaign operations, but says simple timing was a significant part of why he tried for a seat in the Statehouse.

Term limits sidelined the two men who represented parts of his district in the 129th and 130th General Assemblies. Kenny Yuko, now a senator, left the House in 2012. Armond Budish was term limited at the end of 2014 but and is now Cuyahoga County executive.

"I think I bring a different set of strengths than those two gentlemen, but as a general statement, I think they served the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> District well, and generally speaking I felt like they voted the way I would have wanted them to vote," Smith says.

He moves to state politics after 12 years on the Euclid City Board of Education, where he claimed a perfect attendance record at meetings and served as legislative liaison for most of his tenure. He's also worked at various nonprofits and for the Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office, where he was involved with the interagency task force fighting child pornography and other online crimes targeting children.



The new representative also contributed early policy research on predatory lending and mortgage problems in Ohio. That topic was the focus of his exit project for a master's in urban studies from Cleveland State University, which led to his co-authorship of Policy Matters Ohio's first report on foreclosures.

Smith's background also includes campaign work in other states and involvement in leadership of the Euclid Democratic Club.

Oh, and he's a roller derby announcer for Cleveland's Burning River Rollergirls and the Chicago Outfit. The 2015 Division 2 playoffs for the Women's Flat Track Derby Association are Aug. 21-23 in Cleveland, Smith noted. Gov. Kasich, he says you're invited.

Smith's local schools experience and economic development studies, including work toward a Ph.D. at Cleveland State, give him perspective on the education policy debates he'll face in the General Assembly.

Smith says he'd like to see more consistent, stable funding of education and a more cohesive approach to providing resources for the system from preschool through college.

"Putting on my economic development hat, the quality of our workforce and the adaptability of our future workforce is critically important. And we have to make college education more affordable so that our workforce has the skills that it will need to transition as jobs become more technologically dependent," he says.

He'd like to see the next budget restore funding to local governments.

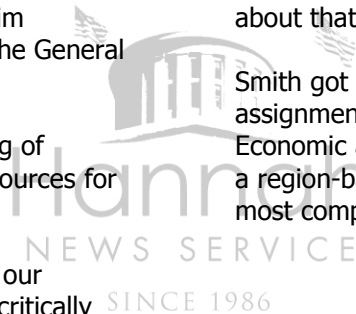
"The state's tax revenue base tends to be a more stable income stream. Cities are subject to a little more fluctuation, so when you remove something stable like the Local Government Fund, or cut it substantially, or remove the inheritance tax revenues ... it forces local governments to rely on some revenue streams that will have more fluctuation," he says.

Smith says he'd like to see upcoming tax reforms go toward making the income tax system more progressive, arguing previous across-the-board cuts that returned the most money to high earners aren't beneficial to many in his district, particularly in struggling East Cleveland.

While acknowledging the barriers posed by serving in the minority, Smith says he was somewhat buoyed about prospects for bipartisanship from his interactions with the governor and fellow lawmakers at new-member orientation, as well as the tone set so far by House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville).

"The unexpected optimism of the new rep and senator orientation -- I found that I really enjoyed some of the folks that have a different initial after their name than mine," he says. "I'm more optimistic about that than the day after I was elected."

Smith got a leadership role in the first wave of committee assignments, landing the ranking minority member's chair for the Economic and Workforce Development Committee. He's interested in a region-based economic development strategy that focuses on the most competitive industries in a given area.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Martin Sweeney**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democratic

**Age:** 51

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in political science from Cleveland State University

**Path to General Assembly:** Elected in November to the 14th District House seat, succeeding term-limited Rep. Mike Foley (D-Cleveland).

**Personal:** Married, four children.

Coming off 18 years on Cleveland City Council, including an eight-year stint as president, Martin Sweeney is hoping his experience can be used to positive effect at the Statehouse.

Sweeney is the new representative for the 14th House District, succeeding term-limited Rep. Mike Foley (D-Cleveland).

Sweeney identifies two primary issues he wants to focus on in the new role: water quality and voter engagement. The former topic is obvious given his hometown.

"Being a Clevelander my whole life and watching lake fronts ebb and flow. ... I don't think there's time to mess around. Something's got to be done, and I'm glad it's that the first thing that the General Assembly is taking up," he says.

The interest in engaging the public stems from a worrisome trend he observed over nearly two decades in local government. Despite representing the same number of people across his council terms, he saw the number showing up to vote drop by nearly half.

"I don't like the trend. Is it because of not-inspiring elected officials? ... How can we improve this trend," he says.

After graduating with a political science degree from Cleveland State University, Sweeney took his first shot at public office with a close loss in a city council race at age 26.

A decade later, after serving as a probation officer and in the municipal court clerk's office, Sweeney says he got another shot from the "Dennis Kucinich domino effect," which caused a city council vacancy. Sweeney says he asked Dale Miller, then on council, to consider him.

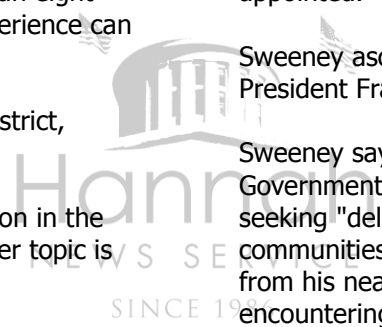
"He had some questions, he did some due diligence on fact checking, and I wasn't his first choice," Sweeney says -- until Miller found out the top contender had missed voting in a few elections, while Sweeney hadn't. "Because of that, that's the only reason I was appointed."

Sweeney ascended to the council presidency in 2006 after then-President Frank Jackson was elected mayor.

Sweeney says he's also interested in addressing cuts to the Local Government Fund under the Kasich administration, and otherwise seeking "deliverables" for Cleveland and the other Cuyahoga County communities he represents. Sweeney knows many of the players from his nearly two decades of local government but is now encountering them in a different role.

"This is the first time I'm actually going to a working session of the city council of Parma Heights and saying, 'I need to know your priorities,'" he says.

"There's not much of a learning curve in regard to the communities I have the privilege of representing right now. Once you have a strong relationship, it makes it much easier to govern," he says.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Emilia Sykes**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 29

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Bachelor’s degree in psychology, Kent State University; law degree and master’s degree in public health, University of Florida

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated Republican Cynthia Blake to succeed term-limited Rep. Vern Sykes (D-Akron) in the 34<sup>th</sup> House District

**Birth date:** Jan. 4, 1986

**Website:** [www.emiliasykes.com](http://www.emiliasykes.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/EmiliaSykes](http://www.facebook.com/EmiliaSykes)

**Twitter:** @EmiliaSykesOH

Though serving in the House is a family tradition, Emilia Sykes says it was not in her plans after she graduated from law school.

She also holds a master’s degree in public health and says it became obvious that the policy side is the best place to influence that area. Coupled with a desire to serve the region where she grew up, and that has been good to her family, Sykes says she felt moved to run for the seat.

Both her father, Vernon Sykes, and her mother, Barbara Sykes, have represented the district for over 30 years, her father most recently wrapping up an second stint in the House before term limits once again have forced him from the chamber.

Emilia Sykes says one of the best parts of having two former lawmakers as parents is the relationships they have formed over the years. Especially with her father's having recently served, Sykes says she has received a warm welcome from fellow legislators with fond things to say about him.

“I have to be thankful that he was a good legislator and a good person too,” she says.

Sykes says she has her own policy areas where she wants to focus. While her father has a background in education and her mother a background in social work, Sykes says she wants to focus her attention on public health.

“It’s very clear we need some policymakers who are understanding of the public’s health,” she says, noting the field considers the whole population and goes beyond just looking at diseases.

Sykes says she is very interested in reproductive and women’s health, and that it is not just a health issue but an economic issue as well. She says the economics of women’s health is something she hopes her colleagues will consider.

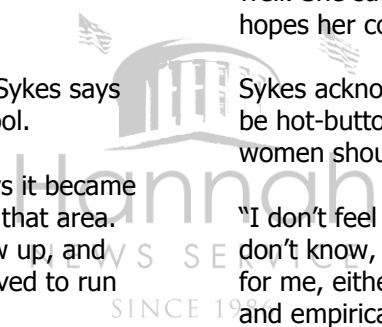
Sykes acknowledges that reproductive and women’s health tend to be hot-button issues, but sees them as personal decisions that women should be able to make for themselves.

“I don’t feel like I’m qualified to make that decision for someone I don’t know, and I don’t think they’re qualified to make that decision for me, either,” Sykes says, adding that there is a lot of information and empirical evidence that policymakers should be leaning on, not what pundits say.

An opponent of the “heartbeat bill,” which bans abortions when a fetal heartbeat can be detected, Sykes says the legislation treats women as though they are not equipped to make the best decision and overall is not good policy.

“Those two things combined should make it a non-factor, but it comes up every year,” Sykes says.

She serves on the Health and Aging, Judiciary, and Ways and Means committees, as well as the Finance Committee, where she is the ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on Health and



Human Services. One issue she expects to debate in that role is the continuation of the Medicaid expansion.

Sykes says she does not care how the General Assembly deals with it, as long as it gets passed, calling it critically important for people who have taken advantage of Medicaid expansion. She disagrees with the argument that the cost of expansion is too high, saying the savings have been astronomical.

Overall, she sees health care as a right, and says it should be a constitutional right in the way that having an attorney in a criminal trial is a right. But she understands there are some who do not share that view.

"If someone doesn't feel it is a right, then it is incumbent upon me not to continue to push that on them or try to make them look at it that it is a right," she says. "I have to be smart and sensitive to that, and look at it from a different angle."

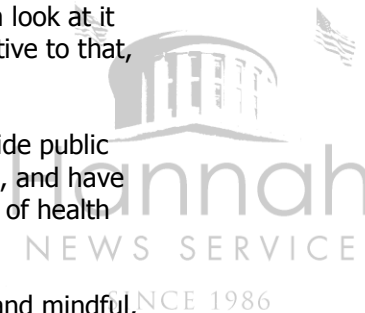
Sykes plans to jump in right away with legislation to provide public health programs that are easy to implement, are low cost, and have significant health outcomes. She says "those are the type of health policies I think people can get behind."

"We don't have a lot of time here. I want to be cautious and mindful, but we don't have a lot of time to waste," she says.

Other issues Sykes is concerned with include charter schools and making Ohio a more attractive place in which younger Ohioans will want to live. She believes her perspective is a little different since she attended school out-of-state, has lived in other areas of the country, and has seen what those states offer young people. She says it is a matter of figuring out what pulls them in. For her, it was her family, but she says that for others who don't have that tug, she wants to understand what would bring them back.

"I hope my presence in the Legislature as a younger person is impactful. I know lots of states are struggling with how we can

maintain and retain young talent in our states," the 29-year-old lawmaker says. "I hope my being here can help in that process."





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Cecil Thomas**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 62

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** University of Cincinnati, associate degree in law enforcement technology

**Path to General Assembly:** Defeated

Republican Charlie Winburn to replace the term-limited Sen. Eric Kearney (D-Cincinnati) in the 9<sup>th</sup> District

**Marital status:** Married

**Religion:** Christian

**Birth date:** Oct. 21, 1952

**Website:** [www.cecilthomas.com](http://www.cecilthomas.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/Thomas4Ohio](http://www.facebook.com/Thomas4Ohio)

**Twitter:** @thomas4ohio

The new senator for Ohio’s 9<sup>th</sup> District hopes his experience of more than three decades with the Cincinnati Police Department and the city’s Human Relations Commission will help the state come to terms with a question facing the nation: Can peace officers and the diverse communities they serve find mutual trust?

Sen. Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati) served the police force for 27 years and the city commission as executive director for five before taking his growing commitment to community advancement to Cincinnati City Council. His efforts at the Human Relations Commission had put the city on the map, bringing local authorities and neighborhood leaders together toward shared goals.

“I immediately began to lobby my colleagues on council to fund the initiative,” Thomas says, eventually forming the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV). He led councilmembers in approving money for a program among at-risk youth and young adults that is now being modeled in the U.S. and abroad.

Six years later, Thomas termed-out of city council in time for a bid to replace former Sen. Eric Kearney (D-Cincinnati), who was also term-limited. First, Thomas had to overcome a fellow city councilmember and well-known local pastor, Charlie Winburn, to keep the 9<sup>th</sup> District in Democratic hands.

Now, he is moving forward with legislation to fund police training in cultural sensitivity, constituent mental health, and “de-escalation” skills.

“Unlike Cincinnati, a lot of our municipalities do not have the resources to address what is considered best practices,” Thomas says.

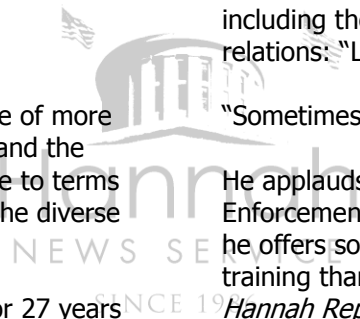
He notes the conventional wisdom embraced by some observers, including those with far less experience in police-community relations: “Let the police officer do his job,” people say.

“Sometimes that is not enough,” says Thomas.

He applauds the work of the newly convened Advisory Group on Law Enforcement Training in the Ohio Attorney General’s Office, though he offers some different thoughts on cadet screening versus cadet training than ones recently shared at the advisory group. (See *The Hannah Report*, 1/23/15.)

“When you do your assessment of officers, there are some who are going to slip through the cracks,” Thomas says of candidates with innate, perhaps unconscious, biases. “There is no clearly identifiable way to weed out those officers. You can’t legislate someone’s heart, but you can legislate their behavior.”

That, in one sense, is the goal of SB23 (Thomas), which seeks to create an Ohio Community-Police Relations Commission that would approve police training courses for compliance with best practices. The bill also would require officers to document the race and gender of detained or ticketed persons, and direct law enforcement agencies to file a report with the attorney general’s office whenever police





action results in death, injury or medical care involving a private citizen.

On other law enforcement and criminal justice issues, Thomas shares the concerns of the Kasich administration and many in the General Assembly regarding collateral sanctions, prison populations and rehabilitation.

"How do we truly begin to address overcrowding in our prison system?" he says, joining those who support more community sanctions and better opportunities for long-term employment.

"Let the time serve them as opposed to letting them serve the time," Thomas says, calling for more training in skilled trades during incarceration. "The whole purpose should be rehabilitation," he says, noting the irony of community reentry for those who are no better equipped when they leave than when they enter prison. "It's kind of like giving them a life sentence when they get out."

On other social issues, Thomas drew the endorsement of Ohio Right to Life in the 2014 election cycle but says he is not inclined to impose legal restrictions on others.

"I've always been pro-life, and I have never backed off of that. I have my opinions, but I try not to impose my personal beliefs with my God on somebody else," he says. "It's up to the individual's conscience."

As for his prospects in a badly outnumbered legislative minority -- an issue raised by his Republican challenger in 2014 -- Thomas says he takes heart from the fact that lawmakers as a whole are interested in Ohioans' "quality of life."

"I'd say 95 percent of the things presented we agree on," he says. "The other 5 percent is where we have to say, 'What can we agree on?'"



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Nino Vitale**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 44

**Occupation:** Manager at family company (wife), Johnson Welded Products, Inc. in Urbana

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Ohio State University; master's in business administration, Franklin University; master's degree studies, Franciscan University

**Path to General Assembly:** Won Republican primary and ran unopposed to replace former Rep. John Adams (R-Sidney), who was term-limited

**Religion:** Roman Catholic

**Birth date:** Aug. 24, 1970

**Website:** [www.votevitale.com](http://www.votevitale.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/nino.vitale.39](http://www.facebook.com/nino.vitale.39)

**Twitter:** @votevitale

One of 50 co-sponsors of "heartbeat" bill HB69 (Hagan-Hood), Rep. Nino Vitale (R-Urbana) says a commitment to traditional family values is among the primary reasons he ran for state office. The husband and father of five boys is hoping those values will make a difference in the 131<sup>st</sup> General Assembly.

"One of the reasons I ran is to make Ohio a stronger family state," he says, urging men to become more focused on their marriages and on their children.

The second-generation Italian American replaces one of the more conservative members of the House of Representatives and appears equally committed to anti-abortion causes in Ohio. A strong supporter of Marriage Works Ohio and a foster family provider, Vitale notes some politicians and would-be officeholders are happy to affiliate themselves with the movement.



"You can tell you people you're pro-life," he says. "I had an eight-year track record long before I was in office. I very much believe in being a voice for the voiceless."

Operated by his extended family, Vitale's employer, Johnson Welded Products, prevailed last fall in a lawsuit challenging federal health insurance mandates on abortifacients and contraceptives.

He allows some differences of opinion on heartbeat legislation among self-identified conservatives.

"I think abortion is not good or safe for women. Abortion is definitely not safe for the baby. I'm a strong supporter of heartbeat," says Vitale, joining dozens of other House members in supporting a bill that lapsed in the chamber only three months ago. Heartbeat bill 130-HB248 (Hagan-Wachtmann) garnered only 47 total votes, however; legislators signing on to HB69 already have exceeded that number.

"This looks like a very pro-life General Assembly," he says, expressing hope for heartbeat legislation in the House but acknowledging likely resistance in the Senate.

Describing himself "issue-oriented," Vitale drew the endorsement of TEA Party-affiliated groups and places Second Amendment gun rights and small government among his major concerns.

"Local government is one of the four or five reasons why I ran. Keeping local government strong is important to me," he says. "One of the ways I hope to do that is giving them a pay increase without raising taxes."

Vitale compares Indiana, with "two levels" of taxes, to Ohio's nine. He acknowledges major problems with bridges, roads and other infrastructure but says Ohio taxpayers are "fatigued." One solution would be to continue raising the cost threshold on public works projects required to pay the prevailing wage to allow non-union shops to participate, he says.

"They would have more control to decide best how to spend their dollar," says Vitale, drawing on his own background in the service and manufacturing sectors. With previous experience at Apple, The Limited, and Wendy's, he has now taken on a managerial role in an automotive brake manufacturing plant employing 340 workers over three shifts.

"We have jobs, but finding the people who can fill them and show up on time and make a quality product can be a challenge," Vitale says, echoing a common complaint among skills-based employers. He notes some job candidates cannot pass a drug screen now, without legalizing marijuana.

"We're having enough difficulty with drugs. I think making it legal would not help the problem," he says.





Meet the Freshmen of the 131st: **Kenny Yuko**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Democrat

**Age:** 64

**Occupation:** Legislator

**Education:** Cuyahoga Community College, Kent State University

**Path to General Assembly:** Beat former Rep.

Ed Jerse in a three-way primary to dominate the 2014 General Election

**Religion:** Christian

**Birth date:** Aug. 1, 1950

**Website:** [www.kennyukyo.com/index2-s.asp](http://www.kennyukyo.com/index2-s.asp)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/kennyukoforsenate](http://www.facebook.com/kennyukoforsenate)

**Twitter:** @KennyYuko

Calling former Rep. Kenny Yuko a freshman lawmaker is a little like calling Mario Lemieux a rookie walk-on with the 2000 Pittsburgh Penguins. Both brought considerable history to their renewed roles, and both took on expanded duties -- Lemieux, as team owner, and Yuko, as a member of the Ohio Senate.

"I had four communities before. Now I have 28," Yuko says of the Senate District 25 he took over from former Sen. Nina Turner (D-Cleveland). Term-limited in 2012, he waited for Turner's own exit before winning a three-way Democratic primary over former Rep. Ed Jerse, his predecessor in the House. Yuko's General Election victory last fall gave him three quarters of the vote in a non-competitive district.

"I only do things one way. That's full steam ahead," says the former labor organizer.

Terminally good-natured, Yuko comes by his blue collar credentials honestly as son of a Euclid-based Lincoln Electric worker with eight years of schooling.

"The machines your dad worked on are now in the Smithsonian," he says of Ohio's manufacturing past. In some very good ways, he says the industry's future in the Buckeye State looks a bit different.

"It's millions of dollars for this equipment. We need a skilled workforce to protect our investment," Yuko says, joining colleagues on both sides of the aisle who are working overtime to bridge industry needs and worker training. "We have to get that connection between those who are unemployed and those needing employees."

Whether one is seeking an academic degree or vocational training, he says college debt is consuming many of the resources families might otherwise use to improve their standard of living.

"I retired and paid off my college loan on the same day," he says of his own investment in higher education. His daughter, 37, is still paying off her own college loans.

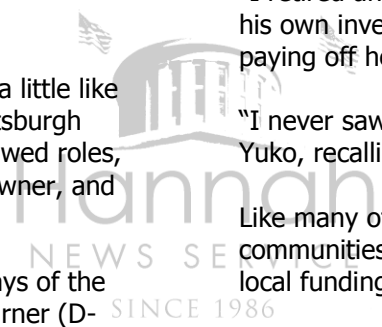
"I never saw my dad use credit cards. He always paid cash," says Yuko, recalling a very different time in the American Midwest.

Like many of his colleagues, he points to the difficulties many communities are having in paying their own bills in a time of reduced local funding, including East Cleveland.

"What do we do with this city? They're virtually broke," Yuko says with characteristic candor, suggesting the local service and equipment sharing advocated by the Kasich administration works better in some cases than in others.

"I think it's going to be an ongoing thing. It's going to be a way of life," he says. "They were reluctant to merge services in the past. I think that's going to change."

Yuko is nevertheless optimistic about the future of greater Cleveland. He says it's attracting new jobs, new people, and cool things to do. "Yes, yes, and yes," he says, mounting a personal ad campaign for Northeast Ohio.



He remains committed to workers' needs, health care, veterans' issues, and education, whether in traditional school districts or community schools.

"I don't really give a damn where they educate the kids, as long as they do a good job," says Yuko. "These kids are our economic development package. They're our future."

He says the shared concern many legislators have expressed over charter school performance in the current General Assembly should extend to many other areas of public policy.

"I spent eight years in the House, and I spent all eight years working very well with Republicans and Democrats," Yuko says. The observation brings to mind one of his more memorable comments in years past.

"You can't shake hands with someone who has a clenched fist," he said on entering the Legislature the first time. (See *The Hannah Report*, 2/21/05.)



Meet the Freshmen of the 131st:  
**Paul Zeltwanger**

**Quick Bio**

**Party:** Republican

**Age:** 49

**Occupation:** Real estate developer

**Education:** Bachelor's in business administration and accounting, Grace College; MBA in finance,

Indiana University

Path to General Assembly: Elected to 54<sup>th</sup> House District, defeating incumbent Rep. Peter Beck in primary

**Marital status:** Married, four children

**Spouse's name:** Teresa

**Religion:** Christian, independent evangelical

**Birth date:** Feb. 28, 1966

**Website:** [www.paulzeltwanger.com](http://www.paulzeltwanger.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/VoteZeltwanger](https://www.facebook.com/VoteZeltwanger)

In Southwest Ohio, a district known for Kings Island, abundant infrastructure, bike trails and community centers has secured the moniker "Midwest Disneyland" from the same man who will soon help to represent it.

Paul Zeltwanger, the newly elected Republican representative for House District 54, has a financial background he plans to incorporate on his way to become a "fiscal conservative" standard in the House. He says his MBA in finance from Indiana University and his work as a real estate developer for the past 10 years can contribute to setting the state's upcoming budget.

"I recognize that the budget is going to be a big issue right out of the gate," he says. "I will constantly challenge the 'whys,' ask a lot of questions, understand the data and history. I'm all about supporting good causes as long as they are managed efficiently and producing the results they were designed for."



When it comes to budgets, Zeltwanger says people tend not to challenge themselves to do things differently and efficiently, but remain tied to current budgets and end up asking for larger ones. Following 15 years as a CPA working with Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers, he doesn't see himself as a big spending proponent but a soon-to-be lawmaker willing to think of economics in new ways.

"With the continued growth of technology, there's always more efficient ways to do things," he says, looking to utilize "entrepreneurial solutions" to do things more proficiently.

There's also a push for efficiency in how Zeltwanger strategizes to handle the needs of his constituents. He says an old boss taught him a trick, and he's going to ask the same of those he's representing when they come to him with legislative concerns.

"What would help me is if you can summarize all of your thoughts in one page," he says. "It just forces some discipline around that." If constituents from his district were to push for more money for an item in the budget, he would push back for efficiency, asking for benchmarks and financial details, among other details.

"I'm entrepreneurial by nature," he says. "We need more private sector entrepreneurial solutions in the public sector."

Zeltwanger's excitement for the job, he notes, lies in his frustration with what his predecessors in Columbus haven't been doing. Politicians tend to forget why they are elected in the first place, he says.

He said local political leadership members have persistently asked him to get involved with the Legislature, which he postponed for a decade in order to watch his four children grow up (making sure he had the time to coach their sports teams, too). Now, with three off to college and one in high school, he says the timing is much better.

"I'm at a stage in my life where I have the flexibility and time to give back," he says, noting that as he's tried to teach his own kids about giving back to their community, he feels it's time to be the one to set the example.

A main area Zeltwanger plans to tackle, after having campaigned on the topic, is repealing or reforming the state's Common Core standards. He avoids the top-down approach and looks to uncover the "right process" to improve education standards. "Anything directed from the federal government down to the local level typically is not successful and not the right solution," he says.

"When people talk about Common Core, let's get into the specifics. What exactly is it, what are the standards being designed, what are the tests that are being required, is it the right answer and will that improve the education level of our children?" he questions. Talking to school officials before his term begins, he says he has technology-driven and entrepreneurial ideas to offer for a different model and approach to the hot-button issue.

He also wants to "really dig in" regarding Medicaid. Zeltwanger lists a health care marketing background to bolster his understanding of Medicaid eligibility and the program's other aspects, but is strategizing ways to reduce the number of program recipients by growing their work options.

The 48-year-old from Mason also has a penchant for data. In his recent new representative training session hosted by the nonpartisan Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC), Zeltwanger had a glimpse into the research and fiscal analysis work the agency provides the General Assembly. He finds the "depth and breadth" of the LSC's available resources intriguing. "For me, it was very helpful to realize I don't have to go do all that myself," he says.

That keenness for working with data and his financial experience leads to his interest in the House Ways and Means Committee; finance and appropriations; economic development and regulatory

reform; health and aging; and financial institutions, housing, and urban development committees.

"I enjoy digging into data, analyzing analytics and financial numbers ... so hopefully I can help in that area," he says, also citing his time spent in taxation to be beneficial for sitting on ways and means.

Zeltwanger's district includes Lebanon, Mason and Monroe in Warren County and a small portion of Butler County, all about 25 miles northeast of downtown Cincinnati. After having been in the district for 18 years, he says it's offered a stable place to raise his family, but he knows that sense of community must be constantly refined. "People get busy in their own lives, so we have to continue to promote community and service at the younger ages."

That especially is true when a community faces a nation-sweeping drug addiction problem.

"We are impacted, I think like all districts, with the heroine and opiate addiction issue," he says, making a call to rally local schools and residents together around the crisis. "I think the solution to that is 'all hands on deck.'"



