

# The Columbus Dispatch

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Opinion

## **Editorial: For Ohio governor: Richard Cordray offers a path forward**

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Ohio voters have many important statewide offices to fill this fall, and no decision is more important than who will serve as Ohio's next governor. After careful consideration of the two major-party contenders and their impressive public-service records, The Dispatch endorses Democrat Richard Cordray over Republican Mike DeWine.

Both are lawyers who should be well-known to the Ohio electorate.

Cordray, 59, of Grove City, is a central Ohio native who became a hometown hero in 1987 when he went undefeated on TV's iconic "Jeopardy!" game show at a time when contestants were limited to five appearances. He entered politics as an underdog in 1990, defeating six-term state Rep. Don Gilmore.

He served as the state's first solicitor general from 1993 to '95, was elected Franklin County treasurer in 2002, re-elected in 2004 and then elected state treasurer in 2006. When the need to clean up a mess arose in 2008, Cordray was elected Ohio attorney general, filling the remaining two years of the scandal-plagued term of Marc Dann.

In 2012, Cordray was appointed by President Barack Obama as the first director of the federal government's new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, serving until he stepped down to begin his run for governor last November.

DeWine, 71, also has a long history of public service. Growing up in Greene County's Yellow Springs and now of Cedarville, he was first elected in 1976 as his county's prosecutor. In 1980, he was elected to the Ohio Senate and then to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served four terms.

In 1990, DeWine was elected lieutenant governor as the running mate of George Voinovich, serving one term before winning a U.S. Senate seat in 1994, where he was re-elected in 2000. His bid for a third Senate term was denied by Democrat Sherrod Brown's win in 2006.

DeWine then became Ohio attorney general via an election he won over Cordray in 2010, and was subsequently re-elected in 2014.

So we've seen a Cordray-DeWine matchup before, and now, like previously, we tap Cordray as the preferred candidate.

Our choice is in some ways a departure from past practice, and in some ways it is not.

True, it is rare for this newspaper to favor a Democrat over a Republican for the governor's office. Since 1962, the Dispatch recommended a Democrat just once in that 56-year span: Ted Strickland won the Dispatch endorsement in 2006 and went on to defeat Republican J. Kenneth Blackwell for the seat previously held by Bob Taft.

Now, like then, a term-limited governor, John Kasich, is prohibited from seeking a third stint and voters have the opportunity to choose a new direction for the state.

Now, like then, Ohio faces significant challenges. Now, like then, Republicans enjoy control of both chambers in the Ohio General Assembly, as well as the governor's office — and yet the majority party is ineffective in moving the state forward.

That larger context is important in viewing the governor's race in 2018.

Both candidates advocate for improvements in early childhood development, as they should, to help break cycles of poor educational outcomes. Both candidates are committed to addressing the state's opioid crisis.

But DeWine potentially represents entrenchment with what has been a largely unresponsive Republican legislature while Cordray offers a different direction and proven leadership to challenge the status quo.

DeWine supports further restrictions on abortion rights and has questioned the sustainability of Medicaid expansion, which secured health care coverage for 700,000 low-income Ohioans. He worked as attorney general to dismantle federal health-care reform in the Affordable Care Act and



has declined to join other state attorneys general in protecting insurance coverage for those with pre-existing conditions.

Then there is the issue of public records, which the attorney general's office is charged with protecting but which DeWine at times has suppressed, as was demonstrated in his fight against releasing autopsy reports from a Pike County mass murder in April 2016.

The next governor will need to work with a legislature that has seen a Republican House speaker step down amid an FBI probe, infighting in a Republican House caucus that effectively stalled all legislative progress for seven months and resistance by Republican majorities to creating a plan for balanced congressional redistricting until faced with a ballot issue earlier this year to do the job for them.

A Republican DeWine administration does not offer much hope for shaking up intractable legislators. With DeWine as governor, the legislature wouldn't be the least bit restrained in its pursuit of more gun freedom and abortion restrictions.

Cordray offers a more forward-looking vision for clean energy, protecting Lake Erie, supporting the ability of local governments to provide services to their communities and working with JobsOhio to improve workforce development and help grow small and mid-sized businesses. He also is a voice for reasonable gun restrictions, including red-flag laws to restrict firearm possession for those with demonstrated mental health issues.

He argues persuasively that making Ohio more responsive to women's rights and family-friendly issues, such as reducing costs of higher education, will make the state more attractive for business development and expansion.

Cordray touts his executive experience as state treasurer and attorney general as well as in establishing and operating the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in the Obama administration, recouping \$12 billion for 30 million Americans despite resistance from a Republican Congress.

For those who fear Cordray would lean too far left, his authority will be checked by what is anticipated to remain a Republican legislature.

How the next governor relates to President Donald Trump is not a major issue, but we fear DeWine would not call out bad behavior and ill-advised policy decisions as Cordray has done.

“This is a change election,” Cordray says, and we agree change is needed.

For the path forward he will offer as Ohio governor, the Dispatch endorses Richard Cordray.