



## **Update House Leadership Set January 30, 2023**

*By Janice Lanier JD RN Liaison, Public Policy Committee*

### **House Leadership Changes**

Most of the news from the statehouse in January centered on the surprise election of Rep. Jason Stephens as the new Speaker of the Ohio House when the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly convened for the first time in early January. Although the republican caucus had voted in November for its leadership team, those decisions changed when the full House voted on the Speaker and Speaker Pro Tempore positions. Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Monclova Township) was replaced as Speaker by Stephens, and Scott Oeslager (R-North Canton) replaced Rep. Phil Plummer (R-Dayton) as Speaker Pro Tempore. The leadership change was prompted by a number of republicans who had concerns about some of the decisions made by Merrin following the November caucus vote. The 22 republicans together with the full contingent of House democrats (32) voted as a bloc for Stephens. Following Stephens' 54-43 victory, Oeslager was elected unanimously. The fate of the other four republican caucus-approved leaders (Majority and Assistant Majority Floor Leaders and Majority and Assistant Majority Floor Whips) remained in limbo pending some resolution of the split within the house republicans.

That "resolution" did not come easily as the infighting continued publicly and privately. House republicans argued among themselves as to who was the REAL leader of the caucus thus creating uncertainty with respect to how the house would move forward. Before the house could take up its official business, members had to decide who would fill the remaining four open leadership positions and how the house would be governed. Generally, these decisions are perfunctory and seldom generate much public controversy and media headlines. That was not the case in 2023.

Eventually, although compromises were reached, the final 63-35 vote continued to reflect the ongoing division among republicans. Eight of the group that originally supported Merrin for speaker were among the 63 who voted for the rules Stephens presented. Two of those eight were named to the republican leadership team (Reps. James Hoops (Napoleon) and Sharon Ray (Wadsworth) along with two of the individuals who originally supported Stephens, Reps Bill Seitz (Cincinnati) and Jon Cross (Kenton). Seemingly a compromise for everyone, but the house governance rules generated additional heated reactions. After limited floor debate and over the objections from some republicans about how Stephens was wielding his gavel, the rules package presented by the speaker was adopted. These rules put into place some changes in how the house would operate, especially with respect to how standing committees would

conduct their business and giving democrats more control over their own committee appointments.

**Members of the House Republican Leadership Team include the following:**

*(Source: [www.ohiohouse.gov](http://www.ohiohouse.gov))*



One of the most influential positions—**Speaker of the House**—is **Rep. Jason Stephens from Kitts Hill**. He is serving his second full term as a member of the house having served previously both as Lawrence County Auditor and County Commissioner. He has been a licensed insurance agent since 1999 and is co-owner of Stephens and Son Insurance of Chesapeake Inc. The new speaker holds a bachelor’s degree in economics, finance and business management from Lipscomb University in Nashville and is a certified financial planner. He lives on a small farm with his wife and three sons.



**The Speaker Pro Tempore is Rep. Scott Oeslager** from North Canton. Prior to beginning his legislative career, Oeslager worked as an aide to former Ohio Congressman Ralph Regula and later served as the director of public relations for Malone College. He was appointed to the Ohio Senate in 1985 and has served continuously in either the Ohio House or Senate since that time. Throughout his tenure, he has been named legislator of the year by numerous organizations, including the Ohio Nurses Association. Oeslager received his bachelor’s degree from Mt. Union and a law degree from Capital University. He and his wife reside in North Canton.



**Majority Floor Leader is Rep. Bill Seitz** from Cincinnati. Rep. Seitz has been a member of the General Assembly since 2000. This is his second time serving in the house where he has held numerous leadership positions. He was awarded an undergraduate degree with honors in history and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Cincinnati College of Law where he was a member of the Order of the Coif and served on the Law Review. He began his public service career as a member of the Cincinnati Board of Education and went on to become a township trustee. He is recognized as a fiscal conservative and champion of governmental

efficiency. He has been rated by Columbus Monthly Magazine as the best speechmaker, savviest, funniest, and most knowledgeable legislator.



**Assistant Majority Floor Leader** is **Rep. Jon Cross** is from Kenton. Rep. Cross, serving his 3<sup>rd</sup> term in the house, has been recognized as a leader of economic and workforce development, higher education, and career readiness with much of his legislative work centered around those issues. Prior to coming to the house, he was the chief executive officer and economic development director for the Hardin County Chamber and Business Alliance. He holds a bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University and is committed to keeping Ohio safer, stronger, and open for business. He is married with two children.



**Majority Whip** is **Rep. James Hoops** from Napoleon. Rep. Hoops is serving his 3<sup>rd</sup> term in the Ohio House after being appointed during the 132<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. He previously served in the house from 1999-2006. Prior to that he was the Henry County Auditor. Currently, he is the associate vice president for strategy initiatives at Northwest State Community College. Rep. Hoops earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business and computer programming at the Northwest State University of Louisiana. He is active in his local community volunteering for the United Way and serving on the Henry County Senior Center Board of Directors and as the Treasurer for the Henry County Humane Society. He is married.



**Assistant Majority Whip** is **Rep. Sharon Ray** from Wadsworth. Rep. Ray brings a strong history of public service to her role as a member of the General Assembly. Prior to being elected to the house she served as Medina County Commissioner, was a member of the Wadsworth City Council and sat on the Medina County Board of Elections. She has been active with United Way of Medina County, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture. She began her work career at Roadway Express and then became a Certified Bailiff at Wadsworth Municipal Court and worked as the Community Service Director/Probation Officer for that same court.

## HOUSE DEMOCRAT LEADERS FOR 135<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY

*Source: Ohiohouse.gov*



**Minority Leader Rep. Allison Russo** from Upper Arlington will begin her second term in the leadership role after replacing Rep. Emilia Sykes in 2022. As a public policy consultant Russo spent more than two decades advising government leaders and policymakers on issues related to health care financing and care delivery needs of seniors, vulnerable populations, Veterans, and military families. She holds a doctoral degree in health policy from The George Washington University and a master's in public health epidemiology from the University of Alabama, Birmingham. She is married with 3 children.



**Assistant Minority Leader is Rep. Dontavius Jarrells.** Currently from Columbus, Jarrells grew up in the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland where he saw firsthand the impact lack of real investment opportunity has on a community. He is committed to reframing the debate at the statehouse to focus on growing opportunities for all Ohioans not just those at the top. He has fought to expand health care access in his roles at the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. He holds a degree from Hiram College in northeast Ohio.



**The Minority Whip is Rep. Jessica Miranda** from Forest Park. Rep. Miranda is a small business owner who provides insurance and tax services to middle and working-class families. She believes government has the responsibility to create quality of life standards under which job creation can flourish and believes public health must be a priority if Ohio's economy is to reach its full potential. Miranda is married with 3 daughters.



**Assistant Minority Whip Rep. Tavia Galonski** from Akron is a former teamster whose father was a UAW worker. She knows the importance of rewarding hard work and putting family first. She graduated from the University of Akron School of Law in 1995 and served as a magistrate in the Summit County Court of Common Pleas and the county's Domestic Relations Court. She earned her undergraduate degree in psychology from Emory University and became a flight attendant with Delta Airlines. She is married with 2 children and a grandson.