

State Rep. Bob Hagan of Youngstown files paperwork to challenge U.S. Sen. Rob Portman in 2016

State Rep. Bob Hagan's "hair shirt" campaign against U.S. Sen. Rob Portman has begun. Hagan, a Youngstown Democrat, [pledged last month](#) to cling uncomfortably to the Republican incumbent until Portman is up for re-election in 2016. "I'm declaring my candidacy for US Senate to run against him in the next election," Hagan posted to his Facebook page April 17. "I will be his hair shirt for the next three years." Given the colorful nature of his tirade and his lack of statewide name-recognition, there were doubts Hagan was serious. No longer. He returned to his Facebook page Monday [to announce](#) he has filed paperwork with the secretary of the U.S. Senate that allows him to begin raising money for a run. He is term-limited from his Ohio House seat next year, and [his interest in a U.S. House seat](#) ended when Rep. Tim Ryan announced he wouldn't run for governor. Hagan has his eye on Portman's seat because Ohio's junior senator voted last month against a proposal that would have expanded background checks on gun sales. Other gun control advocates [have since targeted Portman and others](#) who opposed the failed measure, known as the Manchin-Toomey compromise. Portman expressed concern that the measure might make it harder for law-abiding Ohioans to exercise their rights under the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment. "When he voted against universal background checks Rob Portman ignored the overwhelming opinion of the people he supposedly represents in the U.S. Senate," Hagan, 64, wrote Monday afternoon on his Facebook page. Portman aides did not immediately respond to Hagan's announcement. A locomotive engineer, Hagan has been a staple in Ohio's General Assembly -- the House and Senate -- for a quarter century. He staged an unsuccessful primary challenge to embattled U.S. Rep. Jim Traficant in 2000 and in 2005 ran a failed campaign for mayor of Youngstown. He is the brother of former Cuyahoga County Commissioner Tim Hagan. Hagan is starting his campaign at a time when few candidates have even filed paperwork for Ohio's statewide races in 2014. "I think it's going to take three years to get my message out," Hagan told The Plain Dealer in a telephone interview. "There's a question about how much money I can raise. But I know I can raise issues, and I know that I can raise hell."

Cleveland Plain Dealer. 5/6/13.

State revenue intake surges forward in April

The biggest month for personal income tax collections saw Ohio's revenues jump ahead of estimates by one of the largest margins this year, preliminary state data show. Juiced up by a \$260 million overage in PIT intake compared to estimates generated by [Gov. John Kasich's](#) administration, total tax receipts exceeded expectations for the month by roughly the same amount, or more than 11%, the Office of Budget and Management reported Monday. The nearly \$2.58 billion in total tax receipts for April beat estimates by just under \$260 million and tax collections for the year to date, at more than \$17.2 billion, are running \$570.6 million ahead of schedule, OBM figures show. Thanks partly to tax policy changes instituted over the last few years, including a reduction in revenue sharing with local governments, tax intake thus far in fiscal year 2013 is beating the first 10 months of FY 2012 by more than \$1.7 billion, or 11%. PIT receipts came in a whopping 18.8% over estimates for April, easily offsetting a shortfall in sales taxes that totaled \$25 million, or 3.3% below projections. Most other categories were close to OBM's expectations for the month. April's largesse reflect an ongoing economic recovery in the

state and nation and would appear to keep state coffers well on track to meet the administration's goal of a sizeable year-end balance that would be used to fill up the "rainy day" Budget Stabilization Fund to almost \$1.5 billion and seed an ongoing PIT cut as proposed in the House's version of the biennial budget measure.

Gongwer News Service. 5/6/13.

Tea party has had it with GOP

Feeling betrayed by the Republican Party and its leaders, tea party groups in Ohio appear to be uniting and moving toward either a split from the GOP or action to punish Republican candidates who fail ideological purity tests. A series of events, culminating with the April 26 election of Matt Borges as chairman of the Ohio Republican Party, spurred a flurry of meetings and conference calls among tea party leaders last week to plot a course of action heading into the 2014 statewide election. Options being discussed, according to Seth Morgan, policy director for Americans for Prosperity, range from breaking off into "a third party, to an insurrection (within the Republican Party) and everything in between." Tom Zawistowski, executive director of the Portage County Tea Party who lost his bid for the Ohio GOP chairmanship by a 48-7 vote of the party's state central committee, met on Saturday with Don Shrader, chairman of the Constitution Party of Ohio, to explore uniting in a party committed more to principles than winning elections. After the chairmanship vote, Zawistowski said he made it clear that if the state GOP did not focus on enacting conservative policies, "we would either find a political party to join or we would start one of our own," saying his meeting with Shrader "is the first step in that process." It remains uncertain, however, just how much the Ohio GOP and its candidates could be hurt by an insurrection because it is difficult to assess the true strength of tea party groups. A 2012 poll by *The Washington Post* and the Kaiser Family Foundation found that about 28 percent of Republicans identified themselves as tea party supporters. Although loosely organized in 2009 around ideals of fiscal conservatism and smaller government, the tea party largely has been fractionalized with no single acknowledged leader. "There are potential splits within the tea party itself," said John Green, a University of Akron political scientist. "It's hard to judge how strong they are because their popularity fluctuates. It's not a cohesive group, but it does have some resources and some talented people who are quite effective." Along with Zawistowski and Morgan, others in the tea party movement viewed as effective leaders include Chris Littleton, founder of Ohio Rising; Ted Stevenot, president of the Ohio Liberty Coalition; and Matt A. Mayer, president and CEO of Provisum Strategies, a Dublin-based consulting firm. To date, said Mike Gonidakis, president of Ohio Right to Life, the tea party's "biggest Achilles' heel is there is no defined leadership to focus a message. It's almost a flavor-of-the-month type of thing. "Some of these men and women who proclaim to be the leader of this, that or the other and get quotes in the paper, I'm not sure that they're really taking the pulse of the rank and file (Republicans) in the state," Gonidakis said. "To say they don't represent anyone would not be accurate. But to say that they represent a majority viewpoint, I'm not sure that's accurate because if it was, their candidates would be able to win primaries or they would have success in various political offices." But tea party leaders say their ranks are being swelled by social conservatives who oppose abortion and gay marriage and who are angry with the Republican Party. "On all these conservative issues across the board, I think we're all joining hands because we're stronger together," said Lori Viars, vice chairwoman of the Warren County GOP and leader of Warren

County Right to Life. The list of tea party grievances includes action last December by Republican legislative leaders to bury the so-called heartbeat bill, which would ban abortion once a fetal heartbeat is detected. Social conservatives also were riled by U.S. Sen. Rob Portman's change of position on same-sex marriage after his son revealed he is gay, and by the election of Borges, who once lobbied for Equality Ohio, a gay-rights group. Fiscal conservatives were incensed by Republican Gov. John Kasich's budget proposals to expand Medicaid health services to 275,000 needy Ohioans, to broaden the state sales tax and to tax shale oil and gas producers. "I think the appointment of Borges was just the final straw that did pull those social and fiscal tea party groups together to say, 'We're tired of being used on Election Day,'" Morgan said. "There's no question the movement is done with this proverbial pat on the head that the Republican Party has always given us. I have never seen this level of discontent." Viars said the failure of GOP leaders to be true to the conservative policies they portend to embrace has pushed tea partyers to the breaking point. "How many times do you get smacked in the face by the Republican Party before you're ready to make some other arrangements?" she said. "I don't know what that is because we haven't set on any particular course of action. "The suggestions range from everybody leaving the party in a mass exodus, to staying in the party but get challengers in primaries for every race of anybody who ever crossed us, to under-voting in certain races." Led by Littleton, tea party leaders took at least partial credit for the GOP-controlled House killing Kasich's Medicaid expansion by threatening to field primary-election opponents against Republican lawmakers who supported it. Littleton said Ohio Rising and other tea party groups have the grassroots expertise and resources to reach GOP primary voters. "We're doing such amazing targeting right now," he said. "It is so easy to get our message out when you know what needs to be said and how to reach those individuals. Certainly, we think that proved to be a credible threat." But with Kasich and other GOP elected officials facing a strong 2014 challenge from a Democratic ticket led by Cuyahoga County Executive Ed FitzGerald, one longtime Capitol Square Republican activist who asked not to be named questioned the tea party's end game. "Is Ed FitzGerald going to sign a pro-life bill? Is Ed FitzGerald going to sign a pro-gun bill? Is Ed FitzGerald not going to expand Medicaid? What do they think is going to happen if they abandon John Kasich and play spoiler by creating a third party?" Ronald Rapoport, a political scientist at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va., who last week released a new study titled "Republican Factionalism and Tea Party Activism," said tea party "threats for a primary should be taken seriously." His research showed that tea party supporters comprise "a clear majority" of voters "who show up for Republican primary elections." Rapoport said tea partyers are ideologically "super-mobilized" and are interested in taking over the Republican Party "and purifying it to what they think the party should be" rather than compromising on principle. "It's clear that establishment Republicans who have a different set of priorities care more about elections than tea party members who care more about principle and purity and they're less willing to compromise in order to get elected." Rapoport said that the peril for a Republican Party that already "has gotten smaller" is that the more influence the tea party gains over it, the less appeal the GOP will have to voters overall because surveys show that a majority of voters do not support the tea party.

Columbus Dispatch. 5/6/13.

Chief Justice to lay out judicial reform package, propose abolishing partisan primaries

Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor will unveil an eight-point plan to reform Ohio's judicial elections later today, with the elimination of partisan judicial primaries as a key component. Justice O'Connor will unveil the proposals in an address at the Ohio State Bar Association's annual convention in Cleveland, according to the Supreme Court. In a report outlining the plan, Ms. O'Connor said the changes will help address poor public perception of the judicial branch, improve inadequate voter turnout in judicial elections, and educate the electorate. One proposed change would end partisan primaries for judges. Ohio is the only state to hold partisan judicial primaries, the chief justice said, and the system "undermines the very benefits of nonpartisan general elections." Other ideas offered in the report include:

- Holding judicial elections in odd-numbered years so they're not overshadowed by larger state and federal races.
- Setting up non-partisan nominating commissions to recommend judicial appointments to the governor.
- Changing state law to randomly place races on the ballot so judicial elections aren't always at the bottom.
- Requiring that gubernatorial appointments to the Supreme Court receive the advice and consent of the Senate.
- Increasing the basic qualifications for serving as a judge.
- Lengthening judges' terms.

Gongwer News Service. 5/9/2013.

New census analysis confirms record Latino vote in election 2012

The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund today issued the following statement on the release of census analysis on the voting participation rates in Election 2012: "We are pleased to see the latest Census analysis confirm what we have known all along—that the Latino electorate's participation in the 2012 election reached historic heights. The Census Bureau reports that 11.2 million Latino voters cast ballots in the 2012 election, resulting in a 15% increase from the 9.7 million Latinos that turned out in 2008. "Nationwide, the Latino share of the vote rose to 8.4% in 2012, compared to 7.4% in the 2008 election. In battleground states like Colorado, Florida and Nevada, the Latino electorate was particularly decisive, providing the margin of victory in a number of key municipal, state and federal elections. "While progress has continued, a great deal of work remains to be done before the nation's second largest population group reaches its full political potential. We will continue our efforts to achieve this goal, studying and implementing new and innovative ways to engage this increasingly significant electorate to ensure that Latinos have the access and information necessary to cast ballots in future elections."

NALEO. 5/8/2013.

Time is running out on Ohio Democrats' budget ideas

Ohio Senate Democrats are prioritizing proposals to overhaul K-12 education funding and open discussion on Medicaid expansion as budget debates reach their final two weeks. Democrats have been vocal in their support of Gov. John Kasich's proposal to expand Medicaid to 138

percent of the poverty level under the Affordable Care Act. Senate Minority Leader Eric Kearney, D-North Avondale, said he's even had productive meetings about Medicaid with Kasich, a Republican. But the House budget specified that Medicaid expansion would not be a part of the budget. "If we do not remove this provision, we are not able to do anything" about Medicaid in the budget bill, said Sen. Capri Cafaro, D-Hubbard. Senate Republicans have said they are open to improving coverage for the uninsured, but they won't address Medicaid expansion in the budget. The Democrats' education plan spends \$508 million more than the plan that passed the House. To get the money, the senators propose excluding the top two Ohio tax brackets – individual income over \$106,150 – from the House's 7 percent personal tax cut. The Democrats would divvy up K-12 education funds by a formula that factors in the percentage of a district's students who are economically disadvantaged, along with scores on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and the Ohio Graduation Test. Lower-performing schools would get more money per pupil. The plan would give several local districts more funding than they would receive under the two-year House budget. For instance, Cincinnati Public Schools would receive an extra \$20.7 million over two years, Hamilton schools an extra \$4.9 million, Middletown, \$3.6 million, Northwest Local, \$3.3 million and Franklin City, \$1.1 million. Some schools would also receive more money for transportation. CPS, for example, would receive an extra \$4.7 million. Republicans hold a super-majority 23 seats in the 33-seat Senate, so they don't need votes from the Democratic caucus to pass a bill. Republicans are including Democrats in budget negotiations, Democratic leaders said. The Senate is targeting a June 6 vote on its version of the budget. The bill would then go to a conference of House and Senate leaders.

Cincinnati Enquirer. 5/23/13

House Democrats back Heard as minority leader; Phillips, Ashford, Ramos round out team

House Democrats as expected retained their remaining leadership members in electing [Rep. Tracy Heard](#) as minority leader during a late Tuesday caucus meeting. The Columbus Democrat moved up two slots from minority whip, following the decisions of [Rep. Armond Budish](#) (D-Beachwood) and [Rep. Matt Szollosi](#) (D-Oregon) to step down from leadership and pursue other posts. Also moving up two positions to assistant minority leader is [Rep. Debbie Phillips](#) (D-Athens). The two new members of the Democratic team are [Rep. Mike Ashford](#) (D-Toledo), as minority whip, and [Rep. Dan Ramos](#) (D-Lorain), the assistant minority whip. Rep. Heard said in a statement that continuing her third term in leadership at the head of her caucus was an honor and "an exceptional opportunity and responsibility." "Putting this team together has been intentionally inclusive and a representative process. From the point Rep. Phillips agreed to step-up as assistant leader, we have worked hard to make sure the new team is reflective of our caucus in race, gender, geography and philosophy," Rep. Heard said. "At the end of the day, this is a team I know will work as hard as I do, and is supported by the caucus," said the new Democratic leader. Rep. Phillips said, "I look forward to working with my colleagues to fight for Ohio's middle class and working families, to offer a fair chance for Ohio's young people and to develop broad-based prosperity for our communities. I appreciate the support of my colleagues and will work hard to make us a more effective team." Rep. Ashford vowed to "stand tall in the fight for education, police, firefighters, senior citizens and protecting the Middle Class. We will stand with our Union Brothers and Sisters to continue to create good jobs for all Ohioans. I

follow in the great footsteps of leaders from Northwest Ohio who has helped paved the way for me, and I'm proud to have been selected to continue carrying the banner." Rep. Ramos, who the caucus said was the first Latino member of leadership in the history of the House, stated, "Moving into a position of leadership at a time when our fragile economy is still struggling to recover, when worker's rights have continued to be attacked and while the war on women continues to rage on will certainly be challenging. That said, I look forward to the continued opportunity to take on these challenges and I look forward to continuing to fight for outcomes that will benefit the well-being of all Ohioans." Rep. Heard, a former UAW member, news anchor, political consultant, community development leader and Senate aide, is a graduate of the University of Akron. Rep. Phillips, a former Athens City Council member and leader of the Fair Schools Campaign, holds a degree from Ohio University. Rep. Ashford, a Nebraska native, is a former Toledo City Council member and current vice president of Urban Affairs for YMCA/JCC of Greater Toledo. He holds degrees from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and Spring Arbor University. Rep. Ramos, a former legislative aide, policy and budget analyst for then-Speaker Budish and case worker at the county Department of Job & Family Services, is a lifetime Lorain resident and graduate of Ohio State University. [Speaker Bill Batchelder](#) (R-Medina) issued a statement Wednesday commending the new leader. "I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to Rep. Heard on being selected as the new minority leader of the Ohio House of Representatives," he said. "The House will be very well-served with Rep. Heard as the leader of the Democratic Caucus. She has been a faithful public servant to her district and a valued member of this institution, and I have full confidence that she will provide efficient and effective leadership in her new capacity. I look forward to working with her to further the good work of the Ohio House." [Rep. Alicia Reece](#) (D-Cincinnati), president of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus, said she was happy to see two members of that group elected to the team. "We are pleased to work with this leadership team on the OLBC Action Plan which was released in February and to move Ohio forward," she said.

Gongwer News Service. 5/22/13

Key IRS official to take the Fifth

Lois Lerner, the embattled IRS official who played a key role in the agency's screening of tea party groups for additional scrutiny, will invoke the Fifth Amendment at a House oversight committee hearing today, according to a letter sent to the committee by her lawyer. Attorney William Taylor cited the criminal investigation into the IRS' decision to target tea party groups for greater scrutiny beginning in 2010. "She has not committed any crime or made any misrepresentation but under the circumstances she has no choice but to take this course," Taylor wrote. He asked that his client be excused from appearing at the hearing. It's a move destined to frustrate Ohio GOP Congressman Jim Jordan. Jordan has been hounding the tax agency for 14 months – Lerner, head of the IRS' tax-exempt division, in particular – over the treatment of tea party groups after a tea party organization in his home district, the Shelby County Liberty group, came to him with stories about their dealings with the IRS. It was Shelby County Liberty's story, in part, that prompted Jordan and Rep. Darryl Issa, R-Calif., to request an Inspector General audit of the IRS. That audit is now at the center of a political firestorm raging in Washington. Today's hearing – before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee – will be the third congressional hearing in six days examining the IRS' handling of tax-exempt applications

from conservative groups. “Ms. Lerner remains under subpoena from Chairman Issa to appear at (today’s) hearing,” committee spokesman Ali Ahmad said. “Chairman Issa remains hopeful that she will ultimately decide to testify about her knowledge of outrageous IRS targeting of Americans for their political beliefs.” Jordan had hoped to use today’s session to grill Lerner about the IRS’ handling of conservative applications – this time on the record, with a crush of public and press attention and a bevy of new facts at his disposal. “I think she completely misled us,” Jordan said in an interview. “I think she lied to us.” Lerner has apologized for the IRS’ actions, which she characterized as an inappropriate “shortcut” used by IRS workers to deal with an onslaught of new tax-exempt applications. She and others have said the screening of tea party groups was developed and implemented by a handful of “frontline” workers in the IRS’ Cincinnati office, which reviews all applications for tax-exempt status. The IG report says Lerner was first told of the special scrutiny given to tea party groups in June 2011. But Jordan says that in her communications with his staff and in letters to the committee, Lerner never gave Congress any indication of the problem – despite repeated questions from GOP lawmakers. “She said there was nothing out of the ordinary going on,” Jordan said in an interview. Even if Lerner doesn’t talk when she takes her seat at the witness table today, members of Shelby County Liberty will be watching at home. “I have Fox (News Channel) on all day long,” said H.R. Pence, communications director for the Shelby County tea party group. It was Pence’s PowerPoint presentation – delivered at a town hall meeting in February 2012 at which Jordan was the featured speaker – that helped draw the congressman’s attention to the issue. Flashed up on the screen were some of the more egregious requests from the IRS:

- Provide printouts of any social media site you use.
- Provide time, location, schedule and handouts for each event you have held or plan to hold.
- Provide detailed contents of speeches, speakers and volunteers at any events.

“It seemed to be harassing,” Jordan said of the story the Shelby County group told, noting that he subsequently heard similar accounts from other tea party groups around Ohio. Shelby County Liberty had applied for tax-exempt status on Sept. 9, 2010, and received the IRS’ follow-up questionnaire 17 months later, in a letter dated Feb. 7, 2012. “Our board sat and talked about it quite a bit, trying to decide whether to withdraw our application,” Pence recalled of the group’s reaction to the IRS’ questionnaire. “We already had \$400 invested,” she recalled of the application fee, “... so we were undecided.” By this time, the group had already enlisted the help of Jordan’s legislative staff. And the congressman soon started sending letters, including an eight-page missive to Lerner, dated March 27, 2012, saying the IRS’ questionnaires seemed to go “well beyond the scope of the typical disclosures required” by the IRS. Trying to turn the tables, Jordan and Issa, who chairs the House oversight committee, asked the IRS for reams of documents relating to the agency’s examination of tea party groups. The committee’s staff also met with the inspector general who oversees the IRS, J. Russell George, prompting him to undertake the audit released last week. Tom Zawistowski, leader of the Portage County tea party and former president of the Ohio Liberty Coalition, said if Jordan had not taken the grievances of tea party groups seriously, the issue may have never come to light. “Jim (Jordan) and Darryl Issa were the ones who really pushed this through and got the investigation going,” said Zawistowski. The kicker for Pence came Nov. 7, 2012. That’s when the IRS notified her tea party group that it

had received its tax exempt status. That was one day after Obama won re-election, she noted. “Nothing like rubbing your nose in it,” she quipped.

Cincinnati Enquirer. 5/21/13

Kasich honors Ohio troops killed in action

It was in the middle of the reading of the names of Ohio military men killed in action over the past year that Gov. John Kasich rose from his seat and headed toward a little girl sitting in the front row. The youngster and other members of her family couldn't hide their emotions, and neither could the governor, kneeling before them to offer words of comfort and, shortly afterward, covering his own face with his hands as the tears flowed. “When I look at the families who have lost people, they will leave here today with very, very heavy hearts,” the governor told attendees of an annual pre-Memorial Day wreath-laying ceremony at the Statehouse on Tuesday. “We are with you today. We will be with you tomorrow. And we salute you for the sacrifice that your loved one gave.” The governor's ceremony came after a joint session of the Ohio House and Senate, where lawmakers presented Military Medals of Distinction to the families of soldiers and Marines who died in service over the past year. The list included Army 2nd Lt. David E. Rylander, a Stow man who was killed by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan in May 2012. “The men we honor today were taken from this Earth too soon,” said House Speaker Bill Batchelder, a Republican from Medina. “But the spirit of their character and the significance of their sacrifice will carry on for generations to come.” The wreath-laying ceremony included comments from Josh White, a Maryland state-police detective and Stark County native whose sister, 1st Lt. Ashley White-Stumpf, was killed in action in Afghanistan in October 2011. “I could hear in Ashley's voice an overtone, and I've come to the realization that she was simply a scared young woman in a dangerous place that she could not possibly understand,” White said, recalling his last phone conversation with his sister. “The absolute pinnacle of courage is performing your duties despite the absolute fear that you may lose your life.” He added, “That is why we have an obligation to honor our fallen heroes during Memorial Day services. In fact, I believe that Memorial Day ... should always be regarded as one of our nation's most- important days, because it honors the sacrifice that was given in the name of creating a better world.” Tuesday's events were made even more somber by the storms that hit Oklahoma on Monday, leaving some two dozen people dead, including school-children. “We think about those mothers and fathers who don't know about their children,” Kasich said. “Imagine the pain and the suffering that they have gone through, hoping and praying sometimes against hope that their children would be found alive. A devastating tornado that has killed so many and wounded so many and broken the hearts of so many.”

Mahoning Valley Vindicator. 5/21/13

State Rep. Connie Pillich officially launches campaign against Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel

State Rep. [Connie Pillich](#), a Democrat from the Cincinnati area known for spoiling Tea Party dreams, has found her next target: Ohio Treasurer [Josh Mandel](#). Pillich told The Plain Dealer she

officially will declare her candidacy for treasurer Monday. "I look at this type of office as a natural extension of my lifelong commitment to public service," she said. An Air Force veteran and lawyer, Pillich [has been a fixture at party dinners](#) this year while working to build support for her campaign. The primary is a year away, but already she is the third Democrat to announce a statewide run. Cuyahoga County Executive [Ed FitzGerald](#) has launched a campaign for governor, and former Hamilton County Commissioner [David Pepper](#), the party's losing candidate for state auditor in 2010, is running for attorney general. Others could soon join the early-forming Democratic ticket, including [Nina Turner](#), the state senator from Cleveland, who has been open about her interest in a bid for secretary of state. Republicans occupy every administrative office on the statewide ballot next year. Each of them, from Gov. John Kasich on down to Mandel, intends to seek a second term. Ohio Democratic Party leaders see Mandel as vulnerable after his [failed U.S. Senate bid last year](#) against Democratic incumbent Sherrod Brown. Mandel launched that campaign months into his first term as treasurer and became known for [lacking truthfulness](#) and candor. But the Tea Party favorite is [a prodigious fundraiser](#) whose national reputation can attract millions of dollars in outside spending. As he did in his Senate bid, Mandel likely will emphasize economic development. He also will tout a [\\$1 billion investment fund](#) his office manages for local governments and public agencies. [Mandel also has spoken out](#) against Kasich's proposed expansion of Medicaid and the governor's effort to raise taxes on oil and gas companies, making good on a Senate campaign pledge to stand up to leaders in both political parties. Pillich, 52, has experience exceeding expectations against Republican opponents. She wrestled her House seat away from the GOP in 2008. Two years later, she narrowly beat Mike Wilson, the founder of the Cincinnati Tea Party. She faced Wilson again last year, [under new boundaries friendlier to Republicans](#), and won by an even larger margin than in 2010. "I certainly think it means I'm battle-tested and that I don't flinch from a challenge," Pillich said. Matt Borges, chairman-elect for the Ohio Republican Party, responded to news of Pillich's candidacy in an email. "Josh Mandel has worked tirelessly for Ohioans as a watchdog of our tax dollars, and his record of cutting his own budget, modernizing his office and earning a 'AAA' credit rating on the multi-billion dollar investment fund he manages, speaks for itself," Borges wrote. "By contrast, State Rep. Connie Pillich joined her fellow Democrats in pursuing disastrous fiscal policies that led to an \$8 billion budget deficit. Connie Pillich is part of the problem that Gov. Kasich, Treasurer Mandel and others have been working to fix since they were elected in 2010. Ohioans realize that they cannot afford to return to the disastrous tax and spend policies of Connie Pillich. Voters will reject her candidacy and re-elect Josh Mandel in 2014." Pillich's military background might help neutralize one of her rival's biggest strengths. Mandel, 35, served two tours as a Marine reservist in Iraq. Pillich, who grew up near Buffalo, N.Y., attended college on an ROTC scholarship. She spent eight years in the Air Force and rose to the rank of captain. Pillich served in Germany, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and served in support of the first Gulf War while stationed in Ohio. Pillich, who lives in Montgomery, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from University of Oklahoma, a master's in business administration from University of North Dakota and her law degree from University of

Cincinnati. Democratic-heavy Cuyahoga County, where Mandel lives and she is unknown, could be key to Pillich's campaign. The incumbent treasurer is a former state representative and city councilman in Lyndhurst. But Brown, from neighboring Lorain County, beat him soundly here last year, as did Kevin Boyce, the Democratic state treasurer from Columbus, in 2010. "I absolutely need to introduce myself to voters in every part of the state," Pillich said. "I will be visiting every nook and cranny in Ohio."

Cleveland Plain Dealer. 5/20/13

Statewide initiatives likely to wait until 2014; Marriage equality could come earlier; Ballot board meets Thursday

Ohio voters could decide the fate of three contentious policy measures that will likely arise as ballot initiatives in 2014: Medicaid coverage, gay marriage and medical marijuana. Ian James of Professional Petition Management said although no decisions have been made yet, the three measures are likely to arise next year rather than this fall as the 2014 ballot gives groups more time to push their initiatives, as well as presents a likely higher voter turnout. "Next year could very easily become the three M's: Medicaid, marriage and marijuana," he said. "There's not really anything for 2013, it's pretty quiet right now except for marriage. If that happens, it'll spice things up." Mr. James, who has been working on Freedom to Marry Ohio's gay marriage amendment, said this measure could particularly benefit from holding off until 2014 as momentum is gathering in terms of support from Republicans on the issue. Currently, Freedom to Marry advocates are circulating petitions and gathering signatures in 50 Ohio counties, he said. The groups' executive committee will meet in a few weeks to determine whether or not the measure will go on the 2013 ballot. Mr. James said he believes the committee is "leaning towards" 2014, however. "It's looking to me like ultimately the decision comes down to we have resources to run an effective campaign," he said. "If we decide to go into next year, we'll just keep collecting signatures and to have a robust dialog about why marriage matters." This year's ballot will likely be quiet, Mr. James added, noting that "right to work" would likely come up in the 2014 lame duck session and there's been little movement, to his knowledge, on any clean energy bond or personhood initiatives. Likewise, he said, if the legislature doesn't tackle Medicaid expansion, the issue would likely come up in the 2014 ballot. A proposed ballot initiative that would legalize medical marijuana and set-up a regulatory system around the drug, meanwhile, is heading to the Ohio Ballot Board for consideration having cleared the Attorney General's office. According to AG Mike DeWine, the [Constitutional Amendment](#), has received sufficient valid signatures and has provided a "fair and truthful" summary for [certification](#). The Ballot Board will meet Thursday afternoon to determine whether the amendment, put forth by the Ohio Rights Group, constitutes a single issue or more. Petitioners will then be required to collect signatures for each issue from registered voters in 44 Ohio counties, equaling 5% of the total vote cast in each county in the last presidential election. Statewide totals must equal 10% of the votes cast in the presidential election. Mary Jane Borden, of ORG, said putting the medical marijuana initiative on the 2014 ballot is the "most realistic" at this point. If the measure is "green-lighted" by the ballot board, she said, volunteers and advocates will have until July 3 to collect needed signatures, which would present a time crunch. The Ohio Cannabis Rights Amendment proposes allowing adults, and children with written parent consent, who have been

diagnosed with debilitating medical conditions like HIV/AIDS, glaucoma and Crohn's Disease to use marijuana for therapeutic purposes. It would also establish an Ohio Commission of Cannabis Control to oversee permitting and licensing for growers and individuals, as well as set industrial guidelines surrounding hemp. Current bans against smoking in public and driving under the influence would remain in effect under the proposal. If the Ballot Board rules that the hemp language constitutes a separate issue, Mr. James said, advocates would need to double their efforts to get the measure on the ballot. "My experience is it's harder, it doubles amount of time," he said. Ms. Borden said ORG is not concerned about the measure being split, however, saying that the group's philosophy is "one plant, many uses." A similar [measure](#) received certification from the AG's office in 2012, while [two](#) others were rejected in 2011. The 2012 amendment remains an "active petition," Mr. James said, as it has yet to collect enough signatures to be placed on the ballot. Meanwhile, [Rep. Robert Hagan](#) (D-Youngstown) introduced legislation ([HB 153](#)) to legalize medical marijuana earlier this month. The bill was to get its first hearing this week but was removed from the House Health & Aging Committee's agenda. The lawmaker also introduced a resolution ([HJR 6](#)) to outright legalize the drug. Other resolutions seeking ballot issues that have been introduced so far in the legislature include proposals on: voting rights ([HJR 2](#)); the U.S. Constitution ([HJR 3](#) & [HJR 4](#)); right to work ([HJR 5](#)); redistricting ([SJR 1](#)); school funding ([SJR 2](#)) and sweepstakes parlors (HJR 3). Aside from the Cannabis Rights Amendment, only one other citizen-proposed ballot initiative, "To Authorize Prayer in School," has been filed with the AG's office in 2013. Earlier this month the office rejected the amendment petition because of technical flaws, specifically: the lack of language on the proposed constitution amendment in the individual part-petitions and in the summary, as well as the lack of a circulator's signature on the individual part-petitions, which is signed under penalty of election falsification. The proposed amendment called for allowing children to voluntarily pray in schools, let Ohioans express their religious beliefs and require schools to display the Bill of Rights.

Gongwer News Service. 5/23/13

Puerto Rico delegate seeks vote for statehood

Puerto Rico's representative in Congress is seeking an unprecedented yes-or-no vote on whether the island should become the 51st state, submitting a bill Wednesday that riled many in the U.S. territory. The proposal by Pedro Pierluisi calls for a federally approved ratifying vote in which Puerto Ricans would be asked if they want their island to become a state. If the majority agrees, the bill calls for the president to submit legislation to Congress within 180 days. "I expect a clear and firm answer from Congress. This cannot fall on deaf ears," Pierluisi said. "We lack democratic rights ... It's about time this issue be addressed." The White House announced last month it would seek \$2.5 million from Congress to fund a vote on the island's future political status following disagreements about the results of a nonbinding, two-part referendum held in November. On the ballot's first question, more than 900,000 voters, or 54 percent, said they were not content with the current commonwealth status. A second question asked voters to choose a status. Of the approximately 1.3 million voters who made a choice, nearly 800,000, or 61 percent, supported statehood. Some 437,000 backed sovereign free association and 72,560 chose independence. However, nearly 500,000 left that question blank. Pierluisi and members of his New Progressive Party maintain that a majority chose statehood. Opponents including Puerto

Rico governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla, whose Popular Democratic Party supports the status quo, say the results were inconclusive. The general secretary of Garcia's party, Jorge Suarez, rejected Pierluisi's bill, saying Puerto Ricans cannot ratify what never happened. "No one can say that the previous referendum held on the island revealed any kind of result," Suarez said. "Pedro Pierluisi in Congress today made statements based on fictional results in which the status quo was excluded from the ballot." Pierluisi's bill is co-authored by 30 legislators, including Rep. Jose Serrano, a New York Democrat who for the first time aligned himself publicly with Pierluisi on the status issue, stating that he supports any measure that does away with colonialism. Serrano questioned why people are afraid of the public's opinion on the issue. "Let's ask the big question," Serrano said. "If the answer is no, then maybe the issue remains dead for a generation. If the answer is yes, the issue remains on the table." Less than a day before Pierluisi submitted his bill, a majority of legislators in Puerto Rico approved a resolution they plan to send to President Barack Obama and Congress. In it, they stress that the results of November's referendum are skewed since the current political status was not included as a choice. They also praised the White House for seeking funds to finance a future plebiscite. The money would go to the U.S. territory's elections commission for an education campaign and a plebiscite to resolve the island's status, with Obama specifying that the U.S. attorney general would have to approve the ballot before it goes to voters. It is unclear when a new plebiscite would be held. The House Appropriations Committee is scheduled to debate the White House request, among other items, by July. If approved, it would be the first U.S.-financed vote on the issue in the island's history. Puerto Rico's governor on Wednesday said he supports holding another referendum, adding that Pierluisi's bill was unfair. "We have to handle the status issue in a fair and responsible manner, not in a divisive way like a certain group is trying to do," Garcia said. Puerto Rico previously held nonbinding referendums in 1967, 1993 and 1998, with statehood never garnering a clear majority and independence never obtaining more than 5 percent of the vote. The island has been a U.S. territory for 115 years, and its people have been U.S. citizens since 1917 although they cannot vote in the U.S. presidential election, have no representation in the Senate and only limited representation in the House of Representatives.

Miami Herald. 5/15/13

Ed FitzGerald gives Democrats a strong Cleveland contender for governor -- but is that enough? Analysis

Ohio Republicans like to say their Democratic counterparts [must be desperate](#) if Ed FitzGerald is the best they can muster as a challenger to Gov. John Kasich in 2014. Their logic is simple. [FitzGerald](#), the first-term Cuyahoga County executive, is unknown and untested outside Greater Cleveland. And higher-profile Democrats, including ex-Gov. Ted Strickland and U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, have passed on the race. But the truth is FitzGerald could be the party's strongest gubernatorial candidate in at least 16 years -- maybe more. That seems impossible given Strickland's landslide in 2006. But Strickland at the time was a congressman from a small media market. Other prospects that year were Sherrod Brown, who ran instead for U.S. Senate, and Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman, who stepped aside for personal reasons. Strickland was appealing because of his popularity in hard-to-reach Appalachia. He played well there, but he also benefited from a weak opponent and a bad climate for the GOP. After Kasich, Brown and Sen. Rob Portman, FitzGerald represents the largest single constituency in the state. The last time

Democrats had a contender close to that caliber was in 1998, when Lee Fisher, the former attorney general, lost to Bob Taft. But Fisher was four years removed from statewide office and was mocked as "Liberal Lee" in moderate Ohio. You have to go back to 1990 to find a Democrat who ran for governor from a larger base than FitzGerald has today. That was when Attorney General Anthony J. Celebrezze Jr. lost to Republican George Voinovich, the former mayor of Cleveland. This history lesson is instructive for two reasons. It illustrates the quarter-century of trouble and bad luck Democrats have had not only grooming and recruiting top-tier candidates but also winning with the few heavyweights they managed. And it shows how Cleveland, for all of its Democratic firepower, is not necessarily the party's missing ingredient. The late Celebrezze was a son of a popular Cleveland mayor. Fisher, later elected with Strickland as lieutenant governor, hails from suburban Shaker Heights. In a lower class was Tim Hagan, between stints as a Cuyahoga County commissioner when he challenged Taft in 2002. [Even Hagan now acknowledges](#) that his campaign was a joke. Simple math makes FitzGerald a more viable candidate than those before him. In his losing re-election bid of 2010, Strickland received 84,131 fewer votes in Cuyahoga County than he did in 2006. Statewide he lost to the Columbus-based Kasich by 77,127 votes, or 2 percentage points. Strickland managed to win the county decisively both times, but clearly a lack of Cleveland-area enthusiasm doomed his chances of a second term. Ryan and former Rep. Betty Sutton, who also considered but passed on a run for governor next year, have Northeast Ohio bases, but both are in outlying counties -- Sutton in Copley Township, Ryan in the Youngstown-Warren region. FitzGerald clearly is the Democrat best positioned to win back the 84,000 votes Strickland lost in Cuyahoga County. But that might not be enough. Kasich, who failed to win a statewide majority three years ago, has recovered from low job-approval ratings his first year in office. He likely will improve upon his 2010 totals in the rural and Appalachian environs friendly to Strickland. And Ohio's economy, perhaps the biggest factor in Strickland's defeat, has rebounded. Complicating the race for FitzGerald is low name-recognition. [A recent Quinnipiac University poll](#) found that roughly three in four voters didn't know enough to have an opinion of him. Nevertheless, that's an improvement over earlier polls and by no means insurmountable. At this time in 2009, [Quinnipiac found](#) that 70 percent were unfamiliar with Kasich. Had FitzGerald also decided against running for governor, the alternatives were not appealing for Democrats. Assuming Strickland, Ryan and Sutton remained on the sidelines, the party might have turned to [David Pepper](#), the former Hamilton County commissioner who lost a bid for state auditor in 2010. Pepper instead is running for attorney general next year. After him the bench is a mix of unknown or uninterested mayors and unseasoned state lawmakers. Two others are worth mentioning, even if they are longshots to challenge FitzGerald for the nomination. One is former Secretary of State [Jennifer Brunner](#), who has been a favorite of progressives. She also has ruffled party establishment feathers by challenging Fisher in a 2010 primary for U.S. Senate and by accepting Kasich's appointments to a state board and commission. Brunner, of Columbus, told The Plain Dealer last week that she receives many overtures to run for governor or other statewide offices. But after discussions with party leaders, she said she does not see a run as likely. The second is [Richard Cordray](#). This week the Senate is [expected to vote](#) on President Barack Obama's renomination of the former Ohio attorney general as director of the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in Washington. Republicans have threatened to block the move. If that happens, and if Obama gives his blessing, Cordray theoretically could return home to Columbus to run for governor. Cordray has run for statewide office five times, winning twice. As for the likelihood of Cordray joining the race, the scenario is somewhat similar to the hand Democrats held in

1994. Their nominee for governor that year was Rob Burch, then a state senator from New Philadelphia. Jane Campbell, then a state representative and future mayor of Cleveland, flirted with the race but backed out. Some party leaders, rightly concerned about Burch's prospects, hoped they could lure ex-Gov. Dick Celeste back from a job with the Clinton administration in Washington. Celeste opted to stay with Clinton, and the smart money is on Cordray sticking with Obama in some capacity. FitzGerald is not Burch, whom Voinovich clobbered. He comes from the state's largest Democratic base and largest media market, and top party leaders are enthusiastic about his candidacy. FitzGerald also is not Fisher. He is in the early stages of a fast-moving political career, whereas Fisher in 1998 was seeking a comeback after his career stalled. For Ohio Democrats, FitzGerald is a reset button -- a chance to run an unknown quantity with an upside as opposed to a nobody, a has-been or a creature of Washington. It's a risk that might not pay off in 2014, especially if Ohio's economy remains strong and if voters scratch the six-year midterm itch that can hurt the party that holds the White House. But little else Democrats have tried has worked since Celeste won two terms as governor in the 1980s. FitzGerald at least gives the party a chance to catch lightning in a bottle and reseed for a future Strickland could not preserve.

Cleveland Plain Dealer. 5/19/13

Obama names IRS temporary chief amid controversy; Rep. John Boehner vows to hold administration accountable

President Barack Obama, seeking to regain his footing amid controversies hammering the White House, named a temporary chief for the scandal-marred Internal Revenue Service on Thursday and pressed Congress to approve new security money to prevent another Benghazi-style terrorist attack. The efforts did little to satisfy Republicans, who see the controversies as an opportunity to derail Obama's second-term agenda. House Speaker John Boehner suggested the White House had violated the public's trust, and he promised to "stop at nothing" to hold the administration accountable. "Nothing dissolves the bonds between the people and their government like the arrogance of power here in Washington," Boehner said. "And that's what the American people are seeing today from the Obama administration -- remarkable arrogance." The targeting of conservative political groups by the IRS and new questions about the deadly attack on the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya, last year -- along with the Justice Department's seizure of journalists' phone records -- have consumed the White House for nearly a week. Of the three controversies, the president's advisers see the IRS matter as the most likely to linger. At least three congressional committees are planning investigations into the agency that touches the lives of nearly every American. Obama, who was criticized by both opponents and allies for his measured initial response to the IRS targeting, vowed to ensure the agency acts "scrupulously and without even a hint of bias." "I think we're going to be able to fix it," he declared during a joint news conference with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Soon afterward, Obama appointed senior budget official Danny Werfel to temporarily run the IRS, one day after Acting Commissioner Steven Miller's forced resignation. The White House is expected to nominate a permanent commissioner later this year. However, the president knocked down the prospect of appointing a special prosecutor to investigate the IRS, saying the congressional investigations and a separate Justice Department probe should be enough to nail down who was

responsible for improperly targeting Tea Party groups when they applied for tax-exempt status. The news conference marked Obama's first comments on the government's widely criticized seizure of telephone records of reporters and editors of the Associated Press in an investigation of news leaks. The president spoke of the importance of striking a balance between "secrecy and the right to know" but said he would make no apologies for trying to protect classified information that could put Americans at risk. The president said he continues to have confidence in Attorney General Eric Holder. The IRS and Justice Department controversies have coincided with a revival in the GOP-led investigations into the September attacks in Benghazi, which claimed the lives of the U.S. ambassador to Libya and three other Americans. Obama, who angrily cast the investigations as a "sideshow" earlier this week, tried to turn the focus Thursday to Congress. He urged lawmakers to provide more money to strengthen security at U.S. diplomatic missions around the world. The State Department is seeking about \$1.4 billion for increased security; the money would come primarily from funds that haven't been spent in Iraq. It would include \$553 million for 35 more Marine Security Guard units, \$130 million for 155 diplomatic security agents and \$376 million for security upgrades and construction at new embassies. Congressional Republicans held new hearings on the Benghazi attacks last week, and a congressional official also released details of emails that GOP lawmakers said suggested an administration effort to downplay the prospect of terrorism in the election year attacks. The White House, which has long disputed allegations of a cover-up, released 100 pages of documents Wednesday in an effort to put an end to protracted controversy. The release of the emails didn't quiet the GOP furor on Capitol Hill, though, and investigations continued to move ahead. Rep. Jason Chaffetz, Republican of Utah, a member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, said that while he applauded the release of "hand-picked emails," the White House should release all the unclassified emails.

Associated Press. 5/17/13

Effort to fix the national debt spreads to Ohio

A nationwide effort to pressure the federal government to stop deficit spending has taken root in Ohio, where CEOs and city council members are enlisting in the cause. "The time to act is now," Eaton Corp. CEO Alexander Cutler told Cleveland's City Club at a Friday luncheon, where he said that spending cuts will be tough in the short term, but make the U.S. stronger in the future. "The person to act is you. The power comes from all of us." Cutler is among more than 100 CEOs who have joined "Fix the Debt," a group launched last July by Erskine Bowles, who served as White House Chief of Staff under President Bill Clinton, and former Wyoming GOP Sen. Alan Simpson. The pair headed a presidential deficit reduction commission that recommended a mix of spending cuts and tax increases that legislators never adopted. Former Ohio Gov. and GOP U.S. Sen. George Voinovich is co-chair of the group's Ohio effort along with Akron Mayor Donald Plusquellic, a Democrat. Other members of its steering committee include Cuyahoga County Council member Dave Greenspan, Bay Village Mayor Deborah Sutherland, and Mentor Councilman Ray Kirchner. In Ohio, members of the group have discussed the issue with several of the state's U.S. Senators and Congressmen, and Voinovich has written several newspaper opinion pieces that urge Congress to reduce the national debt. On Friday, Cutler told the City Club that deficit spending threatens the nation's competitiveness, and "fiscal prudence" is needed to create jobs and ensure growth. "This is fundamental to the health of our country," Cutler told the group. Voinovich said he and Cutler have sent letters to 140

businesses in the state that urge them and their employees to join the effort to find a real fix for the nation's fiscal problems. The group's members are also attempting to persuade their legislators to solve the problem. "We really want to create an environment out there where members of Congress understand that doing nothing or kicking the can down the road is not an option," Voinovich said in an interview. Voinovich said he tried to reach a debt reduction deal when he served in Washington, but his colleagues preferred temporary Band-Aids that didn't require tough tradeoffs that might erode their political support. He said his group is working with current members of Congress to find a bipartisan solution. Last month, Bowles and Simpson released a new spending proposal that would reduce the deficit by \$2.5 trillion over the next decade. It calls for restoring 70 percent of sequestration's 2013 budget cuts, reforms to tax policy and federal health spending, and limiting defense and non-defense spending growth to inflation levels through 2025. In their preamble to the plan, the pair stress their suggestions are not the ideal, perfect or only way to diminish the government's indebtedness. "It is an effort to show both sides that a deal is possible; a deal where neither side compromises their principles but instead relies on principled compromise," they said. "Such a deal would invigorate our economy and demonstrate to the public that Washington can solve problems, and leave a better future for our grandchildren." Fix The Debt vice president Jon Romano says more than 350,000 Americans have signed the group's online petition to reduce deficit spending. He said CEO involvement in the cause boosts awareness of the effort among their employees and in their communities. "For them it is about economic certainty," said Romano. "It is better for business, and better for consumers." He said Fix The Debt has raised \$40 million from corporations, foundations and individuals to spend when an opportunity arises to push for a compromise that provides a "meaningful fix" to the nation's debt problems instead of "lurching from crisis to crisis and reaching small ball deals at the eleventh hour." Cutler likened doing what's needed to the scene in the film "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," in which the outlaw pair jump off a cliff and survive. "If we come together around this issue and jump off this cliff we will survive," said Cutler. "In fact, not to do so is sitting on a volcano. And that is not a very secure position."

Cleveland Plain Dealer. 5/24/13

GOP sees 'Obamacare' debacle as key to 2014

If Republicans were writing a movie script for next year's congressional elections, the working title might be *2014: Apocalypse of Obamacare*. The rollout of President Barack Obama's health-care law turns into such a disaster that enraged voters rebuke him by rewarding the GOP with undisputed control of Congress. But there's a risk for Republicans if they're wrong and the Affordable Care Act works reasonably well, particularly in states that have embraced it. Republicans might be seen as obstinately standing in the way of progress. The law already has been a political prop in two election seasons, but next year will be different. Voters will have a real program to judge, working or dysfunctional. Will affordable health care finally be a reality for millions of uninsured working people? Or will premiums skyrocket as the heavy hand of government upends already fragile insurance markets for small businesses and individuals? "The end of this movie has not been written," said Robert Blendon, a Harvard professor who tracks public opinion on health care. He said next year's movie actually will be a documentary: what happens in states that fully put the law in place and those that resist — "a message of reality." One of the most prominent doomsayers is Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of

Kentucky, who predicts “Obamacare” probably will be the biggest issue of 2014 and “an albatross around the neck of every Democrat who voted for it.” House Speaker John Boehner, R-West Chester, also has been a relentless critic. “This thing can’t possibly work,” said McConnell. “It will be a huge disaster in 2014.” Counting on that, House Republicans are busy framing an election narrative, voting to repeal the health law and trying to link it to the scandal over the Internal Revenue Service’s targeting of tea party groups. It could help excite the conservative base. But Democratic pollster Celinda Lake doubts reality will follow the GOP script. Next year, “we won’t have to worry about the mythology laid out by the right wing about Obamacare: death panels and dramatic cuts to Medicare,” she said. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said uninsured people in her state will have over 200 coverage options to choose from. “We have been hearing the fear, but in states like mine, people are seeing the reality,” she said. In just about five months, people without access to coverage through their jobs can start shopping for subsidized private insurance in new state markets. The actual benefits begin Jan. 1. But because of continuing opposition to the law from many Republican governors and state legislators, the federal government will be running the insurance markets in more than half the states. Another major element of the law, the expansion of Medicaid to serve more low-income people, also has run into problems. With many legislative sessions over or winding down, it looks like fewer than half the states may accept the expansion. That means millions of low-income people are likely to remain uninsured, at least initially. Other early indicators of how well the health-care rollout might fare are mixed. In a dozen or so states that have started releasing details of their new insurance markets, there’s robust insurer interest in participating, according to the market research firm Avalere Health. That’s a good signal for competition. There still are concerns about a spike in premiums for people who already buy their own coverage, particularly the young and healthy. That could happen for several reasons. The health-care law forbids insurers to deny coverage to sick people, and it limits what older adults can be charged. Also, the plans that will be offered next year are more comprehensive than many bare-bones policies currently available to individuals. Another big source of angst is the Obama administration. The Health and Human Services Department will be running the program in half the country while trying to fight off attempts by congressional Republicans to starve it financially. Unusual for a social program, the administration is largely operating behind a veil of secrecy. Will Obama’s underlings turn out to be the Keystone Kops of health care? Frustration that he and his constituents couldn’t get basic information from the administration led one of the authors of the law, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., to warn recently that he sees “a huge train wreck coming down.” Republicans loved it. Lost in the uproar was the fact that Baucus was referring to potential problems with implementation. He stills thinks the health-care law itself is a good thing. The administration official running the rollout, Gary Cohen, told Congress that he didn’t agree with the senator’s statement. “We are very much on schedule,” Cohen said. Republican pollster Bill McInturff, who has made polling on health care his specialty, said he’s skeptical of what he hears from the administration as well as from his own party. “Life experience said to me there is not going to be some simple, clear narrative that is sitting here today,” McInturff said.

Associated Press. 5/28/13

Ohio Senate pulls back curtain on its version of state budget

Senate lawmakers on Tuesday unveiled their revamped version of Ohio's two-year budget, resurrecting Gov. [John Kasich's \\$1.4 billion tax cut for small-business owners](#). But -- like the versions the House and Kasich rolled out earlier this year -- everything is subject to change. Senators reintroduced the 50 percent tax cut for small-business owners Kasich proposed in February when he unveiled his "[Jobs Budget 2.0](#)." They tossed the House proposal for a permanent 7 percent income tax cut for all Ohioans. Aside from the business tax cut, the Senate's version of House Bill 59 keeps off the table much of what the House scrapped from the Republican governor's proposal. Both chambers are under GOP leadership. Senate President Keith Faber said favoring a tax cut for small-business owners over a cut for all Ohioans is a means to job creation. "While we all support a 7 percent across-the-board income tax cut, we just did a 4.5 percent across-the-board income tax cut," said Faber, a Celina Republican. "While I'm sure it helped at the margins, the reality is we want to do something that's targeted to those 95 percent who are creators of the jobs. "We believe the small-business tax cut will directly grow jobs in the immediate future." The 50 percent small-business tax cut would apply to the first \$750,000 in yearly income claimed on personal tax filings, so a business owner earning \$750,000 would only be taxed on the first \$375,000. Democratic Sen. Michael Skindell said the break given to small business owners won't spur job creation. "The revenue generated from that doesn't really get a lot of small businesses to hire people," said Skindell of Lakewood. "The statement that this will create jobs is somewhat false." Kasich's version of the budget called for sweeping tax reform, which included a 20 percent phased-in income tax cut, a broadening of the sales-tax base and a reduction in the sales tax from 5.5 percent to 5 percent. The governor also wanted to hike severance taxes to draw more money from large oil and gas drillers. "We continue to look at tax reform beyond what we're doing as a small-business tax cut," Faber said. "The severance tax produced by the governor is not likely to be in this budget." Medicaid expansion and the state's school funding formula are not included in this latest iteration of the budget to give lawmakers more time to iron out those issues, Faber said. "We continue to work on" Medicaid, Faber said. "We've had great work groups going on a bipartisan basis... and they're making good progress. A lot of great ideas are coming forward." Faber said his members are looking at "significant increases" in school funding, but that the issue is still in flux. The Senate's version of the budget bill scuttled a controversial House measure that would have required Ohio's public universities to charge in-state tuition rates if they issue students an official letter or utility bill as a form of voter ID. Democrats blasted the measure as an attempt to prevent students from voting in their campus precincts. The Senate held on to a House amendment that would strip funding from Planned Parenthood by changing the current system of divvying the state's family planning funds. A Planned Parenthood official said the group will continue to testify against the legislation this week during Senate committees. Skindell said he will continue battling alongside. "We are continuing the fight to ensure women's health care is tended to," Skindell said. "We will have another round of amendments to seek the removal of that." The Senate will likely tweak Tuesday's substitute to HB 59 before sending the legislation to a floor

vote by June 6. The bill then will move to a conference committee, where lawmakers from both chambers will finalize work on the budget before seeking Kasich's signature. The governor must sign the \$63 billion proposal by June 30. "The House started with a pretty good product in what the governor proposed. The House made it better," Faber said. "We took a pretty good product that came out of the House. We're going to make it even better."

Cleveland Plain Dealer. 5/28/13

Armond Budish likely to launch campaign for Cuyahoga County executive at Thursday event

Watch for Armond Budish to take his long-expected leap into the race for Cuyahoga County executive this week. The Democratic state representative from Beachwood has advised reporters of a "major announcement" he plans to make at 10 a.m. Thursday at the new Ernst & Young building in Cleveland's Flats East Bank development. There is little question that Budish will officially launch his campaign. Last week he [stepped down from his post as House minority leader](#), a move caucus officials are expected to make if they plan to run for a new office. And Democratic insiders had previously told The Plain Dealer that Budish was preparing for a May 30 announcement. Budish is regarded as a Democratic front-runner because of his fundraising abilities. But he's never appeared on a ballot beyond his East Side base. The executive's seat will be open on next year's ballot because Ed FitzGerald is seeking the Democratic nomination to face Ohio Gov. John Kasich. So far FitzGerald is the only announced Democrat in the race for governor. One other Democrat has declared his candidacy: [ex-Sheriff Bob Reid](#). Other Democrats considering bids include County Council President C. Ellen Connally, [State Sen. Shirley Smith](#) and [Eric Wobser](#), head of the Ohio City Inc. development agency. Republicans, a statistical underdog in Cuyahoga County, are hoping to field a high-caliber candidate of their own. Those mentioned include State Sen. Tom Patton and County Councilman Jack Schron.

Cleveland Plain Dealer. 5/29/13

Tea party re-energized by IRS scandal

Tea party activists may be incensed over the improper targeting of conservative groups by the Internal Revenue Service, but those on hand Wednesday for a "national town hall" about the issue also see a silver lining to the controversy. Many at the nearly full conference hall said that the IRS' actions have sparked more activity and interest in conservative movements. "We've already achieved some of our goals of this meeting," said George Brunemann, one of the event's organizers who helped found the Cincinnati Tea Party, served as president of that organization last year and who emceed the event. Waving to the nearly full room, Brunemann said that the IRS situation has "created a new groundswell of interest." Greg Fettig, the midwest regional coordinator of the national conservative group FreedomWorks said that the tea party movement has seen a 14 percent jump in approval in a recent Rasmussen poll over the last two weeks. The

IRS office and division at the center of the controversy was based in the agency's offices in downtown Cincinnati. The event featured speakers from several local, state, and national tea party organizations, as well as several elected officials. Those included Ohio Sen. Rob Portman, R-Terrace Park, who was one of the first in Congress to question the IRS over potential targeting. In addition, Rep. Steve Chabot, R-Westwood, and Rep. Brad Wenstrup, R-Columbia Township, also spoke. Portman said that the IRS scandal is tied directly into politics and the 2012 election. "This is clearly putting politics over the public interest," Portman said, also referring to the ongoing scandal involving Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and possible inappropriate requests for political donations. As for the IRS, "either they are not telling the truth or they are incompetent. They misled the American people, period. "The tea party was right ... the government has overstepped its bounds," Portman said. "There are 12 deadly sins at the IRS, and one is not to directly violate the constitutional rights or you are immediately terminated. We haven't seen that happen yet." Chabot said that while the IRS controversy was indeed "outrageous," he said the investigation into what happened in the Libyan consulate in Benghazi was the biggest scandal facing the White House. "People died ... and time after time the administration lied to the American public," Chabot said. "But the IRS is a big deal, too. This could have a chilling effect on anyone people getting involved for fear of being scrutinized by their own government." One local activist said he was re-energized by the scandal, saying that the "government was trampling people's First Amendment right to free political speech." "They are targeting people with the IRS and are now targeting news organizations with the justice department," said Tim McDonald, a retired Cincinnati firefighter who lives in Whitewater Township and is that community's fiscal officer. Wearing a "Got Tea?" t-shirt, McDonald said he was going to redouble his efforts for conservative efforts and to reform the IRS. "This targeting was political," McDonald said. "I don't think anyone in this room would mind this if they had done it fairly. But they didn't."

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Ohio lawmakers move to block JobsOhio from state audit

Republicans in the Ohio House of Representatives voted Wednesday to shield nearly all of JobsOhio's financial records from review by Ohio Auditor Dave Yost. Under the bill, Yost would not be allowed to review the majority of the state's private economic development arm's funding — an estimated \$100 million annually or more — generated from profits on sales from the state's liquor monopoly. Yost, a Republican, would be consulted in selecting a private firm that would audit JobsOhio each year. The bill passed the House, 61-34. Language limiting Yost's auditing authority was inserted Wednesday morning as an amendment to an otherwise uncontroversial bill meant to reduce the cost of state audits for local governments. The amended bill will now go back to the Ohio Senate, which unanimously approved the measure without the JobsOhio amendment last week. Gov. John Kasich, also a Republican, had pushed for the change since earlier in the year, when he and Yost in an intraparty squabble [buted heads about the state auditor's ability to review](#) JobsOhio's records. JobsOhio is a private nonprofit Kasich and the state legislature [created in 2011](#) to replace the government agency that had promoted economic development in the state. Yost eventually issued a subpoena, with which JobsOhio officials reluctantly complied. JobsOhio [returned \\$8.4 million in state funds](#) it received to help it gets operations off the ground. Spokespeople for Kasich and JobsOhio issued similar statements

following Wednesday's vote, saying the amendment would bring needed clarity to concerns raised by private economic development groups. "It not only helps JobsOhio know how to move forward but it's also critically important for the job creators who use economic development incentives to grow and expand in Ohio," said JobsOhio spokeswoman Laura Jones. "The additional accountability for JobsOhio is welcome also and provides additional assurances as it continues its important work to help create jobs so Ohio can keep getting back on track," said Kasich spokesman Rob Nichols. Yost did not return a message seeking comment. A spokeswoman said Yost first saw the amendment Wednesday morning, and would need to review it before weighing in. However, Yost addressed a rumored amendment in a March letter to legislators in which he argued he and future state auditors should be able to audit JobsOhio, which is run by a board of Kasich appointees and funded through state liquor proceeds. "While there have been no indications of misdealing, the potential for self-dealing or other mischief exists sometime in the future. This office's audit will help protect against the real possibility of human failings," Yost said in the letter. Democrats blasted Wednesday's JobsOhio amendment, saying Republicans railroaded it through without public input from Yost, and unsuccessfully pushed to revert the bill back to its original form. State Rep. Matt Lundy, D-Elyria, said the JobsOhio amendment reduced the public's ability to evaluate if JobsOhio is working effectively. Last week, Lundy and other House Democrats introduced a bill that would make JobsOhio subject to state audits, as well as state ethics and public records laws. "If you have nothing to hide, why are you afraid of the public's right to know how public dollars are being spent by JobsOhio?" Lundy said. State Rep. Ron Maag, R-Lebanon, who introduced the JobsOhio amendment, said the change would help preserve transparency while clarifying that JobsOhio and other private companies that receive public money aren't as a result totally open to government auditors. "This amendment reconfirms the Ohio legislature's intent that JobsOhio be private and transparent," Maag said. Chambers of commerce in Cleveland and Dayton supported the JobsOhio amendment. "(The amendment) makes sure the state doesn't overstep its boundaries and start auditing private funds of private companies, because that's not their role," said Chris Kershner, a lobbyist for the Dayton chamber.

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