



Week of Jan. 23, 2023

House divide deepens after raucous session

Shouts of “point of order” rang out across the House Chamber as Speaker **Jason Stephens** refused to recognize Rep. **Derek Merrin** and his supporters for various motions and amendments during Tuesday’s session. Stephens’ refusal came amid a planned effort by Merrin to amend to the proposed House Rules package and Republican leadership slate, traditionally pro forma votes that are passed without fanfare or controversy.

Stephens’ swift actions shut down any public consideration of the Merrin camp’s alternatives, which reportedly included Merrin loyalists in House leadership, inclusion of Christian prayer prior to each legislative session, and allowing lawmakers to carry firearms on the floor. Between votes, Merrin addressed the chamber to comment on Stephens’ actions saying, “It’s completely uncalled for, inappropriate, and a violation of (House) Rules.” Merrin and key supporters also refused to stand and acknowledge the incoming Republican leadership during their swearing in.

After session, Merrin and supporter Rep. **Phil Plummer** told reporters that they – not Stephens – control the \$3 million fundraising arm of the caucus, signaling a potential campaign to launch and fund primary challengers against the Stephens camp. Stephens refuted that claim saying the speaker controls those funds.

Stephens’ leadership team will be Rep. **Scott Oelslager**, speaker pro tempore; Rep. **Bill Seitz**, majority floor leader; Rep. **Jon Cross**, assistant majority floor leader; Rep. **Jim Hoops**, majority whip; and Rep. **Sharon Ray**, assistant majority whip.

After doling out key leadership and committee chair positions to Merrin supporters, Stephens increased his supporters to 31 Republicans based on the Rules vote, just four votes shy of Merrin with 35 Republicans. House Republicans will attend their two-day retreat next week.

House committee chairs, vice chairs announced

Speaker Stephens this week announced committee chairs and vice chairs – but not full committee rosters – with key committees listed below.

- Finance: Rep. **Jay Edwards**, chair, Rep. **Jeff LaRe**, vice chair
- Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education: Rep. **Tracy Richardson**, chair
- Primary and Secondary Education, Rep. **Adam Bird**, chair, Rep. **Sarah Fowler Arthur**, vice chair
- Ways and Means, Rep. **Bill Roemer**, chair, Rep. **Derek Merrin**, vice chair.

State of the State scheduled for Jan. 31

Gov. Mike DeWine will give the State of the State address Tuesday, Jan. 31 at 12:00 p.m., during which he is expected to outline his executive budget proposal as part of the biennial budget bill process. His remarks can be watched live on the Ohio Channel at <https://ohiochannel.org/>.

Heard around the Statehouse

“They wanted chaos on the floor. They were just trying to create controversy and maybe get their name in the paper or get on the news.” - Rep. [Jay Edwards](#), referring to the tactics of Merrin supporters who unsuccessfully attempted to amend the Rules package and leadership slate.

“He ought to resign for behaving like that.” - [Rep. Phil Plummer](#), referring to Speaker Stephens’ handling of the votes on House leadership and the Rules package.

“Being the first Black Republican in this House in 50 years, I thought I would have the opportunity to provide insight into a caucus that didn't represent me or individuals who looked like me. Today, once again, Black people weren't recognized by a Republican caucus.” - Rep. [Josh Williams](#), a Northwest Ohio Republican whose efforts to address the chamber were refused by Stephens.