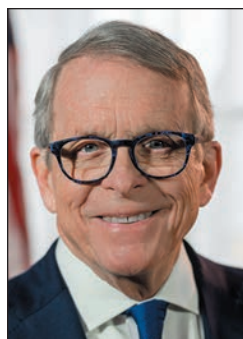


The Ohio Advantage

An Interview with The Honorable Mike DeWine, Governor, Ohio

EDITORS' NOTE Governor Mike DeWine was elected as Ohio's 70th Governor in November 2018 and then reelected in November 2022. With a background in a small family business, DeWine's political career has included serving as Greene County Prosecutor, Ohio State Senator, U.S. Congressman, Ohio Lt. Governor, U.S. Senator, and most recently, Ohio's 50th Attorney General. As Governor, his priorities include addressing the state's opioid crisis, and focusing on the health, welfare, and education of Ohio's children. DeWine graduated from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio with a degree in education.



The Hon. Mike DeWine

What attracted you to public service?

When I was in college at Miami University, I received a bachelor of science degree in education, and I intended to be a history teacher, but I ended up pursuing my law degree, and practicing law led to public service and politics. Public service is an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. Every day in office is a gift and a chance to work on issues, drive policy, and solve problems that will improve the quality of life for our citizens.

Will you provide an overview of the priorities for your administration?

We are always striving to make Ohio the best place to live, work, and raise a family. To make that happen, we invest a great deal of funding and resources in job creation and workforce development. We also focus efforts on improving mental health, supporting law enforcement, and preserving our natural resources. But most of all, we focus on removing barriers and creating opportunities to help our children.

We are investing in prenatal care and post-natal care for moms, early reading for all children, and good quality childcare, so that kids are ready for kindergarten. We are transforming education, particularly our reading programs. We are building up our teachers and principals because they are the guiding lights in our schools. We are expanding our career technical center programs and making sure they have the most up-to-date equipment so their graduates are ready to go right into the workforce or on to higher education. We are increasing funding for college scholarships. In fact, in this year's graduating class, the top 5 percent of students from every high school who choose to attend an Ohio college

or university will receive one of our merit scholarships of up to \$5,000 a year.

If we can nurture and grow upcoming generations of kids to reach their full potential, we will have truly accomplished something great for Ohio.

Will you elaborate on your administration's efforts to improve education in Ohio and reform K-12 education?

In Ohio, we are working hard to give students the best education possible so they can live up to their God-given potential. Our most recent budget estab-

lished the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, a cabinet-level agency to prepare students for success in school and, later, in the workforce.

Today, our #1 goal is to improve reading proficiency. In the fall, we began moving Ohio school curriculums to what works: evidence-based literacy instruction aligned with the Science of Reading. The Science of Reading refers to the research that has been conducted for decades by scientists and reading researchers that shows there is an actual "science" to reading. And, certain reading skills need to be taught, including phonics.

The earlier a child is on track and reading on grade level, the more success that child will have in later grades and after graduation. But this has been a problem for our students. In fact, in 2022, 40 percent of all third graders in Ohio weren't proficient readers.

We are confident that with our greater emphasis on early reading and proven literacy instruction, proficiency will rise. Today, Ohio districts not using the Science of Reading are in the process of switching to that method. Already, more than 8,000 Ohio teachers have received Science of Reading literacy training and support from our Educational Service Center consultants and are using what they learned to teach the 200,000 children in their classrooms. By the end of the next school year, the Science of Reading will be in every district.

How is your administration preparing Ohio for the 21st Century by expanding high-speed, affordable internet and investing in infrastructure?

Having access to the internet has become an absolute necessity for living and thriving in today's world, but unfortunately, reliable, low-cost connections are lacking in many communities throughout



First Lady Fran DeWine and Governor Mike DeWine pose with local children from Malvern during a reading of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* at the Carroll County Public Library to promote enrollment in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio

Ohio. That is why, in 2020, Lt. Governor Jon Husted and I announced the creation of BroadbandOhio, an office within the Ohio Department of Development that is dedicated to improving access to high-speed internet across Ohio.

Since its inception, BroadbandOhio has invested nearly \$250 million to connect 135,000 homes across the State through its Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program. Another \$50 million was made available last year to internet service providers to help cover infrastructure costs. Some examples of recent successes include: More than 90 percent of residents in Darke County are experiencing improved internet coverage; the Molly Caren Agricultural Center in Madison County received funding for an autonomous farming equipment project; and Butler County students living in a mobile home community received free internet access through a state-funded grant that will provide connectivity for three years.

When it comes to infrastructure, since 2021, we have been redeveloping communities by making investments for growth and future opportunities through our Ohio BUILDS initiative, which focuses on supporting targeted solutions that impact quality of life, such as water infrastructure improvements, brownfield redevelopment, and the demolition of blighted buildings. To date, we have spent \$500 million to support hundreds of water and wastewater projects, \$350 million on 313 brownfield removal projects, and \$150 million for the demolition of commercial and residential buildings and revitalization of surrounding properties throughout the State.

Will you discuss your administration's commitment to transparency?

Government operates best in daylight. Ohioans want to be informed, and they deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent. Today, technology makes that easier than ever.

Soon after taking office, we began looking for ways to make information more readily available to the public and to transform government services. In April 2019, we launched the InnovateOhio Platform to coordinate government data and resources. I also signed an executive order to require all state agencies, boards, and commissions to adopt and use the platform. Today, data, through the DataOhio portal, is open and easy to explore and share.

One of the first technology-driven wins for transparency came when Lt. Governor Jon Husted worked with Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague to unite the Treasurer's Ohio Checkbook and Ohio's Interactive Budget into a one-stop resource for taxpayers to easily use to learn more about spending at the state and local levels of government. The new Ohio Checkbook rolled out in 2020 and today, budgets, contracts, and salaries are just a click away. Also, by streamlining the process and eliminating duplication, the State has saved about \$900,000 a year.

How critical is a strong public/private partnership in Ohio and will you highlight your working relationship with the business community?

Public/private partnerships are great ways to get things done as they leverage the strengths

of both sectors. We are always working with the business community and have a great relationship with the "Big Six" – the Ohio Business Roundtable, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Manufacturers' Association, the Ohio Retail Merchants, the Ohio Farm Bureau, and the Ohio Chapter of the National Federation of Independent Business.

But, perhaps the most successful public/private partnership in Ohio is the one we have with JobsOhio, our economic development corporation. JobsOhio is state-authorized, yet private, and staffed by seasoned professionals with years of private sector experience. It operates alongside, but outside of, state government, giving it the ability to move at the speed of business and the expertise to speak the language of business.

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The public/private partnership we've built with JobsOhio has proven to be a powerful competitive advantage for our State. We've had some terrific wins with the help of JobsOhio, including landing Intel in 2022. Construction on Intel is underway in Licking County, and Ohio is becoming the Silicon Heartland – home of the most advanced semiconductor manufacturing site in the world. With Intel and the entrepreneurial talent and businesses coming to Ohio and the groundbreaking innovations coming from the industries already here, Ohio's economic future is looking even brighter.

As you look to attract new industries and businesses to Ohio, how do you define the Ohio advantage?

We have so much going for us in Ohio. First, we have a great location in the Midwest. Ohio is within a day's drive of 60 percent of the U.S. and Canadian populations.

We also have an abundance of clean, fresh water. About 3 million Ohioans get their water from Lake Erie, and through our H2Ohio Initiative, we are taking very good care of Lake Erie and all our waterways.

Another asset that sets Ohio apart is our workforce. We're Midwesterners, who get up in the morning, go to work, and get things done. We are continuing to build our workforce by creating good relationships between business and education. We are also encouraging young people to explore their options – whether those options include attending a career center, pursuing an apprenticeship, going to a college or university, or going straight into the workforce. Our other workforce investments include increased funding for proven programs, such as TechCred, which give employees the ability to earn industry-recognized, technology-focused credentials to prepare them to work in high-tech jobs.

Another selling point for Ohio is its robust and vibrant economy. We have consistently been able to keep our taxes down, and Ohio is incredibly financially sound. Because of our diversified economy and fiscal strength, Ohio recently achieved the coveted "AAA" ratings from all three major credit bureaus for the first time in the State's history.

Ohio has another advantage, and that is its reputation for innovation. Ohio's world-class research institutions employ some of the industry's top scientists and leaders with the skills to advance solutions for production here at home.

Ohio also has a strong transportation network. In fact, it is one of our most vital assets, and we have invested in making them safer and more reliable. Ohio is well-positioned to handle a growing economy, and transportation is vital to that growth. Our Ohio Department of Transportation is charged with maintaining nearly 50,000 lane miles of state and U.S. routes outside municipalities and interstates and more than 14,000 bridges. This transportation system carries 61 percent of the freight traffic in Ohio.

In short, Ohio has set a solid foundation for businesses to grow and prosper.

With so much gridlock and partisanship in Washington DC, what do you see as the key ingredients to getting action and achieving results?

When people find common ground, that can certainly be a way forward. There will always be disagreements and undercurrents that shape discourse. But, in the end, what is best for the people should be what drives policy and solutions.

With the success that your administration has achieved for Ohio, are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to celebrate the wins?

I am grateful every day for the chance to serve the people of Ohio. I frequently travel beautiful Ohio and get to meet so many wonderful people. It is truly inspiring. The very best days for me are when I have Fran, my lovely bride of over 56 years, by my side, and am surrounded by our kids and grandkids. I am a very lucky man. ●