

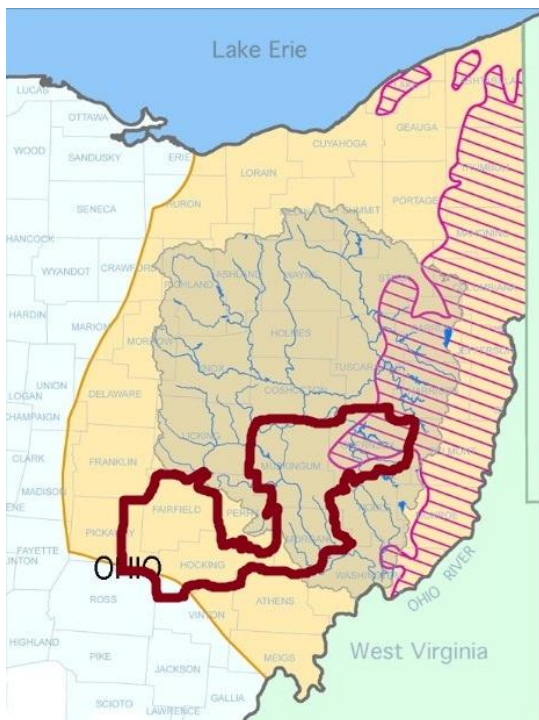
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What will the 2012 election tell us about the issue of hydraulic fracturing in Ohio?
Watch Ohio Senate District 20

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If the collective bargaining bill, S.B. 5, was the signature issue of Ohio Gov. John Kasich's first year in office, then promoting hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") through S.B. 315 has been the signature issue of his second year. If fracking leaves a mark on the elections, it most will likely be in Ohio Senate District 20.

In the map below, the area with purple lines across it is the region of Marcellus Shale potential, the tan area is the region of Utica Shale potential, the grey area is the Muskingum River watershed, the largest wholly contained watershed in Ohio, and the brown outlined area is new Senate District 20.



This district emerges from a process of elimination.

Starting with 132 State House and Senate districts, how many have (1) incumbent Ohio Senators (2) who voted for S.B. 315 on final passage, (3) and are running for re-election, (4) in shale districts, (5) and whose opponents are significantly different on the issue of fracking, (6) and who are in competitive races?

Only Senate District 20 passes all these tests.

(House Districts were eliminated since they are so small in size that only a widespread pattern in House races would reflect on an issue. That is not in the offing this year.)

Criteria (1) – (4) don't require further explanation.

(5) Do the candidates have significantly different positions on the issue of hydraulic fracturing?

The incumbent, Sen. Troy Balderson, is the Vice Chair of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, which considered the hydraulic fracturing bill, S.B. 315.

- S.B. 315 made it nearly impossible for doctors, nurses, emergency responders, medical technologists, and medical researchers to get crucial information about toxic chemicals used in oil and gas drilling. It also added a “gag order” to prohibit these medical professionals from publicly disclosing chemical information they do learn.
- S.B. 315 also denied the right-to-know to neighbors of proposed drilling sites
- S.B. 315 has no provision requiring that wells can only be drilled if they comply with local laws. It does nothing to stop drillers from forcing landowners to lease land even if they don't want to.

He voted for the bill in committee and again on the Senate floor. He has not sponsored a bill to fix it.

Balderson has raised \$346,846 in political contributions since 2007, according to the Ohio Secretary of State. Of this, 85% has come from large contributors giving between \$250 and \$10,000, including Chesapeake Energy, Oxford Oil, Utility Technologies International, Mid-Ohio Pipeline, Appalachian Oil Producers, R+J Drilling Company, Ohio Oil Gathering, Cameron Drilling, Devon Oil, NiSource, Ohio Oil and Gas Producers Fund, Marathon Oil, Southeastern Natural Gas, FirstEnergy, Duke Energy, American Electric Power, and Dayton Power and Light.

The challenger, Teresa Scarmack, opposes key provisions of S.B. 315. She has said she will “advocate for and support” S.B. 379, a current bill to fix the medical right-to-know and gag-order provisions of Ohio’s new hydraulic fracturing law. Scarmack said,

“I believe it is the right of every individual to know what chemical(s) are making them sick and the gag order does not allow for individuals to have this information. Therefore, the fracking companies have no liability in causing abnormalities in the health of the people in Ohio. It is the responsibility of the oil and gas companies to answer for their unsafe practices and the resulting illnesses discovered during an examination given by a physician.”

In reply to a questionnaire from Ohio Citizen Action, Scarmack said she would restore to local government the authority to set and enforce well drilling requirements, and would prohibit hydraulic fracturing or injection well drilling within 1000 feet of an occupied dwelling without the occupants’ consent.

Scarmack has a much shorter record of contributions than Balderson. She raised \$12,200 during the 2012 primary campaign, none of it from oil and gas interests.

(6) Is the race competitive?

The argument that it might be competitive rests primarily on the weaknesses of the incumbent. Troy Balderson is a newcomer to Senate District 20 and he has a narrow political base.

Balderson, 50, is from Zanesville in Muskingum County. He is a co-owner of Balderson Motor Sales in Zanesville, and helps with his family farm in Salem. He was elected to his first term in the Ohio House in 2008, in an open seat election in old HD94, which is all of Coshocton County and most of Muskingum County. He beat Jennifer Stewart by 54% to 46% district-wide. He got 8,836 votes to her 7,474 votes in Coshocton County, and 19,532 votes to her 16,674 votes in Muskingum County.

In 2010, Balderson ran for re-election in old HD94 and was unopposed. He got 9,113 votes in Coshocton County and 19,508 votes in Muskingum.

In 2011, old SD20 Senator Jimmy Stewart decided to quit and work for the Ohio Gas Association. Balderson was appointed to replace Jimmy Stewart in the Senate. Old SD20 included Balderson's House district, old HD94, plus the rest of Muskingum, Guernsey, Noble, Monroe, Washington, Morgan, Athens, and Meigs.

In 2012, Balderson is running in new SD20, which consists of Muskingum, Guernsey, Morgan, Athens (small part), Hocking, Fairfield, and Pickaway (half).

Of these counties, the only one Balderson has campaigned in is Muskingum. To get a sense of how much of the district Muskingum is, let's look at voter turnout in the last presidential election year, 2008:

Muskingum	39,667
Guernsey	17,633
Morgan	6,726
Hocking	13,229
Fairfield	72,665
Pickaway	24,092*
Total	174,042

* Only half of the land area of Pickaway County is in the district, but its only city, Circleville, is in new SD20.

In terms of the number of voters, Muskingum County, the only county Balderson has campaigned in, is only 23% of the new SD20. The Ohio GOP did not do Balderson any favors when they drew the new district lines. The center of political gravity in the district is Fairfield County, which he has never represented in the legislature and in which he has never campaigned.

Further, his fundraising record shows how narrow his political base is. As above, records compiled by the Ohio Secretary of State show that his fundraising since 2007 has totaled \$346,846, of which 85% has been from large contributions ranging from \$250 to \$10,000. That leaves only \$52,201 over 6 years in small contributions, or only \$8,700 a year. This narrowness is compounded by redistricting, which left many of his previous small contributors outside his new district.

The unknown in this equation is his opponent, Teresa Scarmack, a first-time candidate and lifelong teacher, since 1999 as a kindergarten teacher in the Logan-Hocking School District. If she runs a strong campaign, Senate District 20 may tell us how the fracking issue is playing at the ballot box.

For 37 years, Ohio Citizen Action has campaigned all over the state to protect Ohioans from air and water pollution, and save Ohio energy customers money. Ohio Citizen Action is nonprofit and nonpartisan, and does not endorse candidates for office. Our members make up their own minds about who to vote for. At election time, the organization provides the facts about candidates' positions and records on our issues.