

# [***Fight over foreign money in politics stymies deal to assure President Joe Biden is on Ohio's ballot***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0C-VD61-JC5B-G2NV-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The question of [*whether Democratic President Joe Biden will appear on Ohio's fall ballot*](https://apnews.com/article/election-2024-presidential-race-biden-ballot-access-67a8da6962fabde0af3923409cf8d1b1) has become entangled in a partisan legislative fight to keep foreign money out of state ballot campaigns, a year after cash tied to a Swiss billionaire boosted a [*successful effort to enshrine abortion rights*](https://apnews.com/article/ohio-abortion-amendment-election-2023-fe3e06747b616507d8ca21ea26485270) in the solidly red state's constitution.

On Wednesday, against the backdrop of a [*festering Republican leadership fight*](https://apnews.com/article/ohio-fractured-house-speaker-primaries-d51c518f52e1060714c03bde90ee84b5) that’s [*roiled lawmaking*](https://apnews.com/article/politics-ohio-state-government-us-republican-party-3e34bde2192584ce4d1c2e9f0cce30ce) since last year, Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose’s proposal to ban foreign money from initiative campaigns became the poison pill that prevented a final solution for adjusting an Aug. 7 ballot deadline that precedes the Democratic National Convention.

Thursday marked the last day legislators could pass the fix with a simple majority, and no sessions were held.

All four Republican and Democratic leaders at the Statehouse still say they're confident the president will appear on Ohio's ballot. It's the how and when that remain a mystery.

Senate Republicans wanted to use Biden's predicament as leverage to pass a ban on foreign nationals contributing to ballot campaigns.

The legislation stemmed from the involvement in a pair of heated ballot campaigns last year of Hansjörg Wyss, a Swiss billionaire who has funneled hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years into 501(c) nonprofit organizations [*backing liberal U.S. political causes.*](https://apnews.com/article/dark-money-democrats-wyss-politics-elections-601d40cd01569190559d545418afe396) A January report issued by LaRose found that over $207 million flowing from Wyss-backed entities went to three groups that, in turn, donated a combined $3.9 million to help pass November's Issue 1, the abortion measure, and to [*thwart an earlier proposed constitutional amendment*](https://apnews.com/article/ohio-abortion-rights-constitutional-amendment-special-election-227cde039f8d51723612878525164f1a) that would have made passing it more difficult.

In order to garner the necessary Republican votes to help Biden out, Republican Senate President Matt Huffman said a compromise was struck to combine the foreign nationals legislation with the language adjusting the ballot deadline. Both proposals were folded into another bill allowing candidates to pay for child care with campaign funds.

After fractious debate, the measure cleared the Senate along party lines. Democrats called combining the measures “a dirty trick” and “the worst kind of ***politics***.”

Huffman said: “Eventually Joe Biden is going to be on the ballot through whatever means. I think that’s fair for us to come together and also say no foreign money in Ohio elections.”

But GOP House Speaker Jason Stephens, who [*depends on the support of minority Democrats*](https://apnews.com/article/politics-united-states-house-of-representatives-ohio-a93d55bd0fce6ba35653efac890a35d8) to keep his job, had been working on a different solution.

Stephens had in mind a “clean” bill that called for moving this year’s ballot deadline to Aug. 23, the day after Democrats' convention. It also included a long-term solution allowing extensions in future years when either party's nominating convention falls less than 90 days before the election.

This would be the third time since 2012 that Ohio has had to change its ballot deadline to accommodate conflicts faced by presidential candidates of both parties.

But that House plan stalled after it was informally passed, and when Stephens declined to call a vote on the Senate's ballot fix, the chamber erupted. Fellow Republicans aligned against Stephens jeered and booed. Some cried, “Shame!”

LaRose, who initially identified the calendar glitch, issued a statement condemning the House's inaction. Though the chamber's majority is Republican, he said it appeared that “Democrats are more interested in protecting foreign billionaires who want to bankroll Ohio's elections than in getting their presidential candidate on the ballot.”

He pointed out that the House still has time to act with an emergency vote, which requires a two-thirds majority and allows a bill to become effective immediately.

On Thursday, LaRose took his criticism further — bringing up Wyss by name.

“There’s one person at this point who’s responsible for keeping Joe Biden off the ballot in Ohio, and it’s a Swiss billionaire you’ve probably never heard of,” he said in a statement. He alleged Democrats have "become dependent on Wyss’s dark money to fund everything from their ballot campaigns to their fake news operations.”

State Sen. Bill DeMora, a Columbus Democrat, accused LaRose of politicizing his office and said blaming Democrats for the lack of a ballot resolution is “almost so sad it's funny.”

”It is not the Democrats’ fault that the Republicans are infighting and can’t govern, but the Secretary is just trying to please right-wing extremists instead of doing his job to avoid further embarrassment," he said in a statement. "This debacle falls squarely on the MAGA cult Republican supermajority in both chambers who only hold power because of the unconstitutionally gerrymandered maps that LaRose voted for."

Wyss was born in Bern, Switzerland in 1935. He now lives in Wyoming.

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