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Charita Goshay: Mike DeWine and Jon Husted sold their political ambitions to FirstEnergy



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From the people who brought you "The Larry Householder Show" and "Coingate," now comes "The First Energy Follies" starring Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted.

Several media outlets recently reported on emails from 2018 showing that Husted and DeWine were hip-deep in button-holing FirstEnergy executives for campaign donations. That largesse was rewarded with the passage of House Bill 6, which resulted in a $1.3 billion bailout paid for by FirstEnergy customers.

Three FirstEnergy executives who hosted lavish fundraisers for DeWine and Husted have since been indicted on bribery and money-laundering charges. For his part, Householder has landed in the hoosegow for accepting $61 million in bribes.

Husted and DeWine have said they didn't know that bribes were involved to push House Bill 6.

Here's the thing: Short of being caught with "a live boy or a dead girl" as the saying goes, there was no way DeWine, a former prosecutor, congressman and state attorney general who cleared the backlog of rape cases, was going to lose to Democrat Rich Cordray, who ran a campaign so lifeless, the ads could have been used to put colicky newborns to sleep.

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DeWine has been in the game long enough to know that corporations and the people who run them don't hand candidates thousands of dollars as a gesture of good citizenship.

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The emails suggest that Husted led the charge in securing dark-money campaign funds from FirstEnergy, whose executives also donated to DeWine's daughter's campaign for Greene County prosecutor, and paid a $4.3 million bribe to the late Sam Randazzo, a former FirstEnergy executive who led the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, to ensure he did their bidding.

DeWine was warned by his own adviser not to appoint Randazzo, but did it anyway.

Why? Was no one else on the planet qualified?

Randazzo and lobbyist Neil Clark, who was involved with the scandal, died by suicide. *(Editor's note: This column was updated to note that Randazzo and Clark died by suicide.)*

Offering nothing more than "we followed the law," DeWine has been channeling "Hogan's Heroes" Sgt. Schultz, who famously declared "I know nothing! Sometimes I even forget whom we are fighting!"

Once upon a time, Ohio was a purple state, a bellwether which leaned conservative but never veered into Crazytown. Many Buckeyes are old enough to remember having governors from both major parties.

Corn-fed corruption: Ohio Assembly mocking democracy in the Heart of it All

But single-party domination and extremism has resulted in a bribery scandal of biblical proportions, gerrymandering, eliminating policies to ensure gun-safety, an

attempt by the secretary of state to change how election results are calculated, and trying to pass draconian laws, thus proving yet again that absolute power corrupts.

Anyone who's lived in Ohio for five minutes knows that Republicans have always taken turns at being governor, that they avoid intraparty wrangling. Husted is widely expected to run in 2026, but thanks to the FirstEnergy scandal, those plans have struck an iceberg. That sound you hear, is state Attorney General Dave Yost tuning up his guitar as he prepares to jump the line.

But Yost has his own problems. Someone once wisecracked that the most dangerous place in America is to be between Yost and a TV camera. Back in 2023, he couldn't appear on Fox News quick enough to deny and dismiss reports that a 10-year-old Columbus girl underwent an abortion in Indiana after being raped by her mother's boyfriend.

The story not only turned out to be true, it became a key factor in Ohioans voting to enshrine abortion protections despite the GOP's best efforts to derail it.

Prior to that, Yost filed an amicus brief supporting Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's bogus lawsuit claiming that the 2020 presidential election was rigged. Yost knew better but like U.S. Sen. J.D. Vance, he sacrificed his principles upon the altar of ambition.

All these factors give state Democrats a toehold toward competing for the governorship in 2026. If they were smart, they'd run these scandals on a loop. But as we've seen in recent years, Ohio Democrats have a bad habit of bringing a feather-duster to a knife fight.

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