OPINION

Editorial

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tion whether Carter broke Ohio laws related to conflicts of interest and public contracts through his relationship with Vlachos.

OSU's team lacked the power to determine if Carter and Vlachos had a financial or business relationship, a critical unanswered question.

They ask:

1. Under the Ohio Ethics Law, did the Carter/Vlachos relationship manifest a substantial and improper influence that impaired Carter's objectivity and independence of judgment with respect to his actions regarding Vlachos' business ventures in violation of Ohio Revised of Ohio Revised Code 102.03 (D) or (E)?

2. Under the Ohio Ethics Law, were Carter and Vlachos business associates and, if so, would Carter's actions with respect to WOSU's contract with Vlachos be in violation of Ohio Revised Code 2921.42?

3. Did Carter's actions in connection with Vlachos implicate any other potential prohibitions?

An abuse of influence and authority?

The report says Carter, a retired vice admiral in the Navy and former superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy, made up business reasons for trips with Vlachos.

He used his influence and authority to help Vlachos and promote her app and/or veterans' podcast to a wide variety of institutions and businesses, including JobsOhio, Anduril, the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, Student Veterans of America and the Ohio National Guard, according to the report.

This includes helping Vlachos secure a $60,000 JobsOhio sponsorship for her podcast and a contract with WOSU to record episodes.

Besides Carter, one other university employee — Chris Kabourek, Carter's designated "primary point of contact" for Vlachos — resigned.

Carter began helping Vlachos develop her app, "Connect to Power," in May 2025.

According to the report, he suggested to Kabourek, then-senior vice president for administration and planning, that $100,000 in unrestricted donations to the university be used to fund the app.

Among a host of highly questionable things, Carter allegedly forwarded Vlachos' resume to OSU's senior vice president for talent, culture and human resources in 2024, asking that she be considered for "any opportunity that fits her skill set."

The conflict of interest provisions in Ohio's ethics law, Ohio Revised Code 102.03 (D) and (E), read:

- (D) No public official or employee shall use or authorize the use of the authority or influence of office or employment to secure anything of value or the promise or offer of anything of value that is of such a character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon the public official or employee with respect to that person's duties.
- (E) No public official or employee shall solicit or accept anything of value that is of such a character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon the public official or employee with respect to that person's duties.

Did Carter cross these legal lines?

There must be accountability

The recommendations at the end of Ohio State's report related to the university's travel policy, leadership practices, ethics for senior leaders, culture and shared values and cooperation with state and federal agencies fall short of what is needed to restore trust and gain accountability.

The university and the public should urge the Ohio Attorney General's Office or the Ohio Ethics Commission to investigate for legal wrongdoing. And an external audit of the financial resources directly at Carter's control should be conducted.

There also should be a deeper, independent investigation into how the president of one of the nation's largest universities was able to carry on such an inappropriate relationship for nearly two years under the nose of trustees.

Staff members close to Carter told investigators that Vlachos was overly "persistent," "unsophisticated, "weird," and clearly out of her depth, but nothing was done. The university must stress anti-retaliation protections and urge employees to voice concerns about the president and other senior leaders.

As much as university officials may want it to be, this cannot be easily swept away.

This piece was written by Dispatch Opinion Editor Amelia Robinson on behalf of the editorial board of The Columbus Dispatch. Editorials are fact-based assessments of issues of importance to the communities we serve. These are not the opinions of our reporting staff members, who strive for neutrality in their reporting.

Robinson

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My friend says that fact doesn't matter at all to his mom, a racist (his word), who lumps all nonwhite people together and labels them "bad."

My friend's mom is the kind of Ohio voter that Casey Putsch, an accused Adolf Hitler fan challenging Ramaswamy for the Republican nomination in the upcoming primary election, is clearly trying to appeal to.

"Hey Vivek, you wanna play cowboys vs. Indians?" he asks before firing three shots from a rifle in an April 14 video posted to X. "Don't worry. It's feather, not dot."

Columbus-area restaurant owners on April 15 announced the cancellation of a fundraiser to be held at their business after "discovering opinions Casey Putsch, a candidate running for Ohio governor, has made regarding Adolf Hitler, Nazis, and the Holocaust."

D.J. Byrnes of The Rooster Substack asked Putsch to say one bad thing about Hitler on April 17 at the fundraiser's new location, Goodale Park.

Putsch told Byrnes, "Bad painter."

Putsch doesn't have a chance of beating billionaire, Ohio GOP-endorsed Ramaswamy. Neither does his other Republican challenger, Morgan County's Heather Hill.

Hill, incidentally, just considered dumping her running mate, Stuart Moats, from her ticket. In a Facebook post, she claims he called her a racial slur. Hill is Black.

Who gets to be an American?

Racism — the kind Trump constantly stokes and Ramaswamy courted during his anti-DEI crusade — very well might cost Ramaswamy some votes this November.

It is the ongoing fight over who gets to be American and who doesn't, an issue that Ramaswamy somewhat outlines in "What is an American," a Dec. 17 opinion piece penned for the New York Times.

The piece was aimed partly at far-right Groypers and white nationalist Nick Fuentes, who have made xenophobic and racist comments about Ramaswamy.

"If, like Mr. Fuentes, you believe that Hitler was 'really f-ing cool,' or if you publicly call Usha Vance a 'jeet,' then you have no place in the conservative movement, period. The point isn't to clutch pearls, but to prevent the gradual legitimization of this un-American animus," Ramaswamy wrote.

Sexism is real

The November election is shaping up to be the first time in the state's history that a White Christian man's name won't be on the ballot for governor for one of the major parties.

Unless something truly wild happens, Ramaswamy will face Democratic gubernatorial candidate Amy Acton, who does not have a primary challenger.

Neither race, gender nor religion should play a part in the election, but we live in a world where such factors do exist, despite what Ramaswamy and others who deny the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs say.

Being a woman will no doubt create hurdles for Acton, who is also Jewish. Sexism is real.

There have already been efforts to paint her as a weak, unstable woman. Those labels are often foisted on female candidates.

Nancy P. Hollister is technically Ohio's only female governor. The Republican served in the office for 11 days between Dec. 31, 1998, and January 11, 1999, transitioning from her role as lieutenant governor after Gov. George Voinovich resigned to join the U.S. Senate.

Ohio is among the dwindling number of states that have never elected a female governor.

Former Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, the first woman to win a major party's nomination in an Ohio gubernatorial primary, tried in 2022 but was trounced 62% to 37% by incumbent Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican whose favorability among Democrats was boosted due to his handling of COVID-19 pandemic and his name recognition.

Whaley's defeat was much greater than Tim Ryan's 47% to 53% loss to JD Vance in that year's U.S. Senate race on the same day.

Ohioans may or may not reveal whether they are more racist or sexist with the results of the 2026 governor's race. This shouldn't even be an issue.

Neither candidate has held elected office before. Still, voters should compare Ramaswamy and Acton's stances on issues and pick the one that best matches their views.

Of course, I am not holding my breath that everyone will do that.

For her part, my friend's mom voted for John McCain during the 2008 presidential election because Sarah Palin was his running mate.

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Derrow

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shows that 63% privately acknowledge they self-silence their beliefs. And therein lies one of the many great challenges of divining public opinion, particularly in this internet, cell phone and social media era.

While poll results often imply scientific-sounding certainty by reporting a margin of error, that figure only captures sampling error, not other important sources of error such as methodology problems, question wording effects (as with the ONU poll), coverage problems or non-response bias.

Pollsters have always had to manage a long list of response biases, where respondents purposely or subconsciously manipulate their answers in ways that render the results suspect. Spam blocking software for cell phones and email make it harder for firms to connect with representative demographic samples.

Larger polling firms employ teams of social science experts and statisticians to design surveys and outreach efforts and analyze the results. AI might help even smaller firms break through the noise. But the fundamental challenges of a fractured, distrustful and technologically aloof population will be difficult to overcome.

This all plays out at a time when Ohioans are weighing multiple ballot initiatives, which makes getting an accurate read of public sentiment more important than ever.

Whether we're considering government budget priorities or other pressing questions, we ought to think about polling the same as virtually everything else these days: There's always more to the story.

Worse yet, we're told constantly what voters want but rarely how those opinions were elicited or manipulated. Reading the methodology before believing or sharing the headline is a small act, but it's necessary for honest civic engagement.

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Letters

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loans and preventing discrimination through enforcing civil rights laws. The department also collects student data to improve the quality of education.

The administration has ignored the fact that it takes an act of Congress to eliminate a federal agency.

First, Trump signed an executive order to dismantle the department, then his administration withheld billions of allocated dollars without congressional approval and slashed half its 4,000 employees. More recently, Education Secretary Linda McMahon announced that the department's responsibilities would be reassigned to other Cabinet departments, effectively shuttering it.

Please urge your members of Congress to block the destruction of this Congressionally created agency!

Loralee Daily, New Franklin

Suddes

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into a national story, because the perils feared by some suburban and rural Ohioans are also the vivid concerns of many landowners elsewhere. And that doesn't even begin to consider how such oceans of data can be used to manipulate the American consumer – or voter.

While these data barns do produce construction jobs, their operating crews, once a center is operating, is scanty; these are, after all, high-end computers that would be managed by small crews or, passably, remotely. For rank-and-file Ohioans, that's not jobs 'n' progress. That's smoke, and mirrors, and economic colonialism. But for data center owners – and the developers in their advanced guard – the good times will roll.

So, natural beauty risked for fracking; rural meadows cropped with data: That 's not a formula for prosperity; that's a Tomorrow Land of blighted beauty – and of an Ohio owned out of state by the speculators of casino capitalism.



Five tents holding Meta AI data centers for Facebook are under construction on the northeast corner of Beech and Morse roads in New Albany on Nov. 28, 2025.
DORAL CHENOWETH/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

TERM LIMITS: Demonstrating yet again that General Assembly term-limits are the gateway to amnesia, several Republican state senators are musing whether Ohio "needs" its own Department of Energy in the governor's Cabinet, cleveland.com's Anna Staver reported.

One of those legislators is Sen. Brian Chavez, of Marietta, an oil-and-gas operator; another is state Sen. Jerry Cirino, of Kirtland, chair of the Senate's budget-writing Finance Committee.

Trouble is, Ohio had a Department of Energy until mid-1983, when it was broken up, with units folded into the state Development Department and other Cabinet agencies.

What's changed? Not much.

The oil-and-gas lobby still has a chokehold on the legislature but would likely find it more convenient to focus on one executive branch regulator, not several.

Change No. 2, Statehouse amnesia spawned by legislative term-limits, promoted by insiders who wanted – and got – voters to hog-tie themselves on Election Day, leaving lobbyists, Capitol Square's real lawmakers, in charge of almost 12 million Ohioans, and how much it costs them to live.

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