

A primer on Pa.’s lieutenant governor candidates

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

When Pennsylvania election workers tally votes Nov. 3, a 25-25 split in the state Senate is well within the realm of possibility. In such a scenario, the lieutenant governor of the commonwealth would wield the tie-breaking vote on legislation as the chamber’s president.

Though the gubernatorial candidates get the glory, their lieutenants, brought along in a package deal, would hold some of the keys to power.

Among a lieutenant governor’s duties is chairing the state Board of Pardons, which reviews criminal cases and recommends clemency to the governor; chairing the Local Government Advisory Committee, which acts as a bridge between county municipalities and the General Assembly; and, of course, taking the reins of the commonwealth should the governor become incapacitated, die, resign or be forcibly removed.

Following is a brief rundown of each of the three potential lieutenant governors on the ballot this fall.

Austin Davis, Democrat



Austin Davis

Davis, the sitting lieutenant governor, is a former member of the state House and the running mate of incumbent Gov. Josh Shapiro. The 37-year-old native of McKeesport, Allegheny County, is the first Black person to sit in the state’s lieutenant governor seat, and he is the youngest lieutenant governor in America.

Prior to beginning his first term as lieutenant governor in 2023, he served five years in the General Assembly representing Allegheny County in the 35th House

District. He was the district’s first Black lawmaker.

Davis is married and has a daughter.

Jason Richey, Republican



Jason Richey

Richey, a Pittsburgh attorney, is the running mate of state Treasurer Stacy Garrity. The 54-year-old practices commercial, construction and real estate law with K&L Gates, where he has been a partner for more than two decades.

In the May primary, Richey soundly defeated retired corporate executive John Ventre, claiming more than 65% of the vote.

Policywise, Richey avidly opposes income taxes, preferring sales and transfer taxes that ensure a broader tax base.

Richey is married and has three children.

John Thomas, Libertarian



John Thomas

Thomas, of Armstrong County, is the running mate of Montgomery County businessman Ken Krawchuk.

In 2024, Thomas ran for U.S. Senate against Bob Casey Jr. and Dave McCormick, garnering only a fraction of the vote (1.3%).

A career educator, the 48-year-old works as a professional development coach for King of Prussia-based Agora Cyber Charter School. As a candidate, he emphasizes peace and prosperity in the form of decreasing spending on overseas wars and controlling inflation.

Thomas is married with two daughters and three grandchildren.

Governor: How candidates stand on big issues facing Pennsylvanians

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Union No. 98 IBEW Committee on Political Education; the Greater PA Carpenters PAC; Democracy PAC II, which was started by Democratic megadonor George Soros; and Silicon Valley executive Christian Larsen.

Stacy Garrity, Republican

Garrity, of rural Bradford County, spent the bulk of her career in the private sector, working her way up the ranks from cost accountant to vice president of government affairs at Pennsylvania-based Global Tungsten & Powders, which makes powders used in electronics and tools.

She is also a retired U.S. Army Reserve colonel who deployed three times, in Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Garrity received two Bronze Stars and the Legion of Merit award for her service.

Garrity’s first venture into politics was an unsuccessful bid for the GOP nomination for a 2019 congressional special election. Party officials subsequently asked her to run for state treasurer, and in 2020 she took the office in a major upset, beating the incumbent Democrat by less than a percentage point.

From that first campaign, Garrity has framed herself as a committed conservative and loyal ally of Donald Trump. She went on to win her 2024 reelection campaign easily, racking up the largest vote total of any statewide candidate (and beating a record previously set by Shapiro).

Pennsylvania’s treasurer is responsible for stewarding state dollars, which means both making sure bills are paid and investing savings. The office reported last year that it is overseeing \$180 billion in state coffers and directly managing more than \$55 billion overall. The treasurer also sits on the boards of Pennsylvania’s public pension funds.

During her time in office, Garrity has balanced nonpartisan priorities, like cutting program fees, with partisan ones like supporting the Israeli government.

An early priority was getting Treasury’s 529 college and career savings program upgraded to a coveted gold rating. The office succeeded, and Pennsylvania became one of just five states with gold-rated 529 plans. Treasury also eliminated the minimum deposit to open a 529 account, lowered minimum contribution amounts and reduced fees.

As many treasurers do, Garrity has also championed returning unclaimed property to Pennsylvanians, proposing legislation to allow the office to return unclaimed money under \$500 without requiring a claim to be filed with the agency. The bill became law in 2024. Her campaign estimates that all told, Treasury has returned more than \$1 billion in unclaimed property during her tenure.

From the beginning of her first term, Garrity was an active member of the State Financial Officers Foundation, a national conservative nonprofit that works with treasurers and other public officials. Its priorities include support for the Israeli government and opposition to environmental, social and governance, or ESG, initiatives — investment strategies in which the goal is to push corporations to change their behavior.

Garrity pursued both of those priorities. After boosting the state’s Israel Bonds investments by \$45 million, she campaigned at an Israel Bonds gala. She told Spotlight PA the investments, which came after the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks, were

simply a sound financial decision.

“They’ve never defaulted, they pay an above-market rate of return and ... if you can get a good return on your investment, and at the same time support our biggest ally, our only ally in the Middle East, then why not do it? It’s a win-win,” she said. (In 2021, Garrity’s then-chief investment officer warned her that Israel Bonds could actually be risky.)

During last year’s extended state budget impasse, Garrity inserted herself into the proceedings, an unusual step for a treasurer. She used unallocated state dollars to set up a \$500 million program that offered loans to counties, nonprofits and some other state-funded entities that had their usual payments frozen.

The program was widely seen as a political gesture meant to offer a contrast to Shapiro, who at the time was negotiating to end the budget impasse — something Garrity denies. “It was absolutely not political,” she told Spotlight PA.

In her biggest race yet, Garrity is leaning into a message that Shapiro is untrustworthy. She’s also focusing heavily on Pennsylvania’s rural areas — speeding up permitting for farmers and increasing natural gas production.

Both she and Shapiro have made recent turns against data centers, even though they were both initially supportive of the economic activity the projects could bring.

But with little money on hand, it has been difficult for Garrity to communicate her message to voters. As of June, Shapiro had more than 34 times the cash on hand Garrity did.

Her running mate is Jason Richey, a longtime construction, real estate and commercial law attorney at Pittsburgh-based multinational law firm K&L Gates.

Her top donors include University City Housing Co., a real estate firm owned by charter school founder Michael Karp; Pittsburgh-based PAC Keystone Honor, which is funded by manufacturing and construction interests; longtime GOP power broker Bob Asher and his PAC, PA Future Fund; and skill games company founder Michael Pace, from whom Garrity reported accepting a flight worth \$33,500.

Her biggest donations are orders of magnitude smaller than Shapiro’s. The single biggest, from University City Housing late last year, was \$250,000.

Ken Krawchuk, Libertarian

Krawchuk, based in Abington, Montgomery County, the same town Shapiro lives in, is the only third-party candidate for governor on the ballot this November.

His campaign website describes him as having founded an IT consulting firm and says he currently works as a “business architect for the pharmaceutical, insurance and financial markets.”

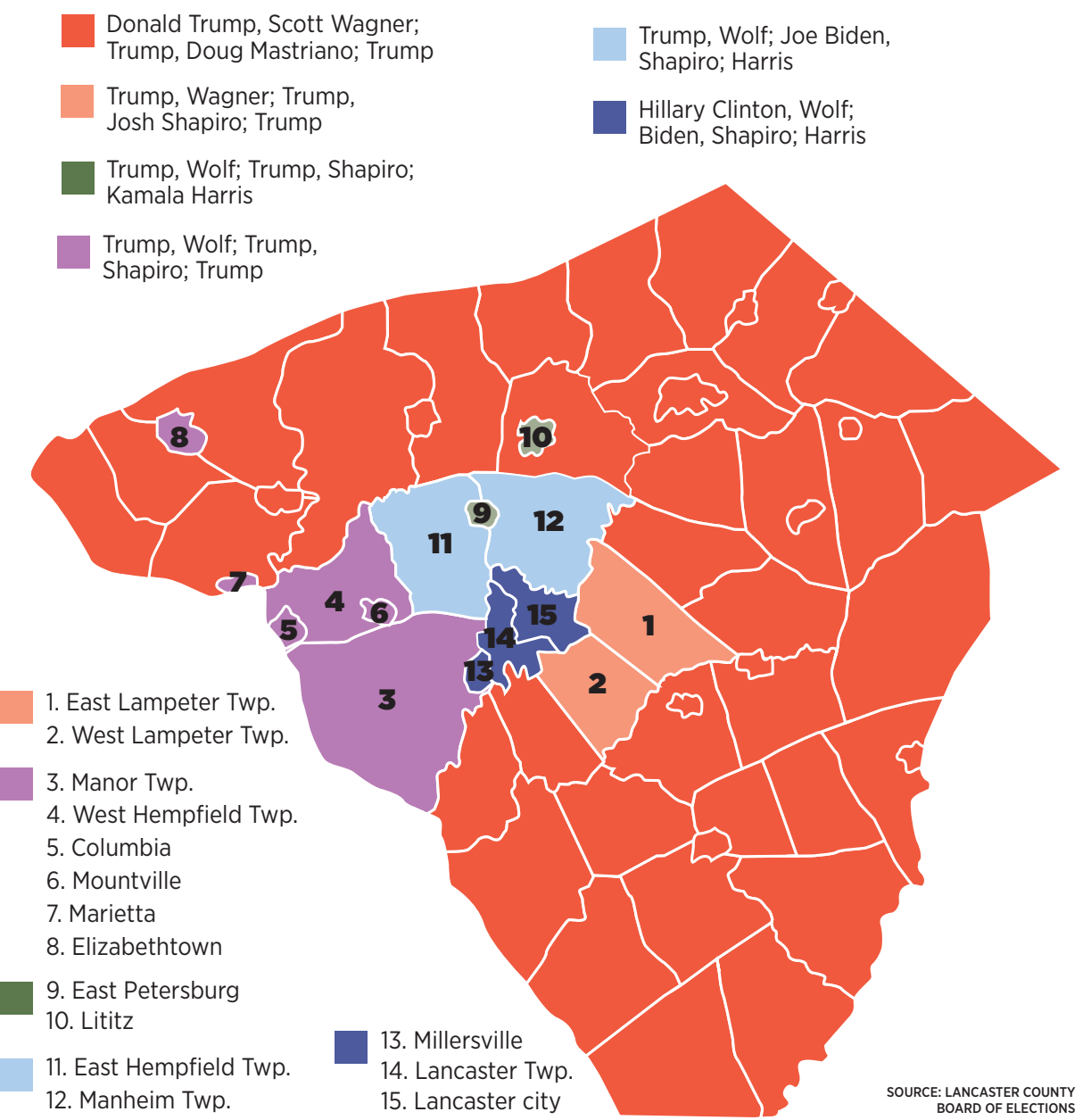
He is running, he wrote on Facebook, to give Pennsylvania voters “more than the same two old state choices.” He appeared somewhat surprised that Garrity’s campaign didn’t challenge his spot on the ballot in August, writing that “the silence was deafening,” and that he and his running mate “are now solidly, irrevocably ON the ballot.”

Krawchuk says he favors completely privatizing schools and eliminating school property taxes; getting rid of the state’s personal income tax over the course of a term; getting rid of mail ballots and expanding voter ID requirements; eliminating parole for “violent criminals”; and decriminalizing drugs.

His running mate is John Thomas of Somerset County, who describes himself as a career educa-

BIG-RACE VOTING SINCE 2016

While most Lancaster County municipalities have voted straight Democrat or Republican in presidential or gubernatorial elections since 2016, Lancaster suburbs and a few of the county’s boroughs have split their vote. The legend below details the voting patterns for each municipality.



tor “in traditional public schools, a private school, and cyber charter schools.”

It’s unclear who his top donors are. As of Oct. 7, Krawchuk had not filed a campaign finance report.

Shapiro, Garrity on the issues

Abortion

— Garrity says she is “pro-life, with exceptions for rape, incest and life of the mother.” She sold “Defund Planned Parenthood” T-shirts during her initial run for office, and posted on Facebook in 2022 that the end of Roe v. Wade would be “a great day for the sanctity of life.”

— Shapiro supports using “his office to keep abortion safe, legal and accessible in Pennsylvania.”

Data centers

— Although he championed Amazon’s investment of millions of dollars for a data center buildout in Pennsylvania, Shapiro recently toughened his stance on data centers, setting stricter environmental and transparency standards for new developments in the state.

— Garrity hasn’t released a detailed plan, but says she favors mandatory rules not tied to climate and a pause on data center development.

Economy

— Garrity says she would call a “Special Session on Energy Affordability” and ask the Legislature to “cut taxes and eliminate hidden costs on electric bills, roll back or eliminate the gross receipts tax on utilities, end tax stacking on energy bills, require full transparency of all taxes and surcharges, and fast-track bringing new power plants online to meet demand and keep costs low.” She also says she

would launch an initiative that “will redirect existing state spending, investment accounts and interest earnings toward property tax rebates for homeowners.”

— Shapiro has touted his administration’s ability to attract private sector projects to the state, including an Eli Lilly GLP-1 factory, an Urban Outfitters distributorship and Amazon data centers. Earlier this month, he announced that Greek yogurt maker Chobani is planning to invest \$1.2 billion to open its first dairy manufacturing operation in the state in the Lehigh Valley and nearly one-third of all the milk it uses will be produced in-state.

In all, according to a news release, his administration said it has attracted over \$43 billion in private-sector investment and created more than 29,000 jobs across the commonwealth.

Elections

— Shapiro has staked many of his policy stances on elections in opposition to President Donald Trump, while struggling to pass new election laws through the divided state Legislature.

— Garrity has indicated she would defer to Trump’s election priorities, but her state-level legislative priorities are less clear. She questioned the results of the 2020 presidential election on multiple occasions, saying at one 2022 political rally that Trump defeated Biden.

Energy and environment

— Garrity says that the free market should solve environmental issues and that “of course there’s climate change, but I’m not sure as to what extent.”

— Shapiro has made energy and the environment a key platform, although his actions on some

of those issues have not always aligned neatly with members of his party. He’s lobbied for and received federal funding for hydrogen production and clawed back a program put in place by his Democratic predecessor, Tom Wolf, that limited carbon emissions from power plants.

Garrity and Shapiro primarily diverge on what kind of energy they want the state to produce: Shapiro supports an “all of the above” approach that includes clean energy like solar and wind alongside oil and gas, while Garrity wants to dramatically increase natural gas production.

LGBTQ+ rights

— It’s unclear where Garrity stands on many LGBTQ+ issues. Her campaign would not answer questions from Spotlight PA. She has, however, been outspoken that transgender girls shouldn’t participate in women’s sports.

— Shapiro has vocally supported LGBTQ+ rights throughout his career.

Recreational marijuana legalization

— Garrity does not support legalizing recreational marijuana and says she would veto any such bill.

— Shapiro supports legalizing recreational marijuana and has asked the General Assembly to create a program run by the state Department of Agriculture in each of his yearly budget proposals. The tax revenue would help the state pay for rising healthcare and education costs.

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