



## DISTRICT 16 CANDIDATES FORUM STEPHANIE KUNZE AND CRYSTAL LETT

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**Brad Frick** hosted a forum for the candidates for election to Ohio Senate District 16. Brad was joined by the incumbent, Republican **Stephanie Kunze**, and challenger, Democrat **Crystal Lett**. Both Stephanie and Crystal advanced from the primary for this District on April 28, 2020.

The District includes much of the western portion of Franklin County, including the cities of Dublin, Galloway, Grove City, Hilliard, Upper Arlington, Worthington, and portions of Columbus. There are approximately 388,000 residents living in the District, which is approximately 39,000 more than in the average Senate district. The District is about 2 1/2 times the size of District 24 of the Ohio House of Representatives, which covers UA.

Senate terms are 4 years, and due to term limits, service is limited to 2 consecutive terms. There are 2 qualifications to serve in the Senate: residence in the district for at least 1 year, and no conviction for embezzlement (absent repayment). The salary is \$63,000 per year. The average total campaign expenditure for this seat since 2000 is \$454,000, which is about 2 times the average for the House seat.

Background on Crystal Lett: She is a graduate of Hilliard Davidson High School and OSU, where she majored in political science. She has worked in the area of mental health for many years. She worked for North Central Mental Health as a caseworker, and left that position after the birth of her firstborn son, who was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder that causes developmental dis-

abilities. Currently she is a practice manager with 2 firms which administer psychological exams for the Bureau of Workers Compensation, Ohio Industrial Commission and Ohio Police and Fire, for purposes of determining fitness for duty. She has long been an advocate for Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). She lives with her husband and 3 children in Linworth, where her children attend Dublin schools.

In her opening statement, Crystal described her childhood in Hilliard, and her work as an undergraduate at OSU in Columbus neighborhoods helping residents with mental health disorders. She was an intern for the Community Relations Commission. Her subsequent job as a caseworker involved working with youth aged 14-21 with severe mental health disorders. After her son was born, she worked from home, including on legislative issues. She works with Save the Children on affordable child care and early childhood education policy, with a goal of universal pre-K education. She has worked with US Senator Sherrod Brown on the renewal of CHIP, which saved health care for 209,000 families in Ohio. She and her husband both had to transition



**CLICK HERE** to view this meeting and all previously recorded Rotary meetings



## GREETERS

**October 20**  
Rudy Whipps  
Matt Hare

**October 27**  
N/A

**November 3**  
N/A

## REGISTRATION DESK

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Auto  
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## OUR NEXT MEETING

**OCTOBER 20TH**  
SCIOTO CC / ZOOM

Upper Arlington  
**Rotary**  
Club



# DISTRICT 16 CANDIDATES FORUM

## STEPHANIE KUNZE AND CRYSTAL LETT

careers in order to care better for their son, and were able to use benefits under CHIP. She would like to take the advocacy that she has done for her own family, and put it to work for all Ohioans.

**Background on Stephanie Kunze:** She is a graduate of Indiana University, with a degree in English. She is also a graduate of the Hilliard Citizens Police Academy. She has worked as an account representative for Estee Lauder and has worked in law firms, title companies and at Hilliard City Schools. She formerly was the Representative for the 24th Ohio House District. She is chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee and a member of these Committees: Agriculture and Natural Resources; Finance; Health, Human Services and Medicaid; Insurance and Financial Institutions; Transportation, Commerce & Workforce, and others. She chairs the board of the Ohio Children's Trust Fund, which works in the area of child abuse. She also serves on the Infant Mortality Commission. She and her husband live in Hilliard and have 2 daughters. She formerly served on Hilliard City Council.

In her opening statement, Stephanie expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve in the Senate for the last 4 years. She wants to continue to focus on the matters she has been working on, including strengthening Ohio's families and economy, and protecting Ohio's most vulnerable citizens. She has sponsored new laws to protect victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual abuse. She is the joint sponsor of Hands Free Ohio, a bill to limit distracted driving. She has also authored the Women Suffrage Centennial Commission bill, which commemorates the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote, in part through a new monument featuring Ohio women. She noted her service on the Governor's Workforce Transformation board. She said these experiences give her a broad vision on policy matters relating to Ohioans, from the pre-natal period to infancy. She noted Ohio's abysmal infant mortality rate and efforts to reduce that rate, including reducing the racial disparity gap. She also described significant investments in early childhood education affordability, accessibility and quality, as well as in K-12 mental health. In her role chairing the Higher Education Committee, she tries to advance the opportunities of Ohioans to have a happy and successful life.

Brad asked the candidates 4 questions.

**Q1:** What should the Ohio Senate be doing about mental health?

Crystal: this question is not just a professional one for her, but also personal, as her brother took his own life. She said that when deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill happened in the 1960s and 70s, there was a promise to fund community mental health centers (CMHCs), to meet the needs of those with mental health disorders in the com-

munities where they live. While deinstitutionalization was successful, the full funding of CMHCs did not happen. When she was a caseworker, to get on her caseload, an individual had to be on or eligible for Medicaid, plus had to have at least 3 suicide attempts resulting in hospitalization. This criteria led to a waitlist of 3,000 for services. She finds this situation unacceptable, and so full funding of CMHCs is vital. There is also a need to look at what services need more personnel; there is a shortage of psychologists, psychologists, case managers and social workers, and people need compensation incentives to go into those careers. These measures are needed to allow those with mental health disorders to thrive, which they deserve.

Stephanie: in last year's state budget, there were significant investments totaling over \$600 million in K-12 mental health. But mental health issues do not just affect the young. So, she has worked to increase overall access to mental health treatment, including in rural communities--for instance, through telehealth options, which could be among the blessings to come out of the pandemic. She also described the need for parity in payment between mental health and other forms of medical treatment. She noted that the leading "ask" from Franklin County with respect to the state capital budget was for the building of a new mental health and addiction treatment service facility in the county, and she expects to advocate for that facility. She described Senate Bill 258, which provides for increased mental health treatment for Ohioans. She also described efforts toward criminal justice reform in the Senate, looking at what offenders actually need to be in prison vs. in care. She noted the increase in overdoses and alcohol sales, suggesting an additional need for investment in substance abuse treatment and prevention.

**Q2:** How do you plan to address the nuclear energy bailout in House Bill 6 and the associated scandal?

Crystal: HB 6 was a corrupt piece of legislation from start to finish. It was rushed through the legislature, and there were few compromises on amendments. At the Dublin library, she even encountered 2 people on each side, circulating opposing petitions, getting into a physical altercation, and then she knew something was going on beyond the surface at the Statehouse. However, when the scandal broke, she found astounding the amount of money involved and the length and breadth of corruption. The public is owed the repeal of HB 6, to restore trust in government. Repeal should not stall. And then we have to ensure that such corruption doesn't happen again, through the passage of anti-corruption laws such as HB 739 that has already been introduced, requiring "dark money" groups to disclose funders and spending, and strengthening restrictions on foreign governments' and corporations' ability to influence Ohio elections.

Stephanie: She and Crystal agree the most on this issue. HB 6 was a corrupt bill from the beginning.

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She voted no on it last year. She is a co-sponsor of a bipartisan repeal bill in the Senate, SB 346. Another problem with HB 6 that needs correction is that it repealed standards for renewable energy. National companies looking to invest in Ohio have requested that the state have such standards. And as one example locally, IGS Energy has invested in solar energy. So, going back to the pre-HB 6 situation and having a comprehensive energy policy is needed. As for anti-corruption: she had many confused constituents calling her office about the mailers, ads and phone calls they had received last year in support of HB 6. Ohioans never had an opportunity to express their own opinion about the bill, and that was disturbing. She is a co-sponsor of an anti-corruption bill in the Senate, which would provide transparency on money in politics.

**Q3:** If Roe v. Wade is overturned by the US Supreme Court, and reproductive rights are then governed by the states, what is your position on how Ohio should treat such rights?

Crystal: she is proud to be endorsed by Planned Parenthood and Vote Pro-Choice. She is a firm believer in women having autonomy over their bodies, and when it comes to making difficult decisions about pregnancy and women's health, those decisions should be made by the patient and her doctor. She herself has been a patient of Planned Parenthood and received quality, affordable health care services from them. Having access to reproductive health care allowed her to decide when she was ready to become a parent. In part she is who she is today because Planned Parenthood allowed her to exercise personal responsibility over her reproductive choices. She wants to guarantee the same ability for generations to come. Women need to have the right to choose so that they can be the authors of their own stories. She would passionately advocate for this position in the Statehouse.

Stephanie: she thinks her record on this issue speaks for itself. As a member of the Health Committee, she has sat through many hours of testimony on this issue—on the Heartbeat Bill specifically. There have been many times where both parents testify about an unwanted baby and how the parents and their medical provider try to decide what to do in regard to the health of their family and baby. It is heartbreaking to listen to them testify about having to carry a baby to term knowing that the baby will be born perhaps, for instance, without a brain. Her vote on the Heartbeat Bill reflected the district, and what she heard from countless people who called and emailed her office. There can be occasions where there are 2 victims involved, in the case of rape or incest, or where the life of the mother is at stake. There needs to be an opportunity for a woman and her family to work with their health care professional on what is best for them, but there also needs to

be an opportunity to protect life. So she is proud the Ohio Senate voted unanimously on a bipartisan bill that would ban abortion after birth. She thinks on this issue, the members of the Ohio Senate are much more alike than apart. She was voted one of the most bipartisan legislators at the Statehouse. She thinks her voice on the abortion issue has been consistent and representative of the district.

**Q4:** Do you think Gov. DeWine has done a good job handling the COVID-19 crisis?

Stephanie: She thinks the Governor has done a very good job. Given what we knew in March, and looking at history, his restrictive and firm response at the beginning of the pandemic was designed to lead to a better economic recovery. As he has learned more about the disease, and as there has been access to CARES Act money for testing and PPE, he has done a good job of reopening the economy, balancing keeping Ohioans safe and the cost of being completely restrictive. She is confident we will be on solid footing going forward, thanks to the early interventions that happened. She voted for more than \$3 million in CARES Act funding to come to the City of UA for unexpected COVID-19-related expenses, the need for which she understands as a former local elected official. Keeping Ohioans safe and ensuring a strong economic recovery has been key.

Crystal: She agrees that the Governor did the best he could. She appreciates that the Governor has rejected the politicization of COVID-19. He took the steps he needed to take, driven by data from public health officials, and made decisions in a responsible way. It is important to remember that this is a new disease and no one knew what to do when it came on the scene. To have flexibility, listening skills and data analysis skills to make decisions is important. She felt that the Governor provided very strong leadership as things got politicized, and he stood firm, listening to public health officials. This approach needs to continue, so we can take care of each other. Her only regret is that we did not have a mask mandate sooner. The data shows that this mandate has protected Ohioans. We need to pick up the pieces when the pandemic ends, and prioritize care for people who are the most vulnerable and disenfranchised, when crafting the state budget next year.

**Summations:**

Stephanie: She hopes to bring her experience back to the Senate, where she has a seat at the majority table, where decisions are made, and where she can ensure that central Ohio is at the forefront of those decisions. The Governor is preparing his proposed operating budget now, and the majority has influence in that process. She is proud that the budget crafted previously by the Senate passed unanimously in that body. Her record, her love for the district, and her service would be her honor to continue. She respectfully asks for our votes.

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Crystal: To recover from COVID-19, we need a multiplicity of voices represented in the legislature. Right now, there is a supermajority in both the House and Senate, and that is not working for the benefit of the people. She is proud to have garnered support from Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris, plus Senator Sherrod Brown, as well as the Ohio Education Association and the Ohio Federation of Teachers, the Human Rights Campaign and Stonewall Columbus, Moms Demand Action, and several labor organizations. She wants to take that support and be a good representative for the district in the Statehouse. It would be an honor to earn our votes.



## THE MEETING



**Debbie Johnson** opened the meeting, which was held entirely via Zoom.

**Joe Valentino** provided the invocation, led the pledge of allegiance, and recited the Rotary 4-Way Test.

**Jim Lynch** of the Tri-Village Club was the sole visiting Rotarian.

Guests included **Erik Yassenoff** and Spencer Dirrig.

## NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:



**Joe Ayers** described the volunteer project happening this Saturday from 9 am to noon, at Miller Park, for the sanding and staining of the gazebo there.

Debbie announced that the Club's board voted to forgo the holiday gathering that had been scheduled for Dec. 15. She is open to ideas about alternatives.

Debbie also announced that the board had approved grants for the Bed Brigade project, and for a match, up to \$3,000, for gifts to the Club's Holiday Wish Program. **Sandy Clary** will be contacting members again this year about making gifts for that program.



Debbie noted that the Upper Arlington Commission on Aging is looking for volunteers to contact senior citizens about their needs. Please contact Debbie if you'd like to help.