

1 big thing: Catch up quick on the Larry Householder trial



Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder, center, enters the federal courthouse in Cincinnati ahead of jury selection Friday. Photo: Joshua A. Bickel/AP

The highly anticipated corruption trial of former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder begins today in Cincinnati.

Why it matters: The case involves what a former federal prosecutor once called "likely the largest bribery and money-laundering scheme ever in the state of Ohio."

- The scandal cost taxpayers millions and is a sign Ohioans may want to keep a closer watch on our local Capitol Square amid shadowy dealmaking.

Catch up quick: Householder is accused of conspiring with Akron-based FirstEnergy in a pay-for-play scandal to bail out two private nuclear power plants with a \$1 billion bill in 2019.

- Millions in dark money went toward electing Householder-friendly lawmakers across the state — who then elevated him to the speaker's chair — and fighting a petition to repeal the bailout.

- The Perry County official also used the money to pay off private credit card debt, legal fees and home expenses, investigators allege.
- He was later ousted as speaker and expelled from the legislature.

State of play: Two others, including a former Householder associate, have already pleaded guilty and plan to testify against him.

- In 2021, FirstEnergy agreed to a deferred prosecution settlement. For acknowledging having paid Householder in exchange for beneficial legislation, it agreed to pay a \$230 million settlement.
- The "dark money" group that concealed the funding's sources pleaded guilty to racketeering in 2021 as well.
- The only other defendant to plead not guilty, former Ohio GOP chairman Matt Borges, also goes on trial this week.
- An additional defendant, lobbyist Neil Clark, died by suicide in 2021.

The other side: Householder has maintained innocence since his July 2020 arrest.

- “I have not nor have I ever taken a bribe or solicited or been solicited for taking a bribe,” he told legislative colleagues before they voted to expel him.

Separately, Gov. Mike DeWine has denied knowledge of the alleged scheme despite myriad connections between his administration and FirstEnergy.

- Having supported the initial nuclear bailout, he later signed a bill repealing it.

Of note: In the years since the scandal broke, lawmakers have attempted to reform state campaign finance rules to be more transparent.

What's next: The trial is expected to last up to six weeks, AP reports.