

https://lanasteronline.com/news/politics/peach-bottom-rep-bryan-cutler-could-have-a-real-shot/article_33efb132-44d9-11e8-836b-d7fd72809953.html

Peach Bottom Rep. Bryan Cutler could have a real shot at House majority leader



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Apr 22, 2018



Majority Whip Bryan Cutler, of Peach Bottom, stands with Majority Leader Dave Reed, of Indiana County, prior to the Swearing in ceremony Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2017, at the State Capitol.

[Buy Now](#)

BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

A six-term lawmaker from Peach Bottom may be poised to become the highest-ranking member of the state House from Lancaster County in nearly a century.

Capitol observers say Rep. Bryan Cutler, a Republican who serves as House majority whip, has a serious shot at ascending the power ladder to majority leader when Rep. Dave Reed leaves at the end of the year.

Cutler has said he's "certainly interested" in the role.

Along with the speaker — the House's top position — the majority leader drives the chamber's policy agenda and is at the center of major negotiations with the governor on the annual state budget and other major matters.

"The position of majority leader is the most important leadership position in the building, because that individual decides what bills actually advance to the floor of the House of Representatives," said Elizabethtown Republican Rep. David Hickernell, a 15-year House veteran who chairs the education committee.

Ultimately, whether he advances will be up to Cutler's Republican House colleagues — of which there currently are 119. Before the start of every two-year term, both parties in the House and Senate elect their own leaders, and they'll do so again in December.

And while there's no prescribed method for who will definitely be considered, whips have historically risen to majority leader.

Reed was the first Republican majority leader in nearly four decades who did not serve as whip immediately before; he was policy committee chairman, another leadership position.

Cutler, 43, has been a GOP [whip since 2015](#). He was elected to the House in 2006.

"Certainly Cutler would be the next in line," said Kyle Kopko, professor of political science at Elizabethtown College. "I think he's in a good position, to say the least."

Cutler's chances

With Cutler, appropriations committee Chairman Stan Saylor and potentially majority policy Chairman Kerry Benninghoff in contention, Franklin & Marshall College's G. Terry Madonna said there doesn't appear to be a front-runner now.

"My sense about it is there's no real heir apparent here," said Madonna, a longtime Capitol observer and public affairs professor.

Contenders can also come out of the woodwork or drop out quickly in the days before the vote, said Kevin Harley, a lobbyist and former spokesman for Gov. Tom Corbett. It's not easy to emerge from the back benches for such a high-profile position as majority leader,

but it's possible, Harley said.

Part of the process will be a consideration of where House Republicans want their leader to fall on the ideological spectrum.

Reed, in his time, has been one of the more moderate voices — particularly since Republicans in the Tea Party brought a more hard-line approach starting in 2010, Madonna said.

Cutler has been a reliable Republican vote, though he has compromised. Last year, he diverged from his fellow Lancaster County Republicans when he voted for a large expansion of legalized gambling.



POLITICS

Here's how lawmakers from Lancaster County voted on expanding gambling in Pennsylvania

SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer

An important aspect, too, will be reputation.

“Cutler would be an excellent majority leader,” Harley said. “He’s done, by all accounts, an outstanding job as whip, which is not an easy job. He’s gained the respect of members throughout the different philosophical leanings.”

House Speaker Mike Turzai’s preference, in particular, will undoubtedly play a role — and potentially to Cutler’s benefit.

“He’s a real leader. He’s outstanding,” Turzai said of Cutler in [an interview with LNP in December](#).

Turzai, who was running for the Republican nomination for governor at the time, called Cutler “a really good friend.”

What’s at stake

If elected to the role, Cutler would be the first Lancaster lawmaker to serve in one of the House’s top-two positions since Aaron B. Hess had stints as majority leader and speaker in the 1920s.

Having a homegrown majority leader would “mean a great deal” for the county, said Hickernell, the dean of the county’s House Republican delegation.

Hickernell, before his own election in 2002, served as an aide to the county's last high-ranking, power-wielding member, Rep. John Barley.

Barley represented the same rural and reliably Republican southern Lancaster County district that Cutler now serves.

Hickernell said Barley, in his role as whip and later appropriations chairman until 2002, used his influence to help the county in many ways, including the reconstruction of Route 30.

“John certainly did what he could to help Lancaster County, and I’m sure Bryan Cutler would do the same,” said Hickernell, who added he would do everything in his power to help elevate Cutler.



POLITICS

Rep. Bryan Cutler's lobbyist disclosure bill signed into law after decade-long effort

SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer

Kopko said Cutler's position as majority leader would mean his priorities, and those of his colleagues and constituents in the county, would move to the front of the agenda.

That could include reforms to the budget process, making it a two-year spending plan instead of an annual one, and reforming how statewide judges are elected or appointed.

Madonna said majority leaders and speakers have, historically, given a financial boost to their districts — but the conservative Tea Party takeover altered that slightly.

“They’re in a position to help their district and to help their county should they prefer to do that,” Madonna said. “The difficulty right now with many conservatives is they were elected not to bring home the bacon. They were elected to bring down the size of government.”

Cutler was first elected in 2006, defeating incumbent Rep. Gib C. Armstrong in the 100th Legislative District GOP primary after the controversial legislative pay raise that led to significant turnover in the Legislature.

Before then, he was an X-ray technician at Lancaster General Hospital while moonlighting as a Widener University law school student.

Soon, he could be jockeying for one of the top spots in the Legislature — and maybe more.

“Let’s be honest,” Kopko said. “The majority leader could become the speaker. That’s something a lot of folks would be paying attention to.”



LOCAL NEWS

Most Pennsylvania lawmakers will get \$700 annual raise; Some from Lancaster County will donate to charity

SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer

Past state House leaders from Lancaster

(years only when their party was in the majority)



Rep. Mike Sturla — policy chairman, 2009-10 (*He's served in the role while in the minority in the years since*).



Rep. John Barley — whip from 1995-96, appropriations chairman 1997-2002





Rep. Edwin D. Eshleman — whip 1963-64



Rep. Norman Wood — caucus chairman 1963-65



Rep. Aaron B. Hess — majority leader 1921-22 and 1927-28, speaker 1929-30



More Headlines

- Learn about foodscaping (landscaping with edibles) at Saturday's Summer Garden Experience
- Aerial, land searches resume for missing 19-year-old Elizabethtown woman swept into Conewago Creek
- Here's how much rain fell in parts of Lancaster County since Saturday
- Worley & Obetz's financial wreckage: \$60M more in liabilities than assets
- Lancaster city plans to release draft of police's new use-of-force rules
- Appeals court rejects Columbia nuns' religious-freedom lawsuit against Atlantic Sunrise pipeline
- Lancaster County coaches, athletic directors address ongoing PIAA debates
- Left Lane Cruiser adds a punky punch to old-school blues
- Erin Matson nets the equalizer as USA Field Hockey ties England 1-1 at the Vitality World Cup
- Wednesday's LNP Tournament game postponed
- 3rd annual Retro Fest Rockabilly Weekender and Car Show is back at the Host this weekend