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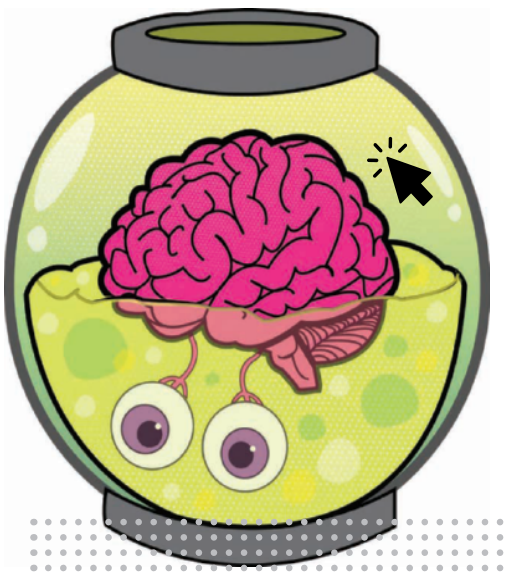

This is your brain on Halloween: Subscriber-exclusive special section in the **The Patriot-News** online at **reader.pn.pennlive.com**.

NEW CUMBERLAND

Trick-or-treat for sweets

It's one of the joys of Halloween: the candy. Hundreds of children and their parents gathered on 16th Street in New Cumberland on Thursday night for trick-or-treating as police blocked off the road to ensure the safety of participants. Many midstate communities are holding trick or treat tonight. To see a schedule, go to tinyurl.com/y38x99ny. *Photos by Sean Simmers, PennLive*

ELECTIONS

Pa.'s turnover of election officials has soared since 2020

Changing election codes and increasing public pressure that overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to the churn.

Lindsay Shachnow
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For decades, the roster of county election directors in Pennsylvania didn't change much from cycle to cycle. Then it did, and Forrest Lehman took note.

"It was clear to me that something different was happening," said Lehman, who has been the election director in Lycoming County for 13 years. "This isn't normal."

In January 2020, he began documenting an unprecedented exodus of election officials across the state.

As years went by, he said, what he found was alarming: Dozens of county election directors and deputies were leaving their posts, taking a combined total of hundreds of years of experience with them. By July 2024, he stopped tracking the resignations because turnover became so common that most of the officials leaving had only spent a few years on the job. More than half the directors had left during the cycle, according to a study from the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit.

"Over time, the picture changed," Lehman said. "People who had worked for a long time were mostly gone, and the people who had worked less time were leaving."

Institutional knowledge about the inner workings of the state election system has been lost amid years of turnover that has been hard to shake since 2020, election officials say. While the departures reflect national trends, data suggests that Pennsylvania's turnover rates may be more pronounced as a result of evolving election codes and rising public pressure on election officials that overlapped with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than five years since the initial uptick in turnover, new data shows that election officials are still leaving. Over a third of Pennsylvania counties have hired new election directors since 2024, according to the Department of State.

Widespread election official turnover across Pennsylvania

Act 77, the state's no-excuse mail-in voting law, was passed in 2019 just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, forcing Pennsylvania's election officials to quickly adapt to a lot of changes all at once.

Other states modified their practices to expand voting access during the pandemic,

SEE ELECTIONS, A4

ELECTION 2026

TV stations pull Perry campaign ad with nudity claim

At least two have yanked the ad, which was released by a committee affiliated with Trump.

Zack Hoopes *zhoopes@pennlive.com*

At least two Harrisburg-area television stations have taken down an ad from a Trump-aligned political action committee that sought to boost Republican Congressman Scott Perry by airing an unsubstantiated allegation of public nudity against Janelle Stelson, his Democratic opponent.

The now-stricken ad relies on a statement from Stelson's next-door neighbor, Sharon Orr, that she saw Stelson naked outdoors and took a photo before calling the police, the same allegation that Perry has used in ads from his own campaign, which began airing online last week.

Perry has declined to say what, if any, attempts were made to verify Orr's account before promoting her claims in the ads. Stelson says the allegation is false.

But Perry's campaign has doubled down, even going so far as to recut the original ad to include an altered quote from PennLive in an attempt to lend credence to Orr's allegation, despite Perry previously calling this outlet's reporting on the matter "garbage" and "propaganda."

The television ad was booked by No Going Back, a PAC financed by President Donald Trump's MAGA Inc.

A representative from ABC27's parent company told attorneys representing Stelson that the ad would no longer be airing, according to emails later shared with PennLive. Those attorneys told Democratic operatives that Fox43 had also pulled the ad, according to those emails.

A third station, WGAL, told campaign lawyers that it was not airing the ad, although it was unclear whether the ad had never been booked or had been scheduled and then pulled before its first airing.

None of the stations immediately responded to calls seeking further information on whether or when the ad had run.

"Their ad was so dishonest that TV stations are refusing to air it, which is the first time we've seen that happen this year anywhere on the House battlefield," Stelson's campaign manager, Alma Baker, said in an email.

On Tuesday, attorneys from the Elias Law Group sent letters to multiple Harrisburg-area stations requesting that the No Going Back ad be yanked, saying it was defamatory. Elias frequently represents

SEE CONGRESS, A2

Learn about the candidates

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania partnered with PennLive to create a voters guide for this year's election. Candidates for governor, lieutenant governor, Congress and the state House and Senate were asked to provide details about their qualifications, as well as their views on key issues. Find it at **PennLive.com/votersguide**.