

COMMENTARY

All presidential politics is local, Muskingum U. professor notes

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NEW CONCORD — In the midst of a growing flurry of campaign rhetoric, news coverage, and political commentary on the 2012 presidential election, it will be important for those of us in East Central Ohio to explore two related questions: How will the presidential election affect the local communities in our region, and how might the values and concerns of our region affect the presidential election?

There's an old adage, made famous by former House Speaker Tip O'Neill, which says "all politics is local." As the 2012 presidential campaigns gear up for summer conventions and then the general election, a lot of attention is being paid to the national race, and to the national issues that are shaping it. But a presidential election isn't truly a national race. Instead, the candidates must compete in 50 separate state contests for electoral votes, and within each of these states are scores of local communities, each with their own values, issues, concerns, and priorities. It is here that presidential elections are truly won and lost.

Ohio is a key battleground state in this election, and both candidates understand that without the Buckeye State in their win column, spending the next four years in the White House may be an impossible dream. But our state is one of contrast and diversity from one community to the next. Whether farmland or factory town, wealthy suburb or poor inner city,

conservative bastion or liberal stronghold, each of these communities must be understood on their own terms. What values are most important to the people there, and what issues and challenges are they facing in their daily lives? Collectively and as individuals, we need to feel that the candidates are in touch with what's important to us, that they understand our hopes and fears, and that they care enough to address them once in office. Without this crucial connection, people may not see a reason to vote for a particular candidate or, worse yet, to vote at all on Election Day.

All of this begs the question: What issues are most important to us here in East Central Ohio? What are the most important challenges that we face in the region, and how do we want our next president to address them? What values do we most cherish, and how would we like to see them preserved and protected in Washington? While we certainly won't all be on the same page on every issue, those debates and disagreements are also a vital part of this necessary conversation. Simply put, when the candidates come calling — and they have already started — will they get a clear and complete understanding of who we are and what's most important to us?

But it's not enough for the people in any given community just to know what they stand for and what they want from their elected officials in Washington. It is crucially important that those people stand up and speak out on their

own behalf. In a region like East Central Ohio, without the deep pockets of ultra-rich campaign donors or the densely populated urban centers that naturally attract candidates, this civic responsibility to stand up tall and speak out loudly is even more essential.

Why? Because without this effort to demand the attention of those running for office, the region will be destined to remain a series of pass-through communities, good enough to pause for gas and a photo-op between campaign stops, but not deemed important enough for the candidates to stay and listen to the concerns of its people.

So where do we begin? As a vital region of a key battleground state in a presidential election that has the attention of the entire country, there is no better time than now for us to stand and be heard. It starts with each of us making a commitment to be informed on the issues that matter to the region. It starts with energizing our friends and neighbors to do the same. And it starts with joining the growing civic conversation on what's most important to our communities and the region in general. Once this conversation is underway, we can then begin to convince the candidates that they should stop and stay for a while in East Central Ohio.

Let's start the conversation now.

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