

Brown, DeWine stance on social issues may affect vote

Not among the items Senate candidates have at top of agendas, but among some voters it matters most.

Monday, October 09, 2006

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In the race for the U.S. Senate this year, candidates Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, and Rep. Sherrod Brown, D-Avon, have focused most of their firepower on issues of national security, taxes and jobs. Differences on those issues may well decide the race.

But there's a contingent of the Ohio electorate that will consider those issues, then ultimately finalize its decision based on each candidates' stance on social issues. And on those issues, there is quite a difference between the two candidates.

For example:

Abortion and stem cell research

DeWine calls himself one of the Senate's strongest supporters "of the unborn," while Brown was endorsed by NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio. DeWine supported a ban on late-term abortion, while Brown opposed it.

Kellie Copeland, executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio, has a picture she uses as evidence that DeWine is no friend to her organization. The photo, taken at a presidential bill-signing of a law restricting abortion rights, has DeWine with two other senators, House Speaker Dennis Hastert and President Bush.

"There are no women in the picture," Copeland notes.

On the flip side, Mark Lally, legislative counsel for Ohio Right to Life, which endorsed DeWine, said both candidates are "like night and day" on abortion. "On issues relating to human life, we think congressman Brown doesn't reflect our views," Lally said.

Vast differences also separate the two men on the issue of stem cell research. Brown has called for the use of stem cells for medical research, arguing its research "could cure a mother's Alzheimer's or a son's juvenile diabetes."

DeWine, meanwhile, has opposed embryonic stem cell research. "I am against taking federal dollars to destroy human life," he said.

Guns

Jim Irvine of the Buckeye Firearms Association said both Brown and DeWine are "terrible candidates for the gun-owner." But if it looks like Republicans will maintain the majority, he said, maybe Brown's his guy. "If you're in the minority you wouldn't have as much power," he reasoned.

DeWine in July 2005 became one of two Republicans to oppose a bill shielding gun makers from liability resulting from the use of their product. A former prosecutor, DeWine said he casts votes perceived as "gun control" votes at the behest of law enforcement agencies that believe they will prevent crime. Brown said he supports the Second Amendment, but votes for bills he believes will "protect the public."

Peter Hamm of the Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence, said his organization has endorsed DeWine. Brown "is a fine, fine man and would make a fine, fine senator," Hamm said. "But Mike DeWine has been there for us in such a serious and morally righteous way that we will do anything to help him get re-elected that is within our sphere."

Gay marriage

Ohio overwhelmingly passed a ban on gay marriage two years ago, but the issue still resonates among so-called "values voters".

In June, the Senate voted for an amendment to the Constitution defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Among the co-sponsors of that amendment: DeWine, who caused a minor furor in 2004 by opposing Ohio's initiative. He argued then that its wording — which could have been read to bar domestic-partner benefits as well as gay marriage — could invite lawsuits and was too broad. DeWine, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, voted for the constitutional amendment banning gay marriage in 2004, but he said at the time that he wanted to see how courts reacted to state initiatives banning same-sex marriage.

Brown, meanwhile, has consistently opposed such a ban.

David Noble, political director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said the task force does not endorse, but said Brown has voted more along the lines of the task force's agenda. But he also said the issue is moot in Ohio because of the 2004 measure. "(Gay) marriage is not happening in Ohio any time soon," he said.

Phil Burress, an opponent of same-sex marriage and head of the socially conservative Citizens for Community Values, characterizes gay marriage as an issue that ranks just under abortion among socially conservative voters.

Except for the abortion issue, Burress characterizes both Brown and DeWine as "pretty far to the left."

"Brown is just a little further," he said.

On the issues:

Abortion

Ban late-term abortion: DeWine supported, Brown opposed.

Making it a criminal penalty to harm an unborn fetus during commission of a violent crime: DeWine supported, Brown opposed.

Stem cell research

Allowing human embryonic stem cell research: Brown supported, DeWine has said he opposes.

Guns

Assault weapons ban: DeWine and Brown supported.

Barring gun manufacturers, distributors, dealers or importers from being sued for damage if the guns they sell or produce cause injury damages: DeWine and Brown opposed.

Gay marriage

Banning same-sex marriage: DeWine supported, Brown opposed.

Issue 1, the state gay marriage ban: DeWine and Brown opposed.