

The Midterms Loom As Critical Elections This Year! (by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

When this issue of StreetVibes hits the streets, the Midterm elections will be nineteen days away. Sometimes Midterms are not a big deal, and voter turnout is generally much lower than in Presidential years. This year, however, the stakes are high. In fact, many scholars of government and politics are calling these Midterms a make or break moment for democracy in the U.S.

What makes these Midterms so different? Quite a few reasons need to be cited. First of all, we have an ex-President and most of the Republican Party who have never conceded the 2020 election results. Not only did Trump and his allies incite the January 6th insurrection aimed at preventing Congress from formally accepting the electoral votes of the states, but they continue to stoke violence and intimidation as tools for achieving their political ends.

Representative democracy cannot function without the peaceful acceptance of election results by both citizens and candidates for office. The threat of violence or behind the scenes election manipulation also make this system of government unworkable. At this moment in time, it appears that a majority of the leaders and members of the Republican Party don't accept these norms, and are leaning toward a more autocratic and exclusionary approach to governance.

Thus, voters in states across the country are confronted by candidates that base their campaigns on "the big lie," and who pledge to transform the election process to prevent further "voter fraud" by African-Americans and other non-white minorities. This situation presents the real possibility that if Republicans gain majorities in both the Senate and House of Representatives this November that further damage will be done to the democratic process. What can concerned citizens do to stop this potential erosion?

The simple answer is to vote, but only after checking out who are the candidates concerned about preserving a democratic process that serves all the people in our diverse society. Here in Ohio, we will elect one Senator, members of Congress, members of the Ohio General Assembly, Ohio Supreme Court Justices, and the Governor. Since most readers of StreetVibes are Ohioans, we will briefly focus on two of these important races.

With the retirement of Rob Portman from the U.S Senate, a very close race has emerged this fall to replace him. Congressman Tim Ryan, the Democratic candidate, and J.D Vance, the



Republican, are running neck and neck in recent polls. Ryan seeks to win back a lot of the white working-class who switched from the Democratic Party to support Trump in 2016 and 2020. Meanwhile, Vance is running as a Trump endorsed candidate.

A product of the Mahoning Valley area, a place that has suffered a loss of industrial jobs over the years, Ryan emphasizes job creation and improving working conditions as his top priority. Instead of creating scapegoats such as immigrants, he focuses on the day to day needs of working families. He

also stresses his independence and moderation, and that he can work with Republicans across the aisle in Congress.

Once critical of Trump, J.D. Vance now seems content to run as Trump's endorsed candidate who seeks to win the votes of the ex-President's followers in rural Ohio and among working class whites. Trump has come to this state for several pro-Vance rallies, including the controversial event where he praised QAnon. The candidate first became known as the author of "Hillbilly Elegy," a book that describes his growing up in an urban Appalachian family.



Vance favors anti-abortion laws, and opposes legislation that recognizes same sex marriage. For the sake of children, he opposes divorce, and he believes that couples, even in unhappy situations, should stay together. In the wake of the Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade, the abortion issue and other policies regulating family life have become hot button issues this fall.

Another close race is taking place here in Cincinnati. Ohio's First Congressional District seems up for grabs this fall, as Councilman Greg Landsman mounts a very effective campaign against incumbent Congressman Steve Chabot. The new redistricting map being used this election cycle makes the First District competitive for the first time in years. It includes most of Cincinnati's population as well as Warren County.

Chabot has represented this District for twenty-six years, but he has never run in such a competitive situation in terms of Republican, Democratic and independent voters. A traditional Conservative in terms of federal spending and taxes, he, nevertheless, supported Trump and many of his polarizing policies. Confronted by this effective challenge from Landsman, he has resorted to a barrage of negative television ads that falsely accuse the Councilman of voting to defund the police.



As a general campaign theme, Landsman emphasizes that he supports the democratic process and would support legislation such as the Voting Rights Act to preserve and protect it. From his position on City Council, he is also keenly aware of the need for promoting adequate federal funding for a number of programs and services that assist many low-income residents in Cincinnati. He is also quick to point out Chabot's "no" vote for Biden's large infrastructure Bill that will pay for renovating local projects like the Brent Spence Bridge.

Both the Vance/Ryan and Chabot/Landsman races are important in terms of helping to preserve our current representative democracy. By flipping one or more of these seats to a Democrat, Ohio voters could help prevent the Party that is beholden to ex-President Trump from gaining control of one or both Houses of Congress. Such success in these critical Midterms would give reformers and activists more time to build popular momentum for passing legislation that would

help restore the health of the democratic



process.