



What Happened in Ohio:

LEVERAGING A PERMANENT INFRASTRUCTURE
TO ADVANCE THE FREEDOM AGENDA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For conservatives, the election results in Ohio in 2012 proved a bitter pill to swallow. In the presidential race, President Barack Obama prevailed despite an economy and record conventional wisdom would deem problematic. How did President Obama do it?

In the seven days following the November 6 election, I analyzed the Ohio results for *National Review Online* and described what I think happened in Ohio. In Parts I to VI, I cover the following topics:

- Ohio’s primary foreshadowed base problems for Governor Mitt Romney;
- How a long primary and an internecine fight on the Right delayed vital actions;
- The Left’s ground game was far superior to the Right’s ground game;
- The impact the liberal state media had on conservatives;
- The Right lost by talking to the voter’s mind as the Left talks to the voter’s heart; and
- The other mistakes made by the Right.

Importantly, this report doesn’t just cite the problems, but lays out the solutions needed to get a different outcome in the future.

Specifically, Ohio needs a permanent Infrastructure focused on identifying and educating Ohioans on the key issues. This infrastructure includes both a 501(c)(3) component—an education tank like Opportunity Ohio (www.opportunityohio.org)—and a 501(c)(4) component like Ohio Rising (www.ohiorising.org) that do the spade work across Ohio week after week, month after month, and year after year to identify and to educate millions of Ohioans.

As I discussed in Part VI, without this effort, all of the money invested in political ads during the last four months of a campaign will hit hardened soil. This combined (c)(3)/(c)(4) effort will soften the soil so those ads hit a receptive audience.

Importantly, this effort cannot be controlled by a political party, as then it becomes about a candidate. This effort expressly is not and cannot be about candidates. It must be about

advancing the freedom agenda in Ohio to make our state a leader among the states, which will benefit candidates who advocate that agenda.

The key is to begin this work as soon as possible so that it can be a force in 2014 and the determining factor in 2016. The foundation for this effort already is in place. We must now expand it dramatically. As more and more Ohioans are brought into the growing network, it will serve as distribution network for our freedom agenda.

We also must improve how we talk about conservative ideas and principles with more heart and less mind as described in Part V. We must drastically improve how we tell stories about real people that make our points. PowerPoint slide decks put people to sleep. Stories inspire and move people to act. How we communicate to this growing distribution network is as important as building the network itself.

In order to ensure that conservative ideas and information reaches Joe and Jane Ohio, we must substantially expand the alternative news outlet created at Media Trackers Ohio (<http://ohio.mediatrackers.org/>). Over the last six months, Media Trackers Ohio wrote hundreds of stories on the big events happening in Ohio. Media Trackers Ohio covers news from an unbiased angle. Equally as important, Media Trackers Ohio covers items Ohio's mainstream media refuses to cover. As I highlighted in Part IV, how are Ohioans supposed to make informed decisions if they are presented only one side of the story and that side contains a liberal bias?

Finally, it won't be enough to just identify and to educate Ohioans by providing them with unbiased news. We must make sure that conservatives prevail on Election Day. To do that, we must leverage a robust Ohio network using Ohio Rising and other electioneering components to advocate for candidates and issues and to execute a get-out-the-vote program that didn't just arise in the last few months. As detailed in Parts I and III, conservatives cannot afford to rely upon a candidate or a political party to build a GOTV effort in just the few months available between a primary election and a general election. That formula doesn't work anymore. We must catch up to the other side and surpass its efforts.

This work must begin now and it must be done correctly.

Let me put things in the larger context that I believe is why we fight and why, despite this most recent setback, we must redouble our efforts and fight even harder. With the growing fiscal problems in Washington, D.C., we are rapidly approaching that point along Alexander Tytler's Cycle of Democracy from which no country in the history of the world has been able to turn back. Tytler's observed:

A democracy is always temporary in nature; it simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who

promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy, which is always followed by a dictatorship.

The average age of the world's greatest civilizations from the beginning of history has been about 200 years. During those 200 years, these nations always progressed through the following sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependence; from dependence back into bondage.

Either we enter America's long decline to being a country lost among countries, or we pull back from the edge and reinvigorate the idea of America as an exceptional nation among nations. If any people can do what has not been done before, it is Americans. As I've said before, it is in our DNA to fight, to solve problems, and to light the way towards a better tomorrow.

The path to a better Ohio and a better America does not begin in Washington, D.C.—it ends there. We must renew America from the grassroots by re-embracing the power of federalism to find the best solutions to America's toughest challenges. By leveraging our fifty laboratories of competition, we will fix our states and, by doing so, fix America.

It is time to get over the regrets of the last election and get to work advancing freedom.

Part I

OHIO'S PRIMARY FORESHADOWED PROBLEMS

The first issue starts at the very beginning of the process in Ohio. Now, it is always tricky to extrapolate primary data to general-election data, but I believe two data points, discussed below, from Ohio's primary foreshadowed problems for Republicans and in the base with Governor Mitt Romney.

First, in the 2008 fully contested Democratic primary between Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama, 2,386,945 Ohioans cast ballots. Remember, Ohio has open primaries where voters select either a Democratic or a Republican ballot and vote in the primary race they select. Fast-forward four years to the fully contested 2012 Republican primary between Senator Rick Santorum and Governor Romney (and a few others whose names remained on the ballot). In that contest, 1,213,879 Ohioans voted. As a point of comparison, in 2000, 1,397,528 Ohioans voted in the Republican primary won by Texas governor George W. Bush. That is, nearly 200,000 more votes were cast twelve years earlier.

Comparing the 2008 Democratic-primary vote count with the 2012 Republican-primary vote count shows that roughly 1,173,066 more Ohioans voted in the Democratic primary four years ago than in the Republican primary this year. Think about that for a moment: Nearly 1.1 million more Ohioans voted for Democrats in 2008 than for Republicans in 2012. Presumably many of those Ohioans who voted for Obama in the 2008 primary voted for him in the general election, helping him win Ohio by a comfortable margin, and helped him win again in 2012, when he won about 300,000 fewer votes across the state, where turnout was down by more than 400,000 votes from what it was in 2008.

The second data point involves looking at the results from the Republican primaries in Ohio in 2008 and 2012. In 2012, Senator Santorum lost the primary but won 69 of Ohio's 88 counties. The 69 counties he won are the most conservative in Ohio—the voters there are the Republican base. That Senator Santorum won so many of them indicated that Governor Romney had an issue with the conservative base.

Dig a little deeper and the problem becomes far bigger. In 40 out of the 69 base counties that Senator Santorum won, Governor Romney received fewer votes than former Governor Mike Huckabee received in 2008 in a largely uncontested primary. (Senator John McCain had sown up the nomination by then.) That corroborates for me that the Republican base was not enthusiastic about Governor Romney. Many people believed that Governor Romney's selection of Congressman

Paul Ryan as his running mate ameliorated some of that problem, but the results from last night don't support that narrative.

Specifically, despite what we were told was the most sophisticated and successful ground game by a Republican in the history of the world, the turnout in Ohio declined 2.05 percent and in all but nine counties. In a year far better for the Republican presidential candidate than 2008, Governor Romney received 93,200 fewer votes in Ohio than Senator McCain did four years earlier. As it stands today, President Obama won Ohio in 2012 by 107,241 votes, only 14,000 votes more than the margin by which Governor Romney lost to Senator McCain.

No matter how you look at it, it seems clear that the base in Ohio did not show up as it needed to do for Governor Romney to win Ohio.

Part II

UNITED WE WIN, DIVIDED WE FALL

One high-level Ohio Democratic leader said to me in the past 24 hours, “Given the state of things, how did you guys possibly lose this election?” Among the many reasons is that Republican leaders in Ohio engaged in a very divisive, drawn-out intra-party fight over controlling the money strings of the Ohio Republican Party (ORP). Costly and drawn out—also stupid.

Coming off 2010, one of the most successful election years in Ohio history, ORP chairman Kevin DeWine rightly took credit for guiding the ship that saw wins in every statewide race, gains in the Ohio Senate, upset wins in U.S. congressional races, maintaining control of a U.S. Senate seat, and retaking the Ohio House. Within a month of the November wins, however, soon-to-be-governor John Kasich asked DeWine to resign because he felt DeWine wasn’t loyal to him. Naturally, DeWine refused.

The backdrop is that Secretary of State Jon Husted wants to be governor. DeWine is a Secretary Husted supporter. As I detail in my book *Taxpayers Don’t Stand a Chance*, people loyal to Governor Kasich believe that the Senate Bill 5 debacle (Ohio’s public-sector collective-bargaining reforms that went down in flames) was a devious plot by Secretary Husted and DeWine to hurt Governor Kasich. The alleged goal was to wound Governor Kasich enough that he wouldn’t run for reelection in 2016, thereby making way for Secretary Husted. John Grisham couldn’t write a better political thriller.

At any rate, with Republicans facing a long presidential-primary battle that would delay the rollout of the winner’s campaign team in Ohio, Governor Kasich decided to launch a full-scale attack on DeWine to force him out of the ORP. All winter and spring, his team traveled around Ohio in an effort to determine which local party leaders were loyal to him and which ones were loyal to DeWine. They then recruited candidates to take out the DeWine loyalists in central-committee races across Ohio. They even went so far as use precious campaign funds to run ads and send direct mail. When the dust settled after the March primary, it was unclear who had the upper hand on the central committee. The fight rolled on for another few weeks, with DeWine finally resigning in April.

With DeWine out, Governor Kasich’s team purged the ORP of DeWine staffers and inserted his own loyalists (they refer to themselves as “True Bloods”) over the next month. Though this insider squabble had no impact on most Ohioans, it consumed party activists and split the party in two.

More important, this circular firing squad meant that putting together and rolling out a get-out-the-vote plan became a secondary priority. With Governor Romney stuck in a primary battle into mid-April, his team's ability to put together a GOTV program in Ohio also was delayed. At the same time, as highlighted in the *Washington Post* story, "The Strategy That Paved a Winning Path," President Obama's team was quietly expanding its operations in Ohio and engaging in micro-targeting at an unprecedented level.

I can't say how much this insider party fight hurt Governor Romney on November 6, but it certainly didn't help. Democrats were united, Republicans were divided. That formula rarely leads to victory.

Part III

ABOUT THAT GROUND GAME

“Obama for America never went away.” –Aaron Pickrell, Ohio Obama for America Strategist

As I noted in Part II, both the ORP and Governor Romney did not get their get-out-the-vote operations set-up as early as needed to compete with the Obama campaign. At its peak, the Romney campaign had 40 field offices operating in Ohio. In comparison, the Obama campaign had 137 field offices across Ohio—more than three times as many. In addition to the field offices, the Obama campaign was active in college campuses making sure that the youth vote turned out for them

As Aaron Pickrell noted at a post-election forum after the election, the Obama campaign hired its 2012 reelection team in March 2009. As reported in *The Hill* article, “Data Drove Obama’s Ground Game,” that team quietly and methodically developed a voter identification system as complex and sophisticated as any ever assembled. They spent years doing all of the spadework necessary to have a very localized knowledge of Ohio voters. This work allowed them to mobilize an enormous volunteer effort in the campaign’s final weeks and days to make sure that their supporters voted.

The Romney team had mere months to catch up and the fractured, weakened ORP couldn’t offer much help. The most vivid example of the gulf between the two operations came out on the Sunday before the election. The Romney campaign in Ohio bragged that it had knocked on 70,000 doors on Sunday. The Obama campaign crushed that figure by hitting over 376,000 doors on Sunday.

As detailed in the *Ace of Spades* blog article, “The Unmitigated Disaster Known as Project ORCA,” the Romney campaign’s GOTV effort called Project ORCA was an unmitigated disaster, leaving thousands of activists with nothing to do or deployed poorly. In Ohio, it was even worse as detailed by one activist:

It completely came apart less than 5 days before the elections as over 100 ORCA volunteers in my county alone had not received their assignments, their information packets, their credentials, access to the application and database they were supposed to use...and the final conference the night before the election did not work. There was no coordination below state level, and the single coordinator at the state level could not begin to handle the issues. On election day, we found that only 2 of 9 precincts in a polling place were being worked by ORCA vol-

unteers, and the way ORCA had set it up we could not get them to enable our people assigned to the 2 precincts to also handle the other 7. The Democrats did not have that problem, and worked all 8 precincts. Meanwhile, we had several volunteers working outside polling places all day that could have been used to help ORCA volunteers, but again ORCA could not adapt to the need. ORCA did not address at least half the polling places in my County.

If one thing could be said about the approach to GOTV by the two campaigns is that the Romney campaign seemed to be focused on the quantity of contacts whereas the Obama campaign focused on quality of contacts. The Romney campaign pushed out email after email telling us how many millions of telephone calls and doors they knocked on, but what they didn't tell us is that most of those calls went unanswered or ignored and the doors they knocked on either received no answer or didn't have enough of the voters inside needed to win. In contrast, the Obama campaign localized the election over the course of years by having the same people repeatedly knock on doors of neighbors many times and used enormous amounts of data to micro target base and persuadable voters with the right messages.

So, when all the dust cleared on election day, the Obama campaign successfully minimized its expected turnout losses enough to stay ahead of the Romney campaign, which failed to improve upon the McCain campaign's poor showing in 2008. Here are some specifics from Ohio exit polling:

- The black vote jumped by 4 points from 2008 to 2012;
- The white vote declined by 4 points from 2008 to 2012;
- The 18-29 year old voter remained about the same from 2008 to 2012;
- The female vote went for President Obama by 4 points more than the male vote went for Governor Romney;
- Liberals went for President Obama by 88% as conservative went for Governor Romney by 81% (those base voters noted in Part I);
- Moderates went for President Obama with 57% of the vote;
- While Governor Romney won independents by 10 points, those voters, along with Republicans, were only 31% of the vote (again, too many base voters stayed home);
- Democrats represented 38% of the vote; and
- While Governor Romney won the suburbs by 4 points and rural areas by 22 points, President Obama won cities of over 50,000 by 34 points and those voters represented 25% of all voters.

Two more points on the turnout need to be highlighted. First, geographically, in the battle between the Cleveland area (19% of all voters) and the Cincinnati area (27% of all voters), President Obama's take in the former—60—far outmatched Governor Romney's take in the

latter—52%—thereby making it very hard from Governor Romney to catch up in the rest of the state. This reality is especially true when President Obama won Central Ohio by 4 points and Eastern Ohio by 3 points. In sum, President Obama won those parts of Ohio in which the voters accounted for 58% of the vote, with the real difference coming from the Cleveland and Columbus areas.

Secondly, one of the big questions on election day was: what would be the impact of the Republican's botched effort to reform collective bargaining rights for government workers in 2011? Though many teachers, firefighters, and police officers are conservative, some of them vowed never to support a Republican again. The veto referendum won by the unions in 2011 served as a dry run to the presidential election in 2012. While it is impossible to say whether those vows lasted into 2012, President Obama did increase his take of the vote of households with union members by 4 points. In such a close election, those 4 points mattered.

There can be little doubt that when it came to the ground game, the Republican effort simply left too much to be desired.

Part IV

THE IMPACT OF JINOS

The national liberal media bias has been well documented over the years. Less explored is the liberal media bias at the state level. In Ohio, that bias is alive and well. Jason Hart at Media Trackers Ohio did amazing work over the last two months exposing this bias. In two key pieces, Hart reported on the person behind Ohio's PolitiFact operations at the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and how other Ohio newspapers enable that bias to spread across Ohio.

In his piece “Liberal ‘Fact Checkers’ Crushes PolitiFact Ohio’s Credibility,” Hart wrote:

Voter registration records and social media posts expose Tom Feran, a columnist for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *PolitiFact Ohio*, as a liberal Democrat. While *PolitiFact Ohio* presents itself as an above-the-fray judge of objective truth, Feran’s bias is hardly obscured in his work: *PolitiFact Ohio* editors Robert Higgs and Jane Kahoun are both registered Democrats according to Board of Elections records.

Hart also released a tweet from Feran from 2008 where Feran pushes President Obama’s candidacy. Hart’s piece on Feran contains lots of evidence of Feran’s liberal bias. In the second piece, “Newspapers Enable PolitiFact Ohio’s Liberal Bias,” Hart details how other Ohio newspapers use “findings” by PolitiFact Ohio to hit Republican candidates.

The problem is far worse than an election year tool used by the media to judge campaign statements. In my book, *Taxpayers Don’t Stand a Chance*, I spend an entire chapter making the case against Ohio’s liberal media. I refer to them as JINOs—Journalists in Name Only. In the book, I wrote:

These JINOs give the impression that they present both sides of the story, and you’ll find conservatives quoted in many stories. Conservative quotes, however, typically appear at the very end of the story. Many readers never make to the end of most stories and thus miss the other side of the story. This end of the story treatment is used only to provide a thin veneer of presenting “both sides.” Naturally, these stories were selected by the JINOs based on their priorities and not on the work done by conservative

Under my leadership, my think tank released ten major reports (and countless smaller pieces) on the big challenges facing Ohio. These reports covered col-

lective bargaining, criminal justice, Medicaid, government pensions, government consolidation, jobs and the economy, and property taxes. As detailed below, these reports significantly influenced policy makers in Ohio.

We also undertook a major redesign of the website that resulted in over 6,000,000 searches of government salary data in just 18 months. We created several first-in-the-nation tools for taxpayers to use to educate themselves on their total tax burdens (the Tax Calculator tool), on compensation differences between the public and private sectors (the Job Comparison tool), and the gold-plated nature of government pensions compared to their own retirement plans (the Retirement Comparison tool). Over 1,000,000 visitors have used these innovative tools. As an independent validation of this innovation, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants is using the Tax Calculator as the model to replicate in the other 49 states.

We even commissioned a groundbreaking poll on the big issues in July 2010. The poll, conducted by Magellan Data and Mapping Strategies on July 19, 2010, surveyed 1,800 registered voters in Ohio. Because of the large sample, the poll's margin of error was only 2.31 percent. The poll asked Ohioans how they would solve Ohio's estimated \$8 billion deficit and provided these three choices: reduce government compensation packages, cut government services, or increase taxes. Fifty percent chose reducing government compensation packages and only 16 percent selected higher taxes. More interestingly, 85 percent of Ohioans, including Democrats and labor union members supported giving workers the freedom to choose whether to join labor unions. The top-line results, cross-tabs, and polling presentation were all provided to the media.

Yet, other than two stories on the release of government salary data on the website by Laura Bischoff in the *Dayton Daily News*, not one other journalist covered any of the major reports we did, our website innovations, or the stunning poll. If you count each report and the poll and each outlet as an "at bat," we went 0-66 for the game. It is impossible to ignore liberal media bias in the newsrooms after such a statistically shocking outcome.

Interestingly, like Ohioans who showed great interest in our work and website, the editorial side of the newspapers found our work highly relevant by citing us more than 20 times during my tenure. Moreover, actual events showed just how relevant our work was, as that work led to legislative reforms in Ohio.

I conclude the discussion on the liberal media bias in Ohio by noting: "I don't begrudge left-wing groups the coverage they get. My concern is that conservatives did not get any, let alone equal, coverage. This failure on the part of those entrusted with the responsibility to fairly and accurately provide readers with news important to them puts taxpayers at an enormous disad-

vantage when it comes to making informed decisions.” This discussion on JINOs in the book covered from September 2009 to June 2012.

Over the last few months, the media blackout of conservative work continued. In July, my new think tank Opportunity Ohio released a statewide survey on Ohio by Magellan Strategies, including the Presidential and U.S. Senate races. While Nate Silver’s *FiveThirtyEight* blog and *PoliticalWire* picked up the survey, not a single Ohio media outlet reported on the survey. In both August and October, we released an analysis of Ohio’s unemployment rate that analyzed Ohio’s unique decline in the labor force that exceeded the increase in those officially on unemployment to show that Ohio’s unemployment rate was likely closer to 9.3 percent. The media ignored those items, too.

Finally, in September, we released a comprehensive report on Ohio’s energy resources, “Leveraging Our Natural Resources: Ohio’s Opportunity to Lead the World Again,” that detailed the impact President Obama’s war on coal and Governor Kasich’s proposed tax hike on oil and gas would have on Ohio. Again, not a peep from the media.

Most Ohioans don’t get their news from the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. They get their news from state-based media sources. If those sources are biased in favor of liberals, it should be no surprise that Republican candidates in top races struggle to get fair coverage of their campaigns. With the issue of jobs and coal at the forefront of the debate in Ohio, biased coverage certainly made it harder for Governor Romney to make his case to Ohioans.

Part V

ISSUES: HEARTS VERSUS MINDS

Throughout September and October, it seemed to me that the Republican focus on several issues were destined to fail as issues that would cut in their favor in Ohio. Let me say from the get-go that I agree with the arguments made by the Right on these issues, but being right on the issue doesn't necessarily mean the issue is right for a hotly contested political campaign.

First, the auto bailout. For months, the Right, as represented by Governor Kasich, argued that the auto bailout only translated into a few hundred jobs in Ohio. Then, the Romney campaign and conservative groups tried to make the case that the auto bailout was bad policy and that General Motors and Chrysler should have followed a normal bankruptcy instead of receiving the federal bailout. These two positions illustrate perfectly the problem the Right has in winning. We argue to the mind with data and wonky policy briefs, as the Left argues to the heart with real life stories. We argue "should haves," as the Left argues "dids."

Our position on the auto bailout just didn't pass George Will's "sniff test." To say that the federal government's injection of tens of billions of dollars into the auto companies as plants are shutting down in Ohio and suppliers are going under resulted in just a few hundred jobs just didn't fit with what Ohioans in northern Ohio were actually experiencing; namely, plants reopening and jobs coming back. Forget for a minute whether those same outcomes would have happened had the auto companies followed a standard bankruptcy, those outcomes DID occur following the bailout. For many Northern Ohioans, that meant jobs, a financial lifeline, and a second chance.

As the Romney campaign, Governor Kasich, and conservative groups were dismissing the auto bailout and intellectually explaining in ivory tower detail what would have happened had the federal bailout not occurred, the jobs were saved and day-to-day lives of Ohioans in any way related to the auto industry were improving. Not surprisingly, Ohio exit polls confirmed this sentiment. On Election Day, 60% of Ohioans approved the auto bailout and President Obama won those voters with 74% of the vote. The mind may be right, but the heart was beating strongly again for those folks.

Next, after the terrible events in Benghazi, the Right became consumed with hitting President Obama on what appeared to be a significant failure on his Administration's part. Again, it may come to pass that the Obama Administration's handling of Benghazi turns into a full-scale scandal in his second term, but, as a campaign issue, it had little impact. As each day passed, my Twitter account had post after post from conservatives focused solely on Benghazi.

Did these folks really believe that a foreign policy issue involving Libya would drive voters away

from President Obama? Would a foreign policy event trump jobs and the economy, especially when the national media—JINOs—would do its part to protect President Obama? There an answer, of course, was no. The Ohio exit poll showed that so few voters named foreign policy as a top issue that it couldn't even determine which candidate prevailed on that issue. For 59% of voters, the economy was the top issue and Governor Romney carried those voters by just 2 percent, despite the sluggish economic growth and job increases over the last year.

On the issue of the economy, one of the biggest hurdles faced by Governor Romney in Ohio was that Governor Kasich simply couldn't stop promoting how great Ohio was doing under his leadership (and coincidentally President Obama's leadership), as evidenced by Ohio's unemployment rate. Forget for a moment whether Ohio's unemployment rate is as good as President Obama and Governor Kasich say it is, the Obama campaign couldn't find a better spokesman for their point on unemployment in Ohio than Governor Kasich. The Left made great hay out of those awkward campaign appearances where Governor Kasich would trump his success as Governor Romney sat with a pained look on his face. Who were voters supposed to believe—President Obama and Governor Kasich or Governor Romney? According to the Ohio exit poll, for the 32% of Ohioans who named unemployment as a top problem they faced, President Obama won that group by 5 percent.

Finally, we conservatives rightly believe that the federal deficit and debt are growing problems that could eventually lead our great nation on the same path of decline as Rome. The problem for us is we tend to speak about it with lots of facts and figures (there is that mind, again) and not with enough heart. The other problem for us is that the debt crisis is “in the future.”

In contrast, the Left focuses on health care and the impact health care has on people today, with lots of personal, compelling stories by real people facing real crises. After the economy, 14% of Ohioans named the federal budget deficit as the top problem, with Governor Romney winning those voters with 71% of the vote. Approximately 20% of Ohioans named health care as the top problem, with President Obama winning those voters with 73% of the vote. That 6% greater share of voters on health care who went for President Obama by 2% more than Ohioans went for Governor Romney on the deficit is what turned Governor Romney's 2% advantage on the economy to President Obama's 2% win overall.

Digging a little deeper on the health care issue shows something else. Because President Obama won those who favored expanding ObamaCare or leaving it as is by 74 percent, he prevailed overall on the question of what to do about ObamaCare by 1 percent. For that critical victory, President Obama should thank Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. Keep in mind, just one year earlier, 67% of Ohioans voted in favor of Ohio's Health Care Freedom Act that expressly opposed ObamaCare. The Supreme Court win in June clearly bolstered President Obama's position on health care in Ohio.

Fundamentally, Republicans chose to fight on issues that wouldn't help Governor Romney in Ohio because (1) reality beats theory, (2) our own team undermined the message, and (3) this wasn't a national security election.

Part VI

THE REST OF THE STORY

This second to last part will discuss several items that tell the rest of the story.

For much of October, like many people, I couldn't figure out why the swing state polls and the national polls were so divergent. More pointedly, I couldn't figure out why my models kept coming out with a slight advantage for President Obama. When the spin over the expected Republican ground game, the depressed Democratic vote, and the massive crowds attending Romney-Ryan events were added to the mix, something seemed wrong with the swing state polls and my own internal models.

On November 1, Charlie Cook wrote a column in *National Journal* titled, "Obama Can Thank Early Negative Ads for His Advantage," that broke through the clutter and explained the split. Here is what Cook wrote:

In the states that have experienced the minimalist campaign, the popular-vote numbers are even or maybe up for Republican nominee Mitt Romney by a bit. For people who live there, the campaign effectively started with the first debate. Many undecided voters were pleasantly surprised by Romney, who presented himself as moderate, reasonable, intelligent, and earnest. He also came across as more of a problem-solver than the ideological robot voters had seen earlier in the campaign through their binoculars.

But for those in the battleground states, who had seen Romney's head bashed in last summer by the Obama campaign's attacks on Bain Capital, plant closings, layoffs, outsourcing, and income taxes—not to mention bank accounts in Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and Switzerland—skepticism has persisted. Much more than in the rest of the country, Romney's scar tissue continues to get in the way of these swing-state voters fully embracing this new and improved Mitt. Sure, after the debates, particularly the first one, many undecideds moved his way. But the ranks of new Romney supporters are smaller and more hesitant in the swing states than in the other states, where viewers didn't witness the hits on his image inflicted by President Obama's campaign and Priorities USA, the leading Democratic super PAC.

Cook's observation made total sense. If you lived in a state like Ohio where the negative Romney ads played all summer, Governor Romney had been defined for you. The first debate, while

impressive, had to compete against what you “knew” about him already. For the vast majority of Americans who did not live in swing states and had not seen the negative ads, the first debate gave them a glimpse of Governor Romney that was impressive. National polls, containing far more non-swing state voters, would naturally be far more positive for Governor Romney than swing state polls. Duh.

Failing to run positive biography ads in the summer to counter the negative Obama campaign ads will go down as one of the most inexplicable decisions made by the Romney campaign. Did the former Massachusetts governor not learn anything from the 2004 summer attacks on Massachusetts Senator John Kerry? Governor Romney has a very powerful personal story, especially about his generosity and charitable work. Too bad most Americans in swing states never heard about that biography.

In terms of ads, the Left’s attack on the *Citizens United* decision that opened the doors for outside group spending is somewhat laughable. First, the Left’s all-too-silent complaints about the spending by Big Labor makes its whining about *Citizens United* slightly hypocritical. The single largest spender in political campaigns over the last two decades is Big Labor. If the Left wants to even the playing field, then it should advocate for removing all restrictions on candidates and political parties tied with total transparency on donors. This approach would respect the Constitution and ensure we knew who was giving to campaigns.

More importantly, the hundreds of millions spent by outside groups didn’t work. For those of us on the Right, understanding why those ads didn’t work is vital to making sure they do work in the future. The ads played an important role in defining the other side and supporting candidates who share our beliefs. The problem is that the ads started in the last few months of the campaign and in such high volume that the ads fell on deaf ears and blind eyes.

In many ways, the ads are like a downpour on a farmer’s field after a drought. Because the fields have hardened since the last rain, getting so much rain so quickly doesn’t allow the water to penetrate the fields. Instead, the rain hits the hard ground and runs off. In some case, the hard rain damages the planted crop. For the ads to be effective, those ads need to be preceded by a someone who is doing the spade work on the ground throughout the year and in off-years. A permanent ground game, like the Obama campaign had, will ensure that when the hard rain falls, the ground can absorb it.

Next, Governor Romney’s decision to tap Congressman Ryan simply didn’t make sense. Don’t get me wrong, Congressman Ryan is a fantastic candidate and one of the best politicians in the Republican Party. The problem is that he had little name identification in Wisconsin, let alone in the rest of the country. As one of eight congressional members in Wisconsin, his statewide name appeal was limited. From an Electoral College standpoint, Wisconsin is a state that has not voted for the Republican presidential candidate since Ronald Reagan in 1984. Electorally speaking, it would be nice to win Wisconsin, but it isn’t needed.

With its 18 electoral votes, Ohio is an electoral necessity for Republicans to win the presidency. Ohio last went for the Republican candidate in 2004, so it is obviously winnable as THE swing state. If you need to win Ohio to win the presidency, I cannot imagine why Governor Romney didn't choose Ohio Senator Rob Portman as his running mate. It is impossible to say that Senator Portman would have helped Governor Romney win Ohio, but he certainly would have helped him close the 107,000-vote deficit in Ohio. By how much? We will never know.

Finally, due to all of the items discussed above and in Parts I–V, Ohioans simply liked President Obama more than Governor Romney. On some of the key questions, Ohioans saw President Obama as more like them. Here is what the Ohio exit poll showed:

- On who is more in touch with them, President Obama bested Governor Romney 50% to 46%;
- President Obama's favorability-unfavorability rating finished at 55% to 43%, a 12 point positive margin;
- Governor Romney favorability-unfavorability rating finished at 45% to 50%, a 5 point negative deficit;
- Ohioans felt President Obama's policies favored the rich, the middle class, and the poor at 10%, 43%, and 36%, respectively;
- Ohioans felt Governor Romney's policies favored the rich, the middle class, and the poor at 56%, 35%, and 1%, respectively;
- On who cares about people like me, President Obama won that question 84% to 15%.

It simply is too hard to win when you are seen as more out of touch, less liked, and more interested in helping the rich versus the rest. It doesn't matter if that last item is actually true, in presidential politics, perception crushes reality. And that, dear readers, is the only story that really mattered on Election Day.

Part VII

WE MUST FIGHT SMARTER IF WE WANT TO WIN

Now that I've spent Parts I–VI explaining what I think happened in Ohio on Election Day, it is time to get to the solutions we need to implement to make sure conservatives don't lose again in 2014 or 2016. Obviously, my recommendations aren't the magic bullet, but I firmly believe if we make these changes, we will stand a significantly better chance of winning in the future.

First, at the state level, let me start by saying what we don't need. We don't need more think tank reports or white papers that Ohioans ignore or throw in a “to read when I have nothing else to do” pile. As the founder of a new think tank (Opportunity Ohio), former head of another think tank, and Fellow with two other think tanks (The Heritage Foundation and the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs), I realize this statement seems contrary to the health of those think tanks. It isn't. I started Opportunity Ohio four months ago to focus on educating Ohioans on the big issues, not to issue dry policy position papers.

The reality is that when “our side” controls the levers of power, which is the case in Ohio, the utility of a traditional think declines markedly. Sure, it can serve as a resource for the political establishment, but most politicians only want think tanks to affirm their policy choices as part of an echo chamber. The far more useful roles a traditional think tank can serve is to provide criticism when politicians from either party propose or adopt policies that don't adhere to our conservative principles and to counter the bad ideas from liberal-progressive groups. With the reelection of President Obama and the continued control of the U.S. Senate by liberal-progressives, we will need The Heritage Foundation, the CATO Institute, and other center-right groups in Washington, D.C., more than ever.

In Ohio, we need something else. As one large conservative Ohio donor said, “We don't need more [expletive] reports!” As much as it pains an idea guy to admit it, he is right. I am, however, also an action guy who has spent the last three plus years driving over 20,000 miles across Ohio educating more than fifteen thousand Ohioans. In just the last four months, I've given over 1,000 copies of my new book to Ohioans in all corners of the state, but those figures are just small fractions of the number of Ohioans we must reach to win.

What Ohio needs is a permanent infrastructure focused on identifying and educating Ohioans on the key issues. This infrastructure includes both a 501(c)(3) component—an education tank like Opportunity Ohio—and a 501(c)(4) component like Ohio Rising that do the spade work across Ohio week after week, month after month, and year after year to identify and to educate

millions of Ohioans. This activity is exactly what Obama for America Ohio did over the last few years very effectively.

As I discussed in Part VI, without this effort, all of the money invested in political ads during the last four months of a campaign will hit hardened soil. This combined (c)(3)/(c)(4) effort will soften the soil so those ads hit a receptive audience.

Importantly, this effort cannot be controlled by a political party, as then it becomes about a candidate. The lesson from the Kasich-DeWine fight discussed in Part II is that politicians will try to control political tools. This effort expressly is not and cannot be about candidates. It must be about advancing the freedom agenda in Ohio to make our state a leader among the states, which will benefit candidates who advocate that agenda.

This effort also will allow grassroots Ohioans to push for issues that the political establishment doesn't have the will to pass. Imagine what a difference it could have made in last year's government collective bargaining battle in Ohio. Because Ohio has a veto referendum tool for voters, controlling all levers of government only gets our side so far. The Left will continue to challenge laws enacted and place issues in front of voters. We must be ready.

The key is to begin this work as soon as possible so that it can be a force in 2014 and the determining factor in 2016. The foundation for this effort already is in place. We must now expand it dramatically. As more and more Ohioans are brought into the growing network, it will serve as distribution network for our freedom agenda.

We also must improve how we talk about conservative ideas and principles with more heart and less mind as described in Part V. We must drastically improve how we tell stories about real people that make our points. PowerPoint slide decks put people to sleep. Stories inspire and move people to act. How we communicate to this growing distribution network is as important as building the network itself. This important work is underway, so we need to continue to invest in it and use it.

In order to ensure that conservative ideas and information reaches Joe and Jane Ohio, we must substantially expand the alternative news outlet created at Media Trackers Ohio. Over the last six months, Media Trackers Ohio wrote hundreds of stories on the big events happening in Ohio. Media Trackers Ohio covers news from an unbiased angle. Equally as important, Media Trackers Ohio covers items Ohio's mainstream media refuses to cover. As I highlighted in Part IV, how are Ohioans supposed to make informed decisions if they are presented only one side of the story and that side contains a liberal bias?

We need to stop complaining about the liberal media and build an alternative news source in Ohio that allows conservatives to go above, around, and below the self-professed gatekeepers in the mainstream Ohio media.

Finally, it won't be enough to just identify and to educate Ohioans by providing them with

unbiased news. We must make sure that conservatives prevail on Election Day. To do that, we must leverage a robust Ohio network using Ohio Rising and other electioneering components to advocate for candidates and issues and to execute a get-out-the-vote program that didn't just arise in the last few months. As detailed in Parts I and III, we cannot afford to rely upon a candidate or a political party to build a GOTV effort in just the few months available between a primary election and a general election. That formula doesn't work anymore. We must catch up to the other side and surpass its efforts.

This work must begin now and it must be done correctly.

Let me end this series by putting it in the larger context that I believe is why we fight and why, despite this most recent setback, we must redouble our efforts and fight even harder. With the growing fiscal problems in Washington, D.C., we are rapidly approaching that point along Alexander Tytler's Cycle of Democracy from which no country in the history of the world has been able to turn back. As I noted in the Afterword of my first book, Homeland Security & Federalism: Protecting America from Outside the Beltway, Tytler's observed:

A democracy is always temporary in nature; it simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy, which is always followed by a dictatorship.

The average age of the world's greatest civilizations from the beginning of history has been about 200 years. During those 200 years, these nations always progressed through the following sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependence; from dependence back into bondage.


Either we enter America's long decline to being a country lost among countries, or we pull back from the edge and reinvigorate the idea of America as an exceptional nation among nations. If any people can do what has not been done before, it is Americans. As I've said before, it is in our DNA to fight, to solve problems, and to light the way towards a better tomorrow.

The path to a better Ohio and a better America does not begin in Washington, D.C.—it ends there. We must renew America from the grassroots by re-embracing the power of federalism to find the best solutions to America's toughest challenges. By leveraging our fifty laboratories of competition, we will fix our states and, by doing so, fix America.

It is time to get over the regrets of the last election and get to work advancing freedom.

About Opportunity Ohio

OPPORTUNITY OHIO (O2)—OHIO'S SOURCE OF OXYGEN TO FEED ITS INTELLECTUAL FIRE

 2 is dedicated to enhancing prosperity for Ohioans through educating policymakers and empowering citizens. We pay particular to the impact of state and local government decisions and how they foster or hinder job creation and economic growth. Our strategic aim is to provide Ohioans with the intellectual firepower for a better tomorrow.

We focus on three key areas. First, we firmly believe that the future of Ohio depends on increasing economic freedom and competitiveness in all parts of our economy. We believe government must provide a fair and level-playing field where everyone is equal before the law, not doling out special favors to insiders, subsidizing those with the best lobbyists, or protecting certain industries from competition and innovation.

Next, an economy geared to the promotion of job creation and entrepreneurship is the only way to ensure that those looking to start or grow a business and those seeking quality work can blossom. We must ensure that government policies spur business and attract the best and brightest by giving a voice to those who create jobs and free Ohio's risk-takers from government actions that impede growth.

Finally, the cost and burden of government cannot continue to make Ohio among the worst states economically, so we must institute strong government reform and accountability measures. Elected officials and the people who run our state and local governments must be accountable for providing transparent, honest, and open government that works. Taxes and regulations—and the size of government—must be kept in check so that the best and brightest Ohioans stay here rather than flee to more hospitable pastures.

We live in a world where it's easy for businesses to create jobs anywhere—be it in the 49 other states or other countries. O2 aims to make Ohio a thriving state once again by reforming government policies so we keep and attract those men and women who create good jobs.

O2 is an educational organization that has applied for federal tax exemption as a 501(c)(3) public charity. During the application process, O2 can accept charitable contributions and, if this designation is granted, then the full amount of your contribution will be deductible for federal income tax purposes. To invest in our vital work, please contact Matt Mayer at 703-919-9894.

For more information, visit us at www.opportunityohio.org or send an inquiry to contact@opportunityohio.org.

OPPORTUNITY *Ohio*

WWW.OPPORTUNITYOHIO.ORG
