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April 2008

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the spring 2008 edition of my bi-annual newsletter, in which you will find a detailed update about what is happening in Washington, where I've been in Ohio in the last six months, and what I'm hearing from Ohioans.

I hope you will read about my efforts on alternative energy, trade, education, health care, veterans, housing and the economy, and agriculture and let me know your views.

Since coming to the Senate last year, I have traveled across Ohio hosting roundtables with community leaders, educators, senior citizens, veterans, farmers, entrepreneurs, and workers.

At nearly 100 roundtables held in every corner of the state - from Ashtabula to Athens, from Hamler to Hamilton - I was proud to have been part of in-depth discussions that centered on pivotal issues important to Ohio families and communities.

Many of the ideas for legislation I introduced in the Senate in the last year came from these conversations with Ohioans. For example, I learned of rural hospitals being stuck with the tab for delays caused by the Veterans Administration, and have set about to make the federal government pay its bills.

People all over the state told me how difficult it was to try to modify their mortgages when the bank and the call center were overseas. Last December, I helped secure an additional \$180 million to hire additional housing counselors to help people navigate the mortgage maze.

With our nation's aging bridges, roads, and water and sewer systems a growing concern for communities large and small, infrastructure funding was discussed at nearly every roundtable.

From [addressing the housing crisis](#) to advancing alternative energy research and development; from [fighting job-killing trade agreements](#) to rebuilding our roads and bridges, there is much work to do in 2008 to strengthen Ohio's middle class.

What We Can Do

As your United States Senator, my top priority is ensuring the best constituent services possible. My office is able to help you with concerns and questions you have about the federal government. We can also help you navigate federal programs and interact with federal agencies.

[Click here](#) »

Website

I am proud to serve as your United States Senator. To better serve you, I have created a website that is as much a "virtual office" as it is a source for information about your government.

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Sign up to receive my e-Newsletters and stay connected with what's happening in Congress. I send out monthly newsletters as well as regular issue-based e-alerts to help keep you informed about the latest actions in Congress.

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Our work is cut out for us overseas as well, where I hope we can soon begin the process of bringing our troops home and letting the people of Iraq take responsibility for their future.

One final note: Tax Day - April 15 - is next week. Ohioans should pay particular attention to this year's rules for filing to ensure you have access to everything available to you. While some of you are not normally required to file a tax return, you must do so to qualify for the 2008 stimulus rebate. Please click to learn more about the [2008 stimulus rebate](#), the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#), and read down further for information on free tax preparation assistance.

I will continue to provide you with regular email updates. I invite you to visit my website to learn more about the issues that matter most to you and to send me emails with your thoughts and suggestions about how we can work together to build a stronger and more prosperous Ohio.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown



[Infrastructure](#)



At about every roundtable I've held around Ohio - nearly 100 - infrastructure funding has been a top priority. The tragic collapse of the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis and later reports about the sub-par condition of our nation's bridges have made it clear that infrastructure funding must be a top priority for the federal government.

In addition to ensuring that our communities' roads and bridges are safe, investments in infrastructure are an effective way to get dollars into communities while creating jobs and long-term economic growth. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that roughly 47,500 jobs are created for every \$1 billion in highway funding.

Infrastructure projects expand beyond roads and bridges. There are still people in parts of Ohio without access to running water in their homes. In the major cities, infrastructure - some of which was created nearly a century ago - is in need of a complete overhaul.

A widespread investment in infrastructure, as laid out in the National Infrastructure Bank Act of 2007, will serve to improve our nation's water systems, roads, and bridges, while also creating long-term growth. I joined as a sponsor of this legislation, and I will continue to push for a greater investment in infrastructure projects because of its broad-reaching benefit to Ohio and the nation.

Tax Day

With the April 15th federal filing deadline rapidly approaching, I encourage all eligible Ohioans to take advantage of the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Economic Stimulus Payment, and the free tax preparation services offered throughout the state.

The Earned Income Tax Credit is a federal tax credit that may be available to working individuals or families who earned less than \$40,000 in 2007. The average credit is \$1,800, with a maximum credit of \$4,700. Last year, 798,000 Ohio taxpayers claimed the EITC, returning \$1.2 billion dollars to our state's economy. Millions of dollars remain unclaimed by taxpayers unaware of this important tax credit.

Beginning in May, Economic Stimulus Payments will begin to be mailed or deposited electronically to eligible recipients throughout Ohio. In order to receive an economic stimulus payment, everyone must have filed a 2007 tax return, including those receiving Social Security, Veterans and Railroad Retirement Benefits, who under normal circumstances are not required to file.

Ohio's seniors, veterans, retirees, and persons with low income are strongly encouraged to file in order to take advantage of this important stimulus payment. Stimulus payments will range up to \$600 for individuals (\$1,200 for married couples) with many parents receiving an additional \$300 for each eligible child younger than 17 years of age.

If you have access to the internet and your gross income was \$54,000 or less, you can take advantage of [free online filing through the IRS' web site](#). If you need a little more help, free tax preparation assistance is available - for additional information on these free tax preparations locations, interested persons should contact the IRS VITA SITE locator hotline at: 1-800-906-9887, or Tax Counseling for the Elderly sites (TCE): 1-888-337-7669.

Alternative Energy

Ohio families are feeling the crippling burden of an energy tax policy that has for too long sided with big oil instead of supporting investment in alternative energy. Gas prices, already above \$3 a gallon, could near \$4 a gallon by this summer.

In March, I wrote the President demanding that he use his close relationship with the Saudi Royal family to push the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to increase oil production. This single step would go a long way in lowering gas prices for the Ohio driver.

While that's a start, it is not the answer for our long-term energy solutions. We must free ourselves from dependency on foreign oil and we must invest in renewable fuels and alternative energy in a meaningful way.

From wind to solar, from biofuels and fuel cells to clean coal technology, Ohio has the capacity to become the Silicon Valley of alternative energy. With strategic investments in research and development, we can be at the center of the fight to reduce consumption of foreign oil, decrease our carbon emissions, and create good-paying jobs in alternative energy here in Ohio.

In our state, we have a talented and hard-working labor force, tremendous agricultural resources, and an entrepreneurial spirit that needs only the investment dollars and commitment to alternative energy from government to realize its economic potential.

As resources are becoming more scarce, and with climate change threatening our way of life, we need brave, innovative ideas and leadership to begin a new system of public-private partnerships to create green, renewable energy and a green renewable energy manufacturing base in America.

In the coming weeks you will hear more from me about specific ways we can invest in alternative energy research and development and commercial potential for Ohio.

Education Summit

One issue repeatedly came up at meetings large and small in Ohio last year: the fact that bright young Ohioans are graduating from high school or college and leaving our state in record numbers.

It became clear at these meetings that the key to ensuring that young people stay in Ohio - and help build its future - is to ensure that everyone who wants to go to college or receive technical training is able to do so; and to ensure that there are good-paying jobs in the state once students graduate.



Earlier this month, I invited all of Ohio's college and university presidents - from two-year and four-year, and public and private institutions - to join me in Washington, D.C. for a one day summit to discuss our common needs, goals, and opportunities as they relate to education and workforce training.

At this conference - the first ever of its kind - the 46 presidents in attendance discussed new ways in which we can work together to bridge the gap between the skills of the workforce and the labor needs of the economy.

Senator Edward Kennedy, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, and Congressman George Miller, chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, joined us for a discussion of federal priorities in regard to higher education and spoke about how colleges and universities can best leverage federal resources to help ensure that higher education becomes more accessible throughout the state.

In addition, Ohio's Chancellor of Higher Education Eric Fingerhut presented his ten-year strategic plan for higher education in Ohio and discussed ways in which the state and federal government can work together with institutions to promote a vibrant, economically, and culturally flourishing Ohio.

The conference afforded participants the opportunity to share best practices, generating scores of new ideas. Many of the presidents talked about the need for increased integration and communication with the K-12 education system, as well as the need to expand curriculum and degree options, especially those connected to specific regional labor needs.

The conference was a great success and I look forward to working with Chancellor Fingerhut and Ohio's universities and colleges this year as we continue to build on the groundwork laid at the conference. I am confident that working together, Ohioans can build a thriving education and job-creation system that attracts new students, new businesses, and job opportunities to Ohio.

Farm Bill Summit

Ohio farmers know the importance of the Farm Bill currently being negotiated in Congress. They understand that it is a critical piece of legislation that only comes up every 5 or 6

years. However, the effects of Farm Bill are felt by Ohioans in every walk of life - from Cleveland to Cincinnati, from Athens to Ada.

The Farm Bill is not only an agriculture bill. It's also a nutrition bill. It's a renewable energy bill. It's a conservation bill. And it's a rural economic development bill.

This far-reaching legislation is nearing the final stages of negotiations among the Senate, House of Representatives, and the White House. Rural Ohioans and urban Ohioans are counting on a bill that will be forward-looking and support Ohio farmers, consumers, natural resources, communities, and Ohio's food banks and nutrition programs.

As the first Senator from Ohio to serve on the Senate Agriculture Committee in 40 years, I was proud to host Iowa Senator and Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin at a Farm Bill Summit in Columbus earlier this year. Senator Harkin and I sat down with Ohio's farm and food leaders to discuss the status of Farm Bill negotiations and to ask for feedback on priorities for Ohio. Many important provisions were discussed during this Farm Bill forum.

These included incentives for renewable energy, a safety-net that protects farmers against drops in revenue, and incentives for farmers who demonstrate environmental stewardship. In addition, I will work to see that the bill provides affordable access to fresh fruits and vegetables for all Ohioans, while helping create local markets for Ohio farmers. The Farm Bill must support our rural communities by providing funding for infrastructure needs including access to rural broadband.

I will continue to work to ensure that the final Farm Bill retains the critical programs needed by Ohio farmers and citizens.

Trade

Our nation's wrong-headed trade policy has resulted in huge manufacturing job loss and plant closings across Ohio. In January, an Ohio-based paper company announced it was being forced to close a plant with 300 workers after an international trade commission refused to help paper companies devastated by unfairly-subsidized imports from China.

Just this week, President Bush sent to Congress the Colombia Free Trade Deal, another job-killing trade pact that continues our fundamentally-flawed trade policy.

Thankfully, there are more voices in Congress today standing up for fair trade.

Record annual trade deficits, job losses, stagnant wages, and importation of unsafe food and toys have increased support for changing the way in which we set trade policy in Washington.

While President Bush continues to push for more NAFTA-style trade deals, I have been working with my colleagues in the Senate to draft legislation to help workers and businesses compete in the global economy.

We need better enforcement of our trade laws, we need to put an end to China's manipulation of its currency and disregard for health and safety standards, and we need to modernize Trade Adjustment Assistance to help workers, businesses, and communities hit by unfair trade.

I am also working with members of the Senate and House on a bill to review past trade agreements, require the President to submit a renegotiation plan, and set criteria for better trade agreements in the future.

It's time we invest in a trade policy that works for Ohio communities.

Veterans

I am honored to serve as a member of the Senate Veterans Committee, and I count on the input of Ohio veterans and their families.

Among the recurring themes I have heard during meetings with veterans from across the state are the numerous challenges they face as they transition from their military service to civilian life.

Having served us, rural veterans should not have to fight to get medical care from VA facilities. I urged the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to implement an increase in the amount of money veterans are reimbursed for their travel to get medical care from VA hospitals from 11 cents per mile to 28.5 cents per mile. This increase was implemented by the Secretary effective February 1, 2008.

Representative Zack Space and I held a joint field hearing on issues facing veterans in the rural areas of Ohio. At this hearing, Terry Carson, the CEO of Harrison Community Hospital in Cadiz, spoke of his experience serving veterans coming to the hospital for emergency treatment. Under current law, non-VA facilities are reimbursed for the costs of stabilizing a veteran who needs emergency care, and then they are expected to transfer the patient to a veterans' facility. If no veterans' facility is available, there is a coverage gap. This anomaly in the law is unfair to veterans and hospitals alike, and I introduced S. 2142, the Veterans Emergency Care Fairness Act, to remedy it. My bill would require the VA to cover the cost of care provided while a transfer is pending.

Educational benefits - important to so many veterans - can help with the transition from military life to civilian life. I hosted a roundtable at the Louis Stokes VA Hospital in Cleveland and heard directly from student veterans about Dr. John Schupp and the program he developed at Cleveland State University to help veterans excel as students.

In response, I introduced S. 2677, the Supporting Education for Returning Veterans Act. The SERV Act would require the Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to establish veteran support programs at institutions of higher learning similar to the one spearheaded by Dr. Schupp.

Congress has the duty to uphold our nation's compact with former and current members of the military. The very least we can do is fulfill our promises to them. I will work with my colleagues to make sure that's exactly what we do.

[Housing](#)



When I joined the U.S. Senate's Banking Committee, two things quickly became clear: the housing foreclosure crisis in Ohio had many of its roots in Washington, D.C.; and the Banking Committee would be a critical venue for helping Ohioans.

Last week, we heard testimony from Federal Reserve Chairman Bernanke and others on the tense negotiations that took place over a weekend in mid-March to rescue the investment bank Bear Stearns from bankruptcy.

The steps the executive branch and the Fed took that weekend were dramatic and necessary -- and completely opposite from the approach they had taken toward homeowners in Ohio and across the country.

Hundreds of thousands of people were sold mortgages designed to fail. Those people can stay in their homes with a fair mortgage, but will be on the street without our assistance.

Majority Leader Reid and I and others introduced legislation that will provide \$4 billion in

aid to communities so they can address the problems of abandoned homes. Our bill will also fund more counseling to help people rework unfair loans.

This is no easy task. Once upon a time you took out a loan with your local bank to buy a home. You knew the people at the bank, they knew you, and the bank had a stake in your success.

Today, especially for subprime loans, that is seldom the case. The voice on the phone and the owner of the loan could be anywhere in the world. Help in navigating the mortgage maze is essential.

This week, our bill has passed the Senate, and I hope we can soon work out our differences with the House version and get the President's signature on it.

If the government can work overtime to prevent the bankruptcy of a single bank, then we can do no less for the millions of American families and thousands of communities that need our help.



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