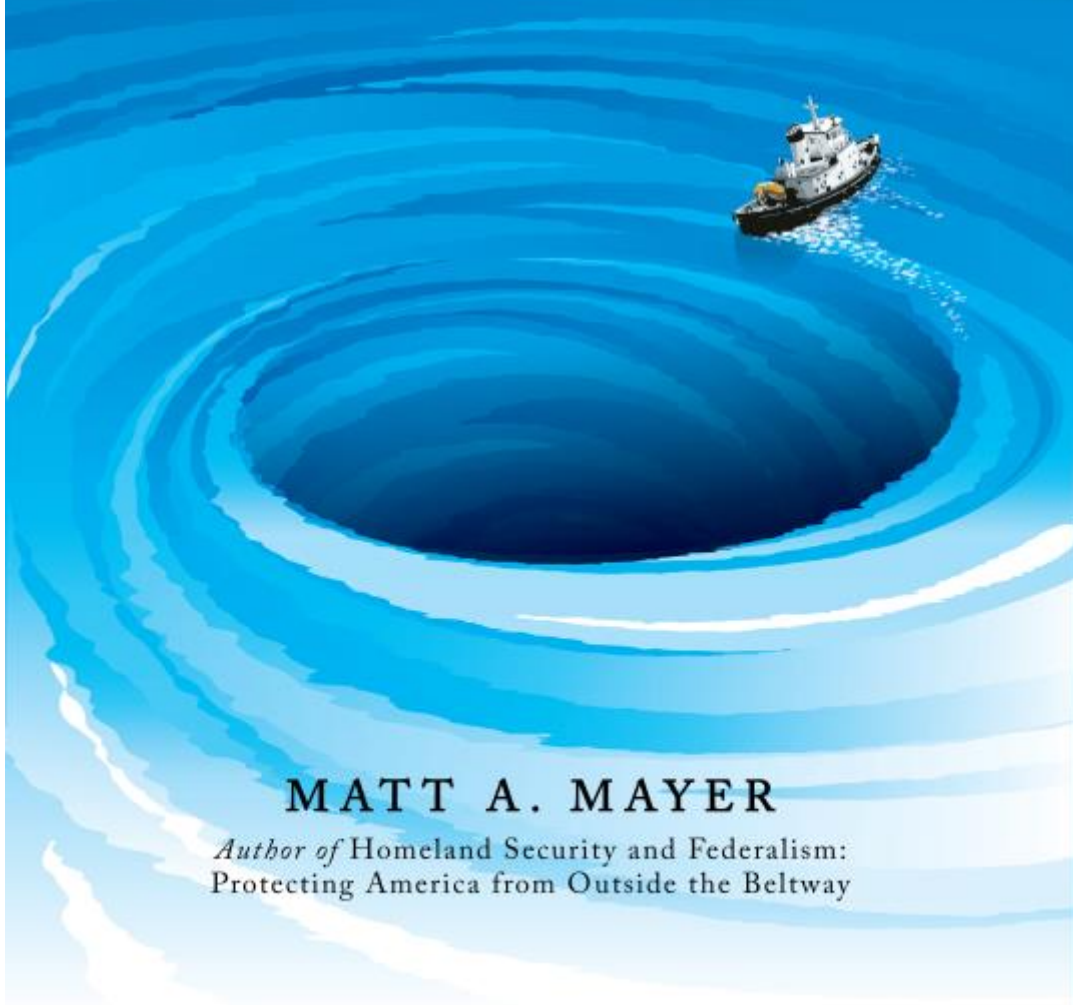


# TAXPAYERS DON'T STAND A CHANCE

WHY BATTLEGROUND OHIO LOSES  
NO MATTER WHO WINS  
(AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT)



**MATT A. MAYER**

*Author of Homeland Security and Federalism:  
Protecting America from Outside the Beltway*

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(AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT)***

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**JINOs (JOURNALISTS IN NAME ONLY)**

“0-66.”

The liberal bias of the national media is well-known and well-established. In stark contrast, the liberal bias of the media that covers state and local politics is largely unknown and unexplored. This chapter details the very real and damaging liberal bias held by state and local media, at least in Ohio.

***If a Tree Falls in the Forest and No One Is There to Hear It...***

I have been actively involved in politics for over a decade in three different locations: Colorado, Washington, D.C., and Ohio. When many of my colleagues blamed poor media coverage on liberal media bias, I always insisted that journalists have a financial stake in covering both sides of the debate and, more importantly, a professional duty to uphold their journalistic integrity. From Lynn Bartels at the *Rocky Mountain News* and Julia Martinez at the *Denver Post* who covered the two of the top political races in the country of which I was involved to Eric Lipton at *The New York Times* and Lara Jakes at the *Associated Press* who covered the new homeland security enterprise erected after September 11, 2001, in which I played a role, journalists have treated my side fairly.

Notwithstanding my experience at the national level, many groups have done studies showing the liberal media bias against conservatives. To my knowledge, few studies exist focusing on the liberal bias pervasive in state and local media coverage. Had I not spent a significant amount of time in the trenches, I would have been largely oblivious to that slanted coverage.

Unfortunately, unlike my experience in Colorado, the journalists in Ohio, especially the news reporters from the six big newspapers (*Akron Beacon Journal*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*,

*Cleveland Plain Dealer, Columbus Dispatch, Dayton Daily News, and Toledo Blade*), exhibited a liberal bias against conservative positions. Additionally, week after week taxpayers are short-changed by suburban journalists, as their coverage is grossly one-sided to benefit higher taxes and the entrenched interests. Frankly, many of the people working at those entities aren't journalists in the grand tradition; rather, they are "journalist in name only", or JINOs.

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 groups like the Buckeye Institute.

Under my leadership, the Buckeye Institute released ten major reports (and countless smaller pieces) on the big challenges facing Ohio. These reports covered collective 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 Buckeye Institute website that resulted in over 6,000,000 searches of the 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). Nearly 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 a labor union. 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 *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 the Buckeye Institute more than 20 times during my tenure. Moreover, actual events showed just how relevant our work was. Here are just three examples.

First, three weeks before anyone had heard of Bell, California, and its government compensation scandal, the July 2010 “The Grand Bargain” report highlighted the gross imbalance in compensation between Ohio state government workers and their private sector neighbors. “The Grand Bargain” report laid the intellectual and data foundation for the collective bargaining reforms contained in Senate Bill 5, as well as upcoming pension reforms.

Plus, with nearly 1,000,000 visitors from 552 Ohio cities doing over seven million searches of the various government salary tools, the idea that Ohioans don’t find government compensation information relevant is laughable on its face. In two separate editorials (“See for Yourself” on September 7, 2011, and “State Issue 2” on October 17, 2011) the *Dispatch*’s editorial board directed Ohioans to use the Buckeye Institute’s salary data tools to get the facts on government compensation costs.

As proof of the importance of “The Grand Bargain” report, a union-funded group out of Washington, D.C., did a report to serve as the counter-weight to our report. Unlike our report, that report received an enormous amount of coverage. Even more troubling, JINOs continually referred to the report as the “Rutgers Study” because the author was a professor at Rutgers University, which falsely gave the report the appearance of being the unbiased work of a top university. The report, along with cookie-cutter versions dropped in other states, was bought and paid for by a union-funded group and had no formal tie to Rutgers University. It would be like calling “The Grand Bargain” report a “Duquesne University” report because the authors work in the Economics Department at that university.

Regardless, the *Youngstown Vindicator* correctly noted in a September 4, 2011, editorial in the lead-up to the vote on Issue 2, “SB 5: It’s all about the money,” that “[t]here are two important studies that reflect the positions of the two sides. For the proponents, the Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions’ ‘The Grand Bargain is Dead’ has become the rallying cry.” This editorial represented the second time an editorial in the *Vindicator* had referred to the importance of “The Grand Bargain” report, the first being the April 3, 2011, editorial “Unions

and Dems will be tested” which detailed elements of the report. Even the *Plain Dealer*, in a “PolitiFact” column on February 21, 2011, analyzing a claim made by Governor Kasich on government compensation packages that relied upon “The Grand Bargain” report, had to conclude that Governor Kasich’s claim was “True.” The *Blade* also mentioned the report in a July 18, 2010, editorial “Voters can’t handle truth? Try us” and again in a November 3, 2010, editorial “Governor Kasich.”

An even more glaring omission occurred just three weeks before the election in a front-page story in the *Dispatch*. In a comprehensive thirty-eight paragraph article titled, “Public, private compensation in same ballpark,” the reporter commits two glaring mistakes. First, he quoted Aristotle Hutras, the director of the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC), as a neutral source in the battle of studies on the compensation differentials between government and private sector workers in Ohio. I know Aristotle. He is a good guy, but describing him as a neutral player is naïve or disingenuous.

Before retiring at the end of 2011, Aristotle spent the last 22 years at the ORSC and is a proud defender of the compensation system of state government. Prior to joining the ORSC, Aristotle worked closely for Democratic Speaker Riffe in the Ohio House. With his \$113,000 salary in 2011, Aristotle’s government pension in 2012 is estimated to be at least \$74,500, with a lifetime payout of roughly \$1.7 million (assuming he lives to age 78). Quoting a 33 year government worker whose pension income alone places him in the top 25 percent of all Ohioans as an unbiased source on whether his compensation is too high is absurd.

Second, the reporter went on to cite three studies that looked at the issue. Despite the widespread editorial coverage of “The Grand Bargain” report and my testimony about it at the Senate Bill 5 hearings, it did not make the list of reports covered by the reporter. Instead, he covered a similar report by Andrew Biggs and Jason Richwine that found that Ohio government workers received compensation packages that were 43 percent more lucrative than their private sector peers as the pro-Senate Bill 5 report and two anti-Senate Bill 5 reports (the “Rutgers Study” and a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee report that found government workers’ total compensation was less than their private sector peers).

Next, the October 2010 report, “Dipped in Gold: Upper-Management Police and Fire Retirees become Public-Service Millionaires,” exposed for the first time that the Deferred Retirement Option Plan for Ohio police and fire personnel was creating public service millionaires. The November 2011 report, “Hanging by a Thread,” detailed the dire fiscal conditions of the five government pensions. Together, the reports focused on one of the biggest issues requiring legislative action: government pension reform. With the over-the-top and

erroneous responses by the government pension plans, it is clear these reports were anything but irrelevant.

Despite the lack of news media, the *Dispatch* editorial board read the “Dipped in Gold” report. In its November 18, 2010, editorial “Drop the secrecy,” the *Dispatch* said, “The Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solutions has raised some important questions about a generous deferred-retirement plan available to police officers and firefighters through the Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund.” Its own reporters missed those important questions. The *Vindicator* referred to the “Hanging by a Thread” report in its December 18, 2011, editorial “Public Pensions in Free Fall.”

Finally, in November 2010, we released the “Smart on Crime: With Prison Costs on the Rise, Ohio Needs Better Policies for Protecting the Public” report. The “Smart on Crime” report focused on criminal justice reforms that looked beyond simply locking up more criminals and offered a menu of alternative solutions that cost less and improved recidivism rates. This report contributed to the passage of legislation six months later that adopted many of our recommendations. As with the other three reports noted above, the *Beacon Journal* mentioned the “Smart on Crime” report in its “Within reach of lame ducks” editorial on December 1, 2010.

If Ohioans read only the news sections of the Big Six newspapers, they would have never known that the Buckeye Institute issued ten data-driven, highly relevant reports in 2010 and 2011. Given the substantial editorial coverage of our work and the widespread interest of Ohioans in it, one has to ask why JINOs at the Big Six newspapers failed to cover these reports?

More recently, the Buckeye Institute finally got a hit. On March 28, 2012, it released the report, “Ohio Right-to-Work: How the Economic Freedom of Workers Enhances Prosperity,” which focused on the issue of workers having the right to choose whether to join a labor union. The “Ohio Right-to-Work” report received coverage in two (*Dispatch* and *Daily News*) of the Big Six newspapers. This coverage likely only occurred because (1) Ohioans for Workplace Freedom already had qualified ballot language to make Ohio a workplace freedom state, (2) the union-funded We Are Ohio had announced it would aggressively fight the initiative, and (3) Indiana passed a workplace freedom law in February 2012. The report served as additional fodder on an already contentious issue.

Because of the late release of the report as noted below, opponents were able to co-opt the coverage. Specifically, the lead author, Dr. Richard Vedder, did a similar report for Indiana in January 2011. In an effort to stop Indiana from adopting workplace freedom legislation, the union-funded Economic Policy Institute (EPI) released a report critical of Dr. Vedder’s Indiana report on January 3, 2012.



For example, the *Daily News* story cited the EPI report to refute the claims in the “Ohio Right-to-Work” report. Consistent with liberal JINO bias, the *Daily News* story included comments from three different groups criticizing the report, but no additional comments from other proponents of workplace freedom. The story also referred to the Buckeye Institute as “right-leaning,” but noted that EPI was “nonpartisan” and provided no qualifying description for Policy Matters Ohio (PMO), another left-wing policy group cited in the story.

In terms of the tardiness of the report, consistent with the philosophy during my tenure to set the debate in Ohio by producing reports on the big issues, I contracted with Dr. Vedder and his team to write the report back in January 2011—a full fourteen months before the report finally became public. The report, completed in May 2011, originally was supposed to be released in July 2011, but was delayed until November 2011. For troubling reasons not worth going into, the report, despite my best efforts, did not get released in July or November. Regardless of the timing of its release and the biased coverage it received, this important report now provides data for proponents of a workplace freedom law.

In total contrast, virtually every “report” released by the left-wing, union-funded groups Innovation Ohio, PMO, and EPI (producer of the “Rutgers study”) received substantial media coverage. In some cases, “reports” consisted of two to three page press releases with virtually no supporting data and lots of partisan opinion. In fact, virtually any group not on the right side of the ideological spectrum gets coverage of its reports (e.g., The Pew Center, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, The Brookings Institute, the Greater Ohio Policy Center, and The Center for Community Solutions). For example, the *Dispatch* gave a Brookings Institution report front page, below-the-fold treatment on May 20, 2012. A search of any of the six major newspaper websites will show this imbalance of coverage.

Another great example is the first report from Innovation Ohio titled, “Ohio Teachers and Collective Bargaining: An Analysis” that purported to show Ohio teachers had received large pay cuts between 2008 and 2009. Reporters at the *Dispatch*, *Plain Dealer*, and *Daily News* picked up the story on February 28, 2011. Within 24 hours of its public release, I published “A Short Response to the Innovation Ohio Report” that showed that the Innovation Ohio report was erroneous based on data from the Ohio Department of Education. Needless to say, the reporters who wrote the original story failed to cover my response, thereby leaving readers with a false view on teacher pay in Ohio.

Remember, according to statements made to reporters by former Governor Strickland in December 2010, Innovation Ohio was created specifically to counter the Buckeye Institute and the impact it was having. This policy disagreement provided the media with an excellent

opportunity to show these two foes at battle. Of course, that would have undermined the credibility of this new left-wing entity on its first day of business.

I don't begrudge those left-wing groups from the coverage they get. My concern is that our work 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 disadvantage when it comes to making informed decisions. Chapter 6 shows how this JINO failure impacted the outcome on Senate Bill 5.

### ***The Overlooked Bias of Weekly Newspapers***

Even more troubling for taxpayers should be the type of journalism practiced by some suburban newspapers. In suburban weeklies across the state, city managers and school superintendents are given weekly columns to promote their "accomplishments" and write property tax levy campaign propaganda masquerading as official business. Opponents of property tax levies, at best, are limited to writing 400 words or less op-eds or letters to the editor to push back against the weekly assault.

When the "news" stories from JINOs are added to the mix, taxpayers are hard-pressed to find a reason to vote against property tax levies. In the Central Ohio market, the *This Week* suburban newspaper is the case study on such reporting. *This Week* spends precious space week after week doing nothing more than reporting what the cities and school districts want it to report. Story after story contains not one shred of critical coverage or opposition viewpoints. Let me give you a few examples.

In the fall of 2010, the Washington Township Fire Department in northwest Central Ohio had a property tax levy on the ballot. Over the course of four straight weeks, a JINO wrote four front-page stories about the levy. Here are the stories with approximate word count and location on the front page noted:

- "WTFD's jobs extend beyond fires," 434 words, above the fold (October 7, 2010);
- "Fire levy would keep current services," 450 words, below the fold (October 14, 2010);
- "WTFD: Levy will maintain services, purchase equipment," 386 words, above the fold (October 21, 2010); and
- "Fire department asking for levy support," 564 words, below the fold, (October 28, 2010).

These four stories contained over 1,800 words in 66 paragraphs. Not once did the JINO present an opposing view on the property tax levy or ask a critical question. For example, with 70 percent or more of all calls being for non-fire related issues, has the district reanalyzed its staffing and equipment needs? Have employees taken compensation reductions to share the fiscal pain of their

neighbors? Week after week the JINO simply wrote pieces on the positives of passing a tax increase.

Here is a second example. In 2011, Dublin City Schools put a property tax levy and bond issue on the ballot that would have been the third tax hike in seven years (2004, 2008, and 2011) equating to a total tax increase on struggling homeowners of more than 70 percent. Again, the JINO's coverage looked more like she worked for Dublin City Schools than the reporting of a truly balanced reporter. In just one edition of *This Week*, the JINO managed to produce three front-page puff pieces on the levy:

- “Osborne: Without levy, deficit likely in 2013,” 430 words, above the fold (October 13, 2011);
- “Axner: Expect \$7.5M in cuts next fall if levy is rejected,” 480 words, above the fold (also on October 13, 2011); and
- “District: Levy is key to maintaining excellence,” 549 words, below the fold (also on October 13, 2011).

In a single edition of *This Week*, the JINO spent over 1,450 words presenting readers with an unequivocally one-sided view of the levy. She failed to find a single critic of the levy or report any answers to tough questions to either Superintendent David Axner or Treasurer Stephen Osborne about the levy.

The JINO's failure occurred despite a September 5, 2011, story in the *Dispatch*, *This Week*'s parent newspaper, highlighting the fact that Superintendent Axner's compensation package is 39 percent more than the next highest paid superintendent in Central Ohio. I was quoted in that story criticizing highly paid superintendents for failing to lead by example by reducing their compensation packages. Superintendent Axner listed the parade of horrors that will occur in the district if voters reject the levy, the JINO never reports information on if district-wide base compensation reductions, including for him, were on the table before cutting staff and/or programs or raising taxes again.

After all, personnel costs reflected the single biggest expense in the district. Yet, the district projected those costs to far outstrip inflation and continually go up—25 percent in just five years. This trend indicated a refusal to ask district employees to realign compensation package costs to reflect the already generous tax revenues Dublin residents provided it. In fact, according to the district's October 2010 five-year fiscal projection, in 2011, personnel costs totaled \$147,266,993, or 91 percent of all revenue for the year. A five percent total compensation cost reduction would yield the district the \$7.5 million it needed to reduce expenses.

Here are several pieces of information the JINO never reported to readers concerning Dublin City Schools:

- It has finished or is projected to finish the school year with a deficit in seven out of eight years from 2008 to 2015, including the years following the passage of the last levy in 2008;
- If the 2011 levy passed, school property taxes on Dublin homes would have gone up roughly 74 percent from 2004 to 2012;
- From 2001 to 2010, as inflation went up 24 percent, per pupil spending went up 51 percent from \$8,511 to \$12,881;
- From 2000 to 2011, Dublin's per pupil spending increased from the 72nd highest in Ohio to the 37th highest in Ohio;
- From 2001 to 2010, the average teacher salary jumped by 43 percent;
- The district projects personnel costs will swallow 112 percent of all revenue by 2015 unless a fourth levy is passed by that date;
- Unless the 2011 levy and a fourth levy are passed by 2015, the district will have a structural deficit of over \$56 million; and
- That all of these facts existed before the state budget cuts to local schools occurred in the spring of 2011.

No matter your views, voters certainly would have found that information useful as they mulled over the levy-bond request.

**[JINO Alert #3: Media outlets should request and report the data on the issues noted above as school districts and other government entities seek additional tax revenues.]**

Regardless of the city, few JINOs appear interested in doing any good old fashion investigative reporting. For example, in looking at the absentee data for Ohio's school districts according to the Ohio Department of Education, Dublin City Schools' teachers are absent 6.3 percent of the school year, or 11.58 days per teacher (over 100,000 hours a year). This rate is up 3.5 days per teacher since the 2000-2001 school year. With a median teacher salary of \$70,728, Dublin taxpayers are losing over \$4.1 million per year in teacher time, as well as the educational value of having those teachers in the classroom. With a \$20 per hour required substitute cost, taxpayers also must cover more than \$2 million in substitute teacher payments. Because Dublin teachers are contractually limited to 185 days, when the 11.58 absentee days are factored in to the equation and pay is pro rated to the 260-work day schedule of most workers, Dublin teachers make the equivalent of a median salary of \$106,000.

Statewide, the Ohio Department of Education data indicates that teachers are absent 9.1 days per school year. The lost time due to absences is over \$300 million per year. Assuming a \$20 per hour substitute cost, Ohio's school districts are spending nearly \$143 million per year to replace absent teachers. This analysis is not intended to say that teachers are not allowed to get sick. They are and, given the germs brought into the classroom by kids, will get sick. Absent time, however,

does not cover only when a teacher is sick. It covers when a teacher is out of the classroom. I am merely illustrating data that taxpayers may want to know as they are asked to approve a request for higher taxes.

**[JINO Alert #4: Media outlets should get this attendance and substitute cost data and inform readers about it.]**

The October 13, 2011 *This Week* looked like one of those annoying television ads for mattresses where pop-ups continually appear to ensure that the viewer has to be utterly brain-dead to not get that a big sale is going on. Specifically, the front page contained two big black and green blocks containing the phrase “A closer look.” Under each block, the paper describes an element of the story. For the story focused on Superintendent Axner’s comments, the description contained the emotional blackmail school districts use to scare voters into supporting levies. It read:

Superintendent David Axner said the district would have 25 students in kindergarten and first-grade classes, 27 students in grades 2 and 3, and 30 students in grades 4 and 5. In the middle and high schools, classes would carry a 30-1 student-to-teacher ratio, he said. Other areas facing potential cuts includes supplemental contracts, stipends, professional development, field trips, maintenance, reading support, educational options and busing.

Threatening bigger class sizes is the nuclear bomb of failed school district levy campaign cuts, so highlighting this cut would guarantee readers would “get the message.”

Not only is this reporting biased against taxpayers, but it also represents indirect financial support of school district levy campaigns. Without such one-sided reporting, levy proponents would have to expend campaign funds to get out their message. Opponents simply cannot compete with such a stacked deck. How are taxpayers expected to make informed decisions given the onslaught of pro-levy media coverage? The reporting failure on the part of JINOs virtually ensures that taxes will go up.

### ***Can't We All Just Get Along***

Here is one last example of the problem with Ohio’s news coverage. No matter where one turns, media pundits are always lamenting the divisiveness of politics in Ohio and in Washington today. These pundits constantly call for more bipartisanship. They yearn for the good ol’ days before term limits when things got done (conveniently ignoring the lack of term limits in Congress and its similar hyper-partisanship). The days when Governor Rhodes and Speaker Riffe

would cut deals to make things happen (or before term limits kicked in when Republicans totally controlled state government). Of course, given Ohio's systemically weak economy and high state and local tax burden, the benefit of getting things done didn't work out so well for taxpayers.

Some quick background.

After appearing on a radio program with John Begala, Executive Director of The Center for Community Solutions, a center-left group focused on health care issues, I reached out to John to start a dialogue because he came across as someone who might be interested in putting aside the sharp elbows and seeing if we could get something done together. John had been an elected Democratic state representative from Cleveland in the 1970s, but his June 2010 report "Thinking the Unthinkable: Finding Common Ground for Resolving Ohio's Fiscal Crisis" had some non-liberal ideas in it.

Over the course of time, John and I came up with tax expenditure reforms that we both could agree on. Tax expenditures are tax benefits such as a tax credit given to a specific group that reduces the tax burden for members of that group. The reforms consisted of three elements: (1) eliminate roughly \$300 million in specific tax expenditures, (2) enact a sunset review of all tax expenditures to ensure each expenditure still made sense and require reauthorization after each review, and (3) appoint a nonpartisan committee to review Ohio's state and local tax system and make recommendations to improve it. We asked a third group, the center-left Greater Ohio Policy Center, to join us on seeking legislative support for those reforms.

Our nonpartisan effort received support in many editorials. Specifically, the following editorials from five of the Big Six newspapers cited our work:

- *Plain Dealer*, "When 3 think tanks with quite different outlooks agree on a list of tax loopholes to close, Ohio's leaders should listen" (May 21, 2011)
- *Beacon Journal*, "Ready for scrutiny" (May 22, 2011)
- *Blade*, "Close tax loopholes" (May 29, 2011)
- *Daily News*, "Tax breaks not free; they put drain on budget" (June 9, 2011)
- *Dispatch*, "Ripe for Review" (June 10, 2011)
- *Dispatch*, "Short Takes" (September 24, 2011)
- *Plain Dealer*, "Cheers & Jeers" (December 1, 2011)

With such near unanimous support from the editorial pages, it became harder for elected officials to ignore this nonpartisan effort, and an effort is currently underway to institute many of our ideas.

In the process of our discussions, we decided to join forces for a big ideas conference that would explore the major issues facing Ohio with top-notch experts from across the political spectrum. We wanted to demonstrate that ideological opponents could sit down and find areas of common ground. Doing so doesn't require putting aside your principles, it just means finding the

overlapping part of the Venn diagram (those diagrams with two overlapping circles) where agreement is possible.

On December 8, 2011, we brought in nationally recognized experts from across the United States to speak on government consolidation, health care, government pensions, taxes, and constitutional changes to Ohio's 1851 Constitution. All of these issues are expected to be top agenda items in 2012 and 2013. Over 300 people attended the event just a block from the Statehouse where many reporters and, of course, elected legislators spend their days.

The event included a lunchtime debate between two of the world's top economists, Drs. Alice Rivlin and Arthur Laffer. Dr. Rivlin served as the first director of the Congressional Budget Office, as the Budget Director for President Bill Clinton, and as a Member of the National Debt Commission. Dr. Laffer is the father of supply-side economics and the Laffer Curve. Both Drs. Rivlin and Laffer have advised many presidents, prime ministers, and other world leaders over the last forty years. Their presence on the same stage anywhere, let alone in Ohio, was unprecedented.

Other than a short blog piece on the *Enquirer* website, the event and, more specifically, the Rivlin-Laffer Debate received no print news media attention. Zero. Zip. Zilch. I do have to give special kudos to the team at WCMH-NBC4 and evening anchor Colleen Marshall, who moderated the debate and spent most of the day at the event, as well as Karen Kasler, Statehouse Bureau Chief of Ohio Public Radio & Television. Not even the *Dispatch*, which sponsored the event, provided coverage of it. Both Ms. Marshall and Ms. Kasler felt the event was important enough to cover. In fact, based on attendance records, other than Ms. Marshall and Ms. Kasler, despite at least six weeks notice, only one reporter and just a handful of legislators even took the time to attend the event. Had Drs. Rivlin and Laffer done this event in New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, or Los Angeles, you can guarantee that it would have received significant media coverage.

The only conclusion I can take away from the lack of media coverage of this nationally unique event is that, despite the call for unity, JINOs and Ohio's political pundits find conflict much more newsworthy. In economic terms, if you reward conflict, you'll get more of it. Perhaps JINOs contribute to the political dysfunction in America and in Ohio due to what they choose to cover and not to cover.

Without a doubt, the failure of the local media in Ohio to fairly cover important issues places taxpayers at an enormous disadvantage. It's one of the reasons Ohio's taxpayers don't stand a chance.