ALL EYES ON OHIO: EXPERTS FROM CASE EXPLAIN WHY WINNING THE BUCKEYE STATE IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Ohioans Have Voted For the Winner of Every Presidential Election Since 1964

CLEVELAND—This presidential election, the most closely divided states are in the Midwest, and experts agree Ohio is in the center of the political spectrum. Americans witnessed Ohio’s Democratic delegates cast the deciding votes that officially made Senator John Kerry the party’s nominee last week. Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland is also hosting The Race at Case, the only vice presidential debate of the 2004 election.

Ohio has long been known as a political bellwether state for a number of reasons. It can be classified as neither urban nor rural, with 27 counties with populations over 100,000 and nearly two million residents involved in the agricultural industry. The state, like so many others, has been impacted by the country’s recent economic downturn and a shift away from the manufacturing industry and the jobs that sustain it. Ohioans have had to develop new skills to remain competitive in the workforce. Issues of great interest to Ohioans typically mirror the rest of the country. For example, given the importance of the youth vote in this election, higher education will continue to be a hot issue in the state.

Political experts believe Ohio is a microcosm of the country, and that the candidate who wins Ohio’s 20 Electoral votes on November 2nd may benefit from a domino effect in the remaining Midwest battleground states. “Winning Ohio is especially important to Bush,” said Joe White, Chairman of the Political Science Department, Luxenberg Family Professor of Public Policy, and Director of the Center for Policy Studies at Case. “But Ohio is just as important to Kerry, because even if he wins the states that Gore carried, he needs to break into Bush’s Electoral College total from 2000.”
Both Republican and Democratic campaign strategists believe the state is a critical part of their electoral strategy. No Republican has ever won the presidency without Ohio, and only two Democrats have done so since 1900, Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944 and John F. Kennedy in 1960. In the past six months, President George W. Bush has visited Ohio six times, and Kerry has made a dozen trips to the Buckeye State. Both candidates visited Ohio just last weekend. The Commission on Presidential Debates selected Cleveland’s Case Western Reserve University as the site of the only 2004 vice presidential debate, which will be held on October 5th.

Historically, presidential campaigns haven’t had a strong presence in Ohio until after the political conventions, but this year, the campaigns are targeting Ohio earlier than usual. To date, President Bush has sent over 50,000 volunteers to the state he won by only 3.6 percentage points in 2000. A recent study shows that four out of five top media markets targeted by the presidential campaigns are in Ohio. Candidates are buying more media ads in Ohio than any other state in the country with the exception of Florida.

Case Associate Political Science Professor Alexander P. Lamis says through the years, Ohio has shifted political gears dramatically. In the late 1980s, the top office holders were primarily Democrats. But as recent as the 2000 presidential race, Al Gore stopped campaigning in the state due to lack of support just days before the election. “Ohio is a competitive two-party state at the presidential level, despite the fact that the top office holders are all Republicans in the state today, and have been for more than a decade,” said Lamis.

Ohio Fast Facts:

- Since first casting a ballot for president in 1804, Ohioans have voted with the winning candidate 82% of the time
- On Oct. 28, 1980, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan participated in a presidential debate in Cleveland; this year’s Vice Presidential candidates will take center stage in a debate at Cleveland’s Case Western Reserve University on October 5th
- President George W. Bush won the state of Ohio by 3.6% in 2000
- The population of Ohio is 11,435,798

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Case is among the nation’s leading research institutions. Founded in 1826 and shaped by the unique merger of the Case Institute of Technology and Western Reserve University, Case is distinguished by its strengths in education, research, service, and experiential learning. Located in Cleveland, Case offers nationally recognized programs in the Arts and Sciences, Dental Medicine, Engineering, Law, Management, Medicine, Nursing, and Social Sciences. The Commission on Presidential Debates selected Case to host the U.S. vice presidential debate on October 5, 2004. www.case.edu