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### Sherrod Brown: Fighting for You

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**To:** Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH)  
**From:** Daniel Cohen, Luke Tonat and Drew Maakestad  
**Re:** Campaign Communications Proposal  
**Date:** 4/3/12

### **About the Race**

Our campaign candidate is Sherrod Brown, a United States Senator from Ohio and a member of the Democratic Party. The incumbent in the race, Brown currently holds a 10 point advantage in the most recent polling against his challenger, Republican Treasurer Josh Mandel (Quinnipiac 2012).

Brown has been representing the people of Ohio for nearly 40 years, having previously served in the Ohio House, as the Ohio Secretary of State and the U.S. House before being elected Senator in the 2006 election (Sherrod Brown).

While in the Senate, Brown has been looked at as one of the more progressive members of the Senate. In a study by the National Journal on he was ranked as the 5<sup>th</sup> most liberal in the Senate, scoring an 85.5 out of 100 on that scale (National Journal 2012). He has been a strong supporter of progressive policies, especially those that provide a social safety net such as Medicare and Social Security. In addition he aggressively worked on the Affordable Health Care Act which passed in 2010 and supported President Obama's economic policies.

An issue that is sure to play a major factor in his re-election is the state of the economy. The Ohio economy is facing slow and uncertain economic recovery. During the economic recession, Ohio was hit particularly hard. The manufacturing rich economy lost more than 400,000 jobs over the span of four years. However, the economy has started to recover. 450,000 jobs that were created last year. The unemployment rate dropped from 8.6% in September to 7.6% in February (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). Despite this improvement, the economy has a long way to go to get to its pre-recession level of productivity and is sure to be a major factor in this race. The fact that one of Senator Brown's main focus' has been fixing the economy and creating more jobs needs to be emphasized.

The challenger in this race is Josh Mandel, a two term member of the Ohio House of Representatives, Iraq veteran and the current Treasurer of the State of Ohio . He took office in January of 2011 after having won 80 of Ohio's 88 counties (Josh Mandel). Despite promising that he would serve his full four year term, Mandel formed a campaign committee for his Senate run only 3 months removed from taking office (Guillen 2011).

The state of Ohio is the definition of a swing-state. The state has correctly picked the winner in the last 11 presidential elections, often by the slimmest of margins. The state currently has a republican in nearly every elected statewide office, after the 2010 election where the Democrats lost statewide, including the Governor's race. The economy of Ohio is based on a combination of agricultural and manufacturing jobs, with many of the manufacturing jobs of the high tech or green. Because of this, the recession and energy are two major issues in any race within the state.

In general this race is a fairly typical one. A popular incumbent is running in a state where he has improved things, against an unknown, if well funded, challenger. A positive

campaign can be run, focusing on the key demographics that helped to elect Senator Brown in the first place: If this is done, middle class voters should be able to return him to the Senate. A negative campaign would not be advantageous at this point in time. While Josh Mandel has little experience or legislative record, a point, which can and should be emphasized, going too negative is not necessary, and would likely hurt Brown's strong approval numbers. Negative campaigns can be very effective in certain situations, especially when both candidates are unpopular. However, in this race, between a popular incumbent and an unknown challenger, it is not appropriate to go negative. He should be able to stay above the fray and focus on his legislative accomplishments and vision for Ohio.

Both of the candidates appear to be very well funded, as the race is seen by both parties as a close race with major national implications. Republicans view it as a race, that if won, could potentially give them a majority in the Senate. Democrats view it in a similar manner, as a seat that they should be able to successfully defend. Senator Brown has raised more than \$10.4 million since he took office in 2007 and currently has \$5.2 million in cash on hand. A majority of this money (63%) has been raised from sources within the state. In contrast Mandel has raised \$4.1 million towards his campaign, in a much shorter time period with half of that number coming from out of state contributions (Gannett 2012). This race is sure to be a focal point of the 2012 elections and could be seen as a referendum on the parties as a whole. As such, there is likely to be a large amount of outside money flowing into the state on both sides of the race.

### **Broad Strategies**

As a popular incumbent, Brown's campaign should focus on a positive campaign emphasizing both his positive personality traits and his accomplishments in office. The combination of these two things should lead to victory in November.

Character traits are very influential in voter choice and are important in this race, especially for Senator Brown. In Senate races, trait evaluations of incumbents is more important than that of challengers, due to the focus of the race likely to be based on the effectiveness of the incumbent (Kim and Kenney 2011, 72). For an incumbent the most important trait to be able to possess and display is leadership, followed by the traits of honesty and caring (Kim and Kenney 2011, 70).

Because of this, we advise Senator Brown to focus on a number of things. The first is his legislative achievements. The achievements show his leadership skills, and effectiveness at providing for his constituents. This is particularly effective against Mandel who has next to no legislative record to run on. Brown must also show that he is caring, both by showing that he understands the concerns of the people in terms of the economy and the damage that the recession has done to Ohio's working families and by emphasizing the welfare parts of his agenda in terms of Medicare, Social Security and the Affordable Health Care Act.

Reinforcing these issues that are positive to Senator Brown should be the major focus of the campaign. By focusing on these particular issue individuals will begin to associate the campaign itself with these issues. This effect known as "priming the vote" allows for a campaign

to dramatically influence what issues voters were interested in. In a study by Druckman, it was found that campaigns “prime exposed and attentive voters to base their decisions on the issues and images emphasized in the campaign” (Druckman 2004, 578). As such, an issue based campaign allows for Brown to be defined by these positive issues rather than by his opponent, who will no doubt attack his record.

Brown was a key part of the economic recovery that has helped to add jobs, voting for bills such as the government stimulus (Sherrod Brown) While the government stimulus has a negative connotation, he should emphasize that under a Democratic controlled Senate and White House, there has been a steep economic recovery compared to where the country was when George W. Bush left office. By focusing on the stimulus, and specifically jobs that he has helped to create, the campaign can focus on Brown’s ability to help Ohioans get back to work. Brown has always had a populist based manufacturing message and this would easily tie into that theme. Ohio has improved over the past 4 years, and the campaign should emphasize that he played a major part in that. Emphasis should be placed on how the economic crisis hurt Ohioans and the recovery has occurred.

Though it is a highly controversial law, Brown should fight back attacks on his vote on the Affordable Health Care Act by emphasizing the positive attributes of it. He should talk about how people with pre-existing conditions can now receive health insurance and how it prevents “insurers from discriminating against Americans with diabetes and other pre-existing conditions, end arbitrary caps on annual and lifetime coverage, and enable parents to continue to cover their children through age 26, providing young people needed health protection as they look for work that offers employer-sponsored coverage”(Sherrod Brown) The campaign should emphasize that despite the negative attacks, in the long run, the plan would actually cut the deficit by over a trillion dollars over the next two decades (Sherrod Brown). The best way to counter-act an offensive is to emphasize why that initial attack is incorrect. When politicians try to disconnect themselves from their record, they look weak and insincere. This issue could easily be turned around in his favor by empathizing the good it has done. This could be done in an even greater way if stories could be used about individuals specifically in Ohio.

The campaign should also focus on alternative energies. While in office, Senator Brown has worked towards creating alternative energies that remove our dependence on foreign oil. This could be an important issue in Ohio with the cost of gas on the rise. Under Sherrod Brown Ohio has “led the country in the number of clean energy jobs created by the Recovery Act during the first reporting period”. One such example was the POWERED (Program for Offshore Wind Energy Research Development) Act of 2010. The act “spurs research on potential offshore wind projects, expand incentives for offshore wind development, and require the Department of Energy (DOE) to develop a comprehensive road map for the deployment of offshore wind” (Sherrod Brown). This and other initiatives by Sherrod Brown have worked to emphasize innovation in the private sector, spurring the economy and working to end our dependence on foreign oil. By focusing these efforts around manufacturing, specifically within the auto industry and their efforts to make more fuel efficient cars, he can attract both the blue-collar worker demographic, and those who are interested in foreign policy.

By focusing on these issues that are positive towards the Senator, they can make them the focal point of the campaign. Some of these issues, such as the economy, are likely to be brought

up by both sides. However, research has shown that if a candidate is able to make an issue their own, they can link it to that candidate in the mind of the voter (Petrocik 1996). This “issue ownership is when “a candidate successfully frames the vote choice as a decision to be made in terms of problems facing the country that he is better able to 'handle' than his opponent. (Petrocik 1996, 826) For instance, if Senator Brown can make a convincing argument that his policies have helped the economy, than that issue will always be associated with him. Josh Mandel, having only held statewide office for a little over a year, has little legislative background to use to emphasize his record on the economy. This should enable Sherrod Brown to run on this issue.

We intend to run a campaign that fully integrates new types of media. According to Auer “social media are used now, and likely in the future to mediate public understanding of important events, trends and decisions”(2011, 730). This type of media can be key to mobilizing and educating voters. In their study of the 2008 election, Kushin and Yamamoto found that while traditional internet sources played the most significant role in the election, new media has the potential to shape political participation on the part of young adults. As they state “it enables various forms of interaction with fellow citizens and political actors that were not possible prior to its growth...its open and collaborative nature can lower the barriers of entry into politics particularly for less politically sophisticated groups” (Kushin and Yamamoto 2010, 625). This form of media can help to tap into groups that are not normally represented.

Other new techniques can be used as well. Because of the increase in use of cell phones over landlines, especially in the younger generations, text messages can be used to mobilize voters in new ways. Old forms of communication such as direct mail or telephone calls are simply not as relevant to this generation. Using text messages simply as a reminder to go out and vote led to a significant 3% increase in voter turnout. (Dale and Strauss 2009, 787). We propose to go a step farther and actively campaign and connect through the use of text messages. This will enable younger generations to be actively involved in the campaign.

### **Targeted and Specific Strategies**

Reaching and connecting with those most affected by the recession is key to a victory in November. Sherrod Brown is a popular incumbent Senator in a state that faces large economic challenges in an election defined by the economy. Therefore, by evoking the attributes that make Brown popular, such as his intelligence, charisma and ability to connect with the electorate, and carefully coupling it with economic progress, our strategy can only increase Sherrod Brown’s standing among working and middle class voters. In this section of our Campaign Communication Plan, we will describe what we plan to do, explain why it is essential to victory, and how we will carry it out.

We believe that the production of a television advertisement, aired statewide, is the most effective medium to convey our message to the electorate. In using such a broad medium, we will be casting a wide net, that will reach a great number of citizens, whether they are politically active supporters, or potential first time voters who have been hit hard by the recession, and does not know where to turn in the present storm of heated rhetoric, and mixed messages. It is this second voter that we wish to appeal to with a positive, homegrown message, displaying Senator Brown’s personal and professional strengths, and how he, a fellow native Ohioan, has already put his home state, and this country, on the road to recovery. In doing this, our advertisement

will be overwhelmingly positive, but for reasons of political necessity will include a short segment connecting our opponent, Josh Mandel, to the perpetrators of conservative overreach that have harmed the economic recovery that is so vital to Ohio.

Having described what we wish to accomplish with our targeted advertisement strategies, it is critical to understand *why* they are the most prudent and appropriate. Television, as previously mentioned, is an extremely effective means of reaching a large amount of people. In reaching such a large share of the population, our message can both rally supporters, and, more importantly, has a much greater probability of being seen by the voters we have chosen to target. To increase these effects, we will also post our advertisement on the Senator's website, and other online video providers, such as YouTube. Although a 2010 study found that videos posted to YouTube during the 2006 or 2008 elections did not have a significant effect on the races, but did act as a repository where political ads could be viewed multiple times. In this way the author classified YouTube as an extension of old media techniques, rather than new ones (Klotz 2010, 121-122). However, we still feel that it is a valuable in spreading our candidates message.

In a recent national poll, 82% of likely voters label the economy "very important", 20% more than the second most "very important" issue (Rasmussen 2012). To be successful, our campaign will have to couple a strong political message on the strides being made within the economy while demonstrating Senator Brown's engagement with the electorate, and commitment to restoring jobs in Ohio.

To this end, we have a couple of innovative strategies. The first is that we will create an interactive map displaying all new manufacturing plants, infrastructure projects and alternative energy establishments to be posted on the Senator's reelection website. This will emphasize his commitment to these types of jobs. Additionally, the website will also include a comprehensive page listing local job fairs and community education opportunities. It has become clear that in a state that has been affected as severely by the recession as Ohio, the winner will be the candidate who can seize issue ownership over the economy. This is an excellent opportunity for Senator Brown, as he has a proven job creating record, and is successfully helping Ohio create more new jobs, as well as win back critical manufacturing jobs that it had lost in the last twenty years. Because of the salience of the issue, the large segment of citizens that will determine who they will vote for because of it, and our confidence in Sherrod Brown's economic record, we believe that it is the perfect narrative to establish.

The tone of our advertisement will be as important as its medium or message. Both candidates, Brown and Mandel, are personally likable and satisfy their respective bases. There is little need to apply a strategy based on negative advertisements and personal attacks, especially due to Senator Brown's initial electoral advantage. With a lead, there is little reason to come out with personal attack ads, which would give the lesser known, Josh Mandel, free airtime, while also possibly alienating voters. There is much debate about whether or not negative advertising can produce significant political backlash. Luckily, Senator Brown is in a position of strength, and won't need to initiate personal attacks. We do, though, anticipate a fair amount of negativity from the other side, because as Goldstein and Freedman found in the 1996 election with Bob Dole, underdogs are in a position where attacking the favorite is a political necessity (Goldstein and Freedman 2002, 729). Negative advertisements give less popular candidates the opportunity to force more favorable issues into focus, and also breeds fear, which could prevent potentially

open-minded members of their own party, or independents, from voting for the frontrunner. In the Dulio, Nelson and Thurber book, Crowded Airways: Campaign Advertising in Elections, they examine a dead heat race between two congressional candidates in Iowa. During the last month of the campaign, one candidate airs three directly negative advertisements, while the other varies his, never dedicating an ad to a purely negative advertisement but instead contrasting positions, and explaining why he is more qualified to represent his constituents in Congress (Dulio, Nelson and Thurber 2000 I-III). We aim to follow a similar strategy, relying on contrast advertisements and counter arguments to keep the focus on the issues. As a campaign, we will not fail to respond to misleading and incorrect negative advertisements, but refuse take it to the personal level, as it would detract from the campaign's premiere issue, the economy, where we feel that we hold the political high ground. To maintain our advantage while holding Mandel accountable for political positions that are detrimental to the economic recovery of both Ohio and the nation, we will outline many of the positions, such as supporting Senate Bill 5, cutting back on Medicare and giving tax breaks to the nation's richest 1%, that Mandel shares with unpopular Ohio Republicans, such as Speaker of the House John Boehner, Governor Kasich, and State GOP Chairman Kevin DeWine.

With all things considered, Cohen, Maakestad and Tonat Strategies advises that our first advertisement should be set to the backdrop of Honda's under construction Acura NSX factory located in Brown's hometown of Mansfield, Ohio. When Brown was growing up in the central Ohio town, it was bustling and booming with manufacturing jobs, but in recent years, as Republican administrations have encouraged tax incentives for companies to move their plants overseas, Mansfield, and Ohio, have suffered. We will display a picture of the Senator wearing a hard hat to symbolize the hard work that he and the Obama administration have done to bring manufacturing jobs back to the region, and will begin to talk about Senator Brown's successful record on jobs, and highlight the economic progress that Ohio has been making, highlighting the reduction of unemployment in the nation as well as in Ohio, bringing back old jobs, and creating new ones. We will also make an appeal to unions, who were targeted by Ohio Republicans, connecting Chairman DeWine, Speaker Boehner and the unpopular Governor Kasich with his treasurer, and Brown's opponent, Josh Mandel. This will be done in a tasteful manner, voicing Brown's support for protecting organized labor from overreach by Republicans, such as Governor Kasich (photo), and his allies (photo of Josh Mandel front and center, and other state Republicans). It is of great importance that we also discuss Senator Brown's roots in Ohio, stating with civic pride that Senator Brown has been a proud Ohioan his whole life, and that Ohio needs a man who knows how to help get America, and communities like his very own Mansfield, back on its feet. As your Senator, Sherrod Brown will continue to fight for the people of Ohio, and keep this great country on the right track

Essentially, This election hinges on Senator Brown's ability to capitalize on his homegrown connection with Ohio voters and his command of the most salient issue, the state and improvement of the economy. We believe that by addressing these issues in front of one of the many manifestations of his and the President's successful efforts towards economic progress, Senator Brown will be able to accomplish this.

## Other Considerations

Sherrod Brown is a member of the Democratic Party and as such will likely speak and campaign on the values that the party as a whole, hold. His interest in strengthening the economy and bringing up manufacturing jobs are both large-scale issues that he is passionate about and has been working vigorously to restore. He is also reaching out to labor unions and companies interested in alternative energy based innovation, both areas that are more likely to be liberal. Because our candidate is a Democrat that much of the campaign will be based on establishing his base. Bartels examines the impact of long-term partisan loyalties, based on the position that Democrats and Republicans tend to differ on in terms of major policy issues. His study proved his hypothesis that once voters are loyal to one party they very rarely cross over (Bartels 2002, 118). Because of this, it would be to Senator Brown's advantage to focus on moderate and liberal voters, rather than trying to attract voters from across party lines. On the other hand, the fact that Mandel is a Republican is likely to negatively influence him. The major Republicans in the state are very unpopular and which will diminish their ability to positively influence the race in his favor.

The incumbency advantage and the age difference between Brown and Mandel could also play a large part in the potential success of this election. Brown is the incumbent candidate with decades of experience in politics. Mandel is also a much younger candidate who is very much an unknown in many ways. This incumbency gives Brown an advantage in many ways. Kahn stated that incumbents have an advantage in the campaigns. Incumbents are often viewed as knowledgeable and experienced, while challengers are seen as ambitious and less electable. (Kahn 1993, 718). These factors, combined with his age and lack of experience in comparison to Brown, make it likely that Mandel will be seen as young and power hungry. The fact that he declared for office nearly immediately after winning his previous one, does nothing to help this perception. These disadvantages toward Mandel may not be deal breakers, but they could also prove to be helpful in defense of Brown. According to Ashworth and Mesquita, the incumbency advantage is true for two reasons: high-ability candidates are more likely to win elections and high-quality incumbents deter challengers (2008, 5). In addition, National Bureau of Economic Research found that since 1994 incumbent U.S. senators running for reelection have won almost 80% of the time (Gowrisankaran, Mitchell and Moro 2004) give three reasons why incumbents win so often: selection, tenure and challenger quality. As a young challenger, it is hard to compete against someone who is not only an incumbent but has years of political experience.

We shall seek a variety endorsements during this campaign. A study by Druckman and Parkin found that endorsements by a newspaper can have a significant impact on the political campaign (2005, 1030). By actively seeking the endorsement of these papers, both in small towns and in the major population centers of Ohio, we should be able to gain an advantage over Mandel.

The fact that Brown was born in an area of rural Ohio, Masfield will also play to our advantage. Voters in rural areas are less likely to vote than those who do not. However, it is these types of voters, those who are unlikely to cast a ballot, who are the easiest to mobilize (Jones et al. 2008). Jones et al state that these people are the “most likely to be mobilized by campaign communication as direct mail, in-person canvassing, and telephone calls” (2008, 111). By using our vast campaign resources we can work to mobilize this largely untapped voting bloc.

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