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Vance's 'I don't really care' comments and U.S. foreign policy

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You might not know it from the Tim Ryan (Democrat)-J.D. Vance (Republican) race for one of Ohio's Senate seats, but senators have key responsibilities for American foreign policy.

That's especially worth recalling today, anniversary of 2001's terror attacks on America, crimes that sparked the Global War on Terrorism, which has cost an estimated \$8 trillion and caused an estimated 900,000 deaths worldwide, Brown University's Cost of War Project reports.

Meanwhile, "some 750 American military facilities remain open in 80 nations and territories around the world. No other country in human history has had such a dominant presence," according to the Libertarian-leaning Cato Institute.

And that peace dividend that was supposed to flow from 1989's fall of the Berlin Wall? It never reached Ohio. In 1989, per capita person income in Ohio was 94.79% of the national figure; in 2021, Ohio's percentage had fallen to 89.03%.

The Senate, not the House, must ratify treaties between the United States and other countries. Senators must also approve the appointment of U.S. ambassadors. And the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is a check-and-balance on presidents.

So far, the Vance-Ryan race's one memorable foreign policy statement came from Republican Vance, a Butler County native and Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq.

Vance said, on Donald Trump acolyte Steve Bannon's "War Room" program, "I gotta be honest with you, I don't really care what happens to Ukraine one way or another. I do care about the fact that in my community right now the leading cause of death among 18-(to)-45-year-olds is Mexican fentanyl that's coming across the southern border ... I'm sick of Joe Biden focusing on the border of a country I don't care about while he lets the border of his own country become a total war zone."

That statement was politically perilous in Ohio, a state which has a significant number of Ukrainian-American citizens and hundreds of thousands of other voters also passionate about helping Ukraine defend itself against Russia.

Still, drugs do plague Ohio. The Health Department reports, “Fentanyl was involved in 81% of (Ohio) overdose deaths in 2020, often in combination with other drugs. That percentage was up from 76% in 2019, 73% in 2018, and 71% in 2017.”

And Vance’s Butler County ranked 8th among Ohio’s 88 counties in the rate of unintentional drug overdose deaths from 2011 to 2020, outpacing far more populous Hamilton (19th), Cuyahoga (30th) and Franklin (32nd) counties.

Still, Ryan and others have said Our Ohio Renewal, a nonprofit Vance founded in part to fight addiction, was actually a Vance self-promotion.

Ryan, age 49, the Democratic senatorial nominee, of suburban Warren, has been in the U.S. House for almost 20 years. Ryan earned a bachelor’s degree at Bowling Green State University and a law degree at what’s now the University of New Hampshire’s Franklin Pierce School of Law.

(James David) Vance, age 38, is a Middletown native with Kentucky roots, who now lives in Cincinnati. He earned a bachelor’s degree at Ohio State after his Marine Corps service, then a Yale law degree. He’s an entrepreneur with links to high-tech billionaire Peter Thiel.

Vance wrote the best-selling 2016 book, “Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis,” about America’s Appalachian underclass by one of its members. “Hillbilly Elegy” is often considered an examination of why many low-income, white voters flock to such GOP candidates as Trump. (To this reader, Vance’s book is as much or more about the power of his “Mamaw’s” – grandmother’s – love in raising him.)

Among Ohio senators who helped shape American’s foreign policy have been Republican Robert A. Taft; Democrat John Glenn; and retiring GOP incumbent Rob Portman, of suburban Cincinnati’s Terrace Park, whose seat Ryan and Vance seek.

Before Nov. 8, Ohioans will hear plenty from Ryan and Vance, much of it, maybe most, about hot-button social issues. But in a country at war more or less continuously since Pearl Harbor, what Ohioans haven’t yet heard, and need to, whether their new senator – in overseeing foreign relations – will or won’t aim to reset America’s compass.