

# On trade, senators are worlds apart

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They come from the same state. They were educated at elite Ivy League universities. They were elected to the U.S. Senate by many of the same voters.

Yet when it comes to international trade -one of the more potent issues in Ohio -Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown and Republican Sen. Rob Portman are from different worlds.

To Brown, international trade pacts such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and permanent normal trade relations with China have been death to the Ohio economy.

As a congressman in 2004, Brown wrote a book, *The Myths of Free Trade: Why American Trade Policy Has Failed*. When he speaks, Brown makes clear his belief that trade pacts have left a legacy of shattered lives and rusty, closed factories across Ohio.

To Portman, who served for a year as U.S. trade representative under President George W. Bush, trade agreements produce tens of thousands of high-paying jobs. Since his election last year to the U.S. Senate, he has been pressing for congressional approval of trade pacts with Panama, Colombia and South Korea.

One thing is certain: One of them is wrong.

The differences between Brown and Portman were in sharp focus last week after Brown circulated a letter signed by 40 other Senate Democrats. The letter asserted that before taking up the South Korea, Panama and Colombia pacts, Congress would have to provide financial assistance to workers who lose their jobs because of trade.

The letter itself wasn't anything startling. After all, it mirrored a request by President Barack Obama. And extending assistance to workers under what is called Trade Adjustment Assistance is all but certain to pass. But most of the lawmakers who signed - including Brown - are expected to oppose the three trade pacts.

Portman backs extension of Trade Adjustment Assistance. But he warned that "continued work" on it should "not derail the thousands of new jobs we badly need that will come from the passage of these three agreements to increase exports."

So who is right?

If you look at job loss in Ohio, then you are likely to believe Brown is right. According to the state government, Ohio shed 418,000 manufacturing jobs between 2000 and 2010. International competition was certainly one factor, combined with two recessions in the decade.

"Those aren't all trade related," said Zach Schiller, research director for Policy Matters, a Cleveland nonpartisan organization linked to organized labor. "But it's enough of a sizable fraction to be concerned about it."

Yet there are mounds of statistics that suggest Portman is right. According to the Ohio Department of Development, Ohio companies exported \$41.4 billion worth of goods in 2010 - a 21.5 percent increase from 2009, when the economy was battered by recession.

Ohio is mirroring the rest of the nation. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, in the first three months of this year, exports of goods and services by American companies increased by nearly 15 percent compared with the first quarter of last year.

"Trade has borne a pretty large brunt of the blame for manufacturing-job loss in the Midwest, when I would attribute it to other things," said Daniel J. Iksenson, a trade analyst at the Cato Institute, a free-market, nonprofit organization in Washington. "U.S. manufacturing is doing quite well. It just doesn't employ the number of people it used to."

Both Brown and Portman only marginally try to fudge their positions. Brown's staff likes to point out that he is a member of Obama's export council. And Portman's staff can produce volumes of examples of his calling for China to modify its currency to make it easier for U.S. companies to sell their goods there.

But don't kid yourself. When it comes to trade agreements, Portman will vote yes, and Brown will vote no.

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