

Democrats force antiwar candidate out of Ohio Senate race

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Iraq war veteran and antiwar activist Paul Hackett withdrew from the US Senate race in Ohio February 14, after his campaign for the Democratic Party nomination was sabotaged by the top national Democratic leaders, including Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid and Senator Charles Schumer of New York, chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

The incident makes clear the determination of the Democratic Party congressional leadership to prevent the 2006 elections from becoming a referendum on the war in Iraq. The Ohio candidate preferred by Reid and Schumer, Congressman Sherrod Brown of Akron, is liberal on social policy but not identified with the widespread public opposition to the Iraq war.

Ohio, which gave Bush his margin in the Electoral College in the 2004 presidential campaign, has several key races this fall. Senator Michael DeWine is widely viewed as one of the most vulnerable Republican incumbents, and Democrats are favored to take back the governorship in the wake of corruption scandals in the administration of Republican Governor Robert Taft.

Hackett, a Cincinnati attorney who served in Iraq in the Marine Corps reserves, came to prominence last summer when he nearly won a by-election in a heavily Republican congressional district, running a vociferously antiwar and anti-Bush campaign. After his narrow 52-48 percent loss, he jumped into the race for the Senate nomination with the same message.

In his withdrawal announcement, Hackett bitterly denounced Reid, Schumer and other leading Democrats who initially welcomed his entry into the Senate campaign last year, then shifted to Brown when DeWine began to appear vulnerable in the polls. Hackett said the Senate leaders had made calls to potential donors discouraging them from contributing to his campaign, with the result that Brown had a huge

financial advantage in the primary campaign.

“I made this decision reluctantly, only after repeated requests from party leaders, as well as behind-the-scenes machinations, that were intended to hurt my campaign,” Hackett said in a statement. “My donor base and host base on both coasts was contacted by elected officials and asked to stop giving. The original promise to me from Schumer was that I would have no financial concerns. It went from that to Senator Schumer actually working against my ability to raise money.”

Hackett added, “For me, this is a second betrayal. First, my government misused and mismanaged the military in Iraq, and now my own party is afraid to support candidates like me.” The first Iraq war veteran to seek national office, Hackett said he was ending his political career, but not leaving the Democratic Party. He indicated he would support Brown if he were the Democratic nominee.

Congressional Democratic leaders tried to buy Hackett’s withdrawal from the Senate by offering their backing if he ran again for the House seat that he lost narrowly in an August special election. But Hackett said he had already assured three other prospective Democratic candidates for the seat that he would not seek it. “The party keeps saying for me not to worry about those promises because in politics they are broken all the time,” he said. “I don’t work that way. My word is my bond.”

Besides his bitter attacks on Bush for going to war in Iraq based on lies and squandering the lives of American soldiers and Iraqis, Hackett also offended Democratic Party leaders with a public attack on the right-wing Christian fundamentalists whom Reid, Hillary Clinton and other Democrats are seeking to woo. Hackett said the Republican Party had been

hijacked by religious extremists who “aren’t a whole lot different than Osama bin Laden.”

The closing down of Hackett’s campaign demonstrates a fundamental truth of American politics: the Democratic Party, while cowardly and indecisive when it comes to the Bush administration and the Republicans, is ruthless and implacable in any struggle against threats from its left.

In 2004, while Kerry was essentially throwing the presidential election by dithering about his position on the war in Iraq, the Democratic National Committee waged war against the rights of third-party candidates even to appear on the ballot, devoting millions to attacks on Ralph Nader, the Green Party, the Socialist Equality Party and other left-wing opponents.

In the current election campaign, the Democrats can be counted on to play the same role, attempting to use election law technicalities, arbitrary deadlines, sympathetic judges and outright fraud against antiwar and socialist candidates. In these efforts, the Democrats act as political policemen for big business, seeking to prevent the working class from having access to an anti-capitalist program and perspective.

The suppression of the Hackett campaign demonstrates that the Democratic Party leadership prefers to lose the 2006 election rather than win control of the House and Senate on the basis of an appeal to antiwar sentiment and the mass popular hatred of the Bush administration and its policies. Such a campaign would arouse popular expectations that the Democratic leadership regards as dangerous, because they fully intend to continue Bush’s policies, above all the war in Iraq, with only cosmetic changes.

The Democratic Party’s lack of appetite for a serious struggle against its Republican rivals is so obvious that even the national press has been compelled to take note. A lengthy analysis last week (February 8) in the *New York Times* cited the growing concern among leading Democrats “that they are letting pass an opportunity to exploit what they see as widespread Republican vulnerabilities.... Democrats described a growing sense that they had failed to take full advantage of the troubles that have plagued Mr. Bush and his party since the middle of last year, driving down the president’s approval ratings, opening divisions among Republicans in Congress over policy and potentially putting control of the House and Senate into play in November.”

Times’s analysis highlighted the assessment of a more right-wing faction of Democratic senators, such as Evan Bayh of Indiana and Barack Obama of Illinois, criticizing figures like Edward Kennedy, John Kerry and Al Gore as “flawed messengers” because they were identified as traditional liberals. It also prominently quoted Governor Phil Bredesen of Tennessee, who has become notorious for cutting tens of thousands of poor families off the state Medicaid program TennCare. He suggested that the Democratic Party was too critical of Bush, and that “you’ve got to stand for a lot more than just blasting the other side.”

In other words, while acknowledging the disarray and demoralization in leading Democratic circles, the *Times* account suggested that the proper course was to move the Democratic Party even farther to the right, and above all to disavow any public identification with outright opposition to the Iraq war.

Recent polls have confirmed the deep unpopularity of the Bush administration and the congressional Republicans. A Pew Research study released February 9 found that 31 percent saw their vote for Congress in November as a vote against Bush, compared with 18 percent who saw it as a vote for Bush. The comparable figures before the last midterm election in 2002 were the reverse, with 9 percent planning an anti-Bush vote and 34 percent a pro-Bush vote (in both polls, nearly half said the president would not be a factor in their vote). The survey conducted February 1-5 found that prospective voters favored a Democratic-controlled House by 50 percent to 41 percent.

Congressional Republicans are extremely nervous about their prospects in the upcoming election, particularly in the House. This concern was reflected in the decision by the House Republicans to dump acting majority leader Roy Blunt and replace him with Ohio congressman John Boehner. The 122-109 vote was fueled largely by concerns that Blunt was too close to the former majority leader, Tom DeLay, and had too many ties to the lobbying interests linked to DeLay and the corrupt Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff.



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