

The Marietta Times

Sherrod Brown visits Marietta, speaks on jobs, opioids



ERIN O'NEILL The Marietta Times U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, speaks to a group of local business and community leaders at the first Regional Economic Diversification Summit at Buckeye Hills Regional Council Thursday.

The senior senator from Ohio, Democrat Sherrod Brown, addressed a large group of local business, community leaders and federal agencies at the Regional Diversification Summit at Buckeye Hills Regional Council Thursday. The summit was hosted by Buckeye Hills, the Economic Development Administration and the Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association.

“The EDA approached us about the possibility of holding this summit in order to look at certain issues that are going on in the region,” said Misty Crosby, executive director of Buckeye Hills Regional Council. *“We wanted to bring the federal partners here to provide input into how they can bring in resources to help solve some of those issues.”*

Brown spoke for about 10 minutes once the summit took a break in the daily programming. The discussion focused on preparing youth to enter the workforce through manufacturing camps, investing in industries that create jobs in the area and keeping young people in the area to grow the region. He also spoke about the dignity of hard work.

“I think it’s important that we all talk about and celebrate work as what it is, whether you punch a clock, whether you work in construction, whether you work at a diner or a hospital, whether you’re a professional, whether you’re a high school graduate — whether you’re not even a high school graduate — we just don’t put the emphasis on the whole idea of dignity of work and that’s changed from a generation ago,” Brown said.

Following his comments, he took questions from the crowd. Jack Frech, former director of Athens County Job and Family Services who currently serves on the Mayors' Partnership for Progress, asked the senator about welfare reform and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

"The state gets about \$700 million a year in TANF funds. Right now they are sitting on an unspent balance of about \$600 million, while at the same time our homeless shelters are packed with families with kids, people don't have enough food, people are struggling like I've never seen," Frech said. *"This being a federal program, do you have any thoughts on it? To me it's unconscionable that they're just sitting on this."*

Brown said depending on November's election outcome, he would be chairman of the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee and he posed the question back to the group, specifically to those with expertise in housing.

"What should the federal government do, beyond tax credits or housing vouchers? There are just not enough homes available aimed at these people who are struggling," Brown said.

Ron Rees, executive director of the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD), said he would like to promote private sector investment to displace government funding for public housing developments.

"That's a big deal because we're shifting the model from taxpayer dollars to private sector," Rees said.

The discussion continued to focus on some of the issues faced in southeastern Ohio once the senator wrapped up his remarks.

He also spoke to the media prior to the event about \$3.7 billion in appropriations through the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies bill that would help fund prevention initiatives and treatment for individuals struggling with addiction.

“The money goes through the state and the state, I think, is finally learning something about how to combat this public health crisis better than they have. The money will go to education, scaling up treatment programs...you can’t arrest your way out of this, you can’t execute your way out of this with drug dealers...we need to help people break their addiction,” Brown said. *“The first thing is, to do no harm by repealing Medicaid. I’m concerned that a number of people running for (state) office want to repeal the governor’s Medicaid expansion. So, you start with not doing harm and then you make sure money gets to these treatment programs.”*

Brown also addressed the issue of getting broadband into rural areas to attract business to the area.

“I’m on the Ag committee and we just were in the process of writing the Farm Bill, I’m on the Conference committee and we want to make sure there are dollars in it for rural development, especially broadband. It should start to tackle the infrastructure problem but this is a Congress now that continues to want to give tax cuts to rich people and then not have the money to spend on any of the kind of infrastructure we ought to be building,” he said.

The senator was also asked his thoughts on Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, an issue on which he disagrees with U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio.

“I oppose him for a lot of reasons. This court has become more corporate, it decides for companies that outsource jobs over workers, it decides for Wall Street over consumers, it sides with large corporations over taxpayers, and my biggest concern is that (Kavanaugh) is going to want to take away the consumer protections and protections for people who have pre-existing conditions. That’s a real threat to five million Ohioans, that the insurance companies could cancel their insurance,” he said.

Regional Economic Diversification Summit

- Agencies in attendance: Buckeye Hills Regional Council, U.S. Economic Development Administration, Housing and Urban Development,

Appalachian Regional Council, Small Business Administration, USDA-Rural Development, Department of Labor, Washington County Department of Job and Family Services.

- Sen. Sherrod Brown: Spoke about investing in the workforce, federal funding for the opioid epidemic, the Farm Bill and rural broadband, and his opposition to Brett Kavanaugh for Supreme Court.
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