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## GETTING PERSONAL

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In the smoke of the pitched campaign battle between a congressman and a former congressman in the 6th Congressional District, political and philosophical differences often get lost.

Rep. Frank A. Cremeans, 53, a Republican from Gallipolis, is seeking re-election in the southern Ohio district, which includes 12 counties and parts of two others sprawling from the suburbs of Cincinnati to Marietta.

Democrat **Ted Strickland**, 55, of Lucasville wants to bestow on Cremeans the status Cremeans bestowed on him two years ago: a one-term congressman defeated in his re-election bid.

Cremeans was elected during the GOP's "Contract With America" campaign and has remained faithful to its tenets, voting more than 90 percent of the time with House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

As a congressman, Strickland voted for President Clinton's proposals about 75 percent of the time. Notable exceptions included votes against gun control, the crime bill and two international trade agreements opposed by organized labor.

Cremeans spells out his stand on the issues regularly as he warns that more is at stake than a single congressional seat.

Since the Republican congressional takeover in 1994, Cremeans recently told a group of Republican women in Clinton County, welfare reform is a reality, work has begun on stopping deficit spending, talk of eliminating the Internal Revenue Service is under way, tax reform is possible and a Democratic president is talking about the end of big government.

All of these things will come to a halt if Democrats reclaim control of the House, Cremeans said.

"I see an opening here that I never thought would visit me. There's no question about it. We have the issues on our side.

"I support a balanced budget," Cremeans said, adding that he also favors voluntary school prayer, school vouchers and tax relief. Quick action is needed, he said, to keep the Medicare system from going bankrupt.

"Medicare really is broke. That's sad."

Strickland is equally specific on key issues, which he sees as education, health-care reform, impoverished children, and jobs and economic development.

"We must protect public education," Strickland said after a recent campaign appearance in Waverly. He said he is concerned that vouchers would take federal dollars away from needy schools in the district.

Though not a large share of Ohio's education spending, federal money is weighted to areas of greatest need, which include the 6th District, Strickland said. A sound public education system and strong programs to reduce teen-age pregnancy are the surest ways to reduce the number of children living in poverty, he said.

High-quality child care to help working mothers and student loans to encourage college educations also should be part of the package, Strickland said.

He said he fully supports Clinton's proposal to give college freshmen and sophomores who maintain a B average or better a \$ 1,500 tax credit.

"A \$ 1,500 tax credit would go a long way toward considering a college education for many young people in this district."

Strickland said something also must be done to insure the estimated 40 million Americans who lack health-care coverage -- to eliminate hospitals shifting costs from indigent cases onto everyone else's medical bills, he said.

Creating jobs in southern Ohio's depressed economy is difficult, he said, so the first priority must be keeping existing jobs. Strickland noted efforts he took in Congress to protect 2,600 jobs at the uranium enrichment plant near Piketon.

Those jobs are threatened again by a national security necessity to import uranium from the former Soviet Union, Strickland said, contending that he is better qualified than Cremeans to again come to workers' aid.

As for balancing the budget, Strickland said, "I hope Frank and I can **debate** that. He credited votes he and other Democrats cast in the previous session of Congress for much of the 60 percent reduction in the deficit since 1992.

"We did it responsibly. We did it in a way that did not damage the economy, and we did it in a way that did not hurt those least able to bear the burden."

Cremeans objects to cries that Republicans want to "cut" spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid when programs offered by both parties propose only to reduce the rate of growth in spending.

Cremeans said Strickland characterized the Republicans' proposal on Medicare reform as a \$ 270 billion "cut" in benefits even though Strickland served on Hillary Rodham Clinton's Health Care Task Force that proposed reducing Medicare spending by \$ 300 billion.

Whether district voters will hear the two face-to-face depends on an ongoing **debate** over **debates**. Since their nominations were decided in March, Strickland has been challenging Cremeans to a series of meetings throughout the district.

Cremeans has declined, citing limited time and difficulty in scheduling because of his duties in Congress and his commute to and from Washington. He proposes instead a series of **debates** simulcast by radio stations throughout the district -- a more efficient means of reaching voters, he said.

Strickland doesn't like the idea, saying that on radio Cremeans could read from scripts prepared by his staff members instead of demonstrating his knowledge of the issues. A compromise, Strickland said, might be to have three radio **debates** and three public **debates**.

Meanwhile, a barrage of charges and countercharges has tilted the campaigning more often into personal attacks than policy differences. Cremeans depicts Strickland as a trespasser supported by an anti-Christian organization, and Strickland paints Cremeans as a polluting factory owner who targets workers and the poor in federal budget cuts.

The trespassing and pollution charges are related. Cremeans owns a ready-mix concrete business in Gallipolis and some years ago purchased an adjacent property for possible expansion.

The land included tenants in trailer homes, and in June the Gallia County Health Department cited Cremeans for raw sewage flowing from some of the sites.

Cremeans said he inherited the problem from the previous property owner and promised to clean it up, which he said would involve evicting some uncooperative tenants who were behind in rent.

Although Strickland initially didn't raise the issue, he decided to check on the property in an Aug. 1 drive-by on what he said is a public road. Cremeans contended that Strickland was trespassing and vowed to file charges if Strickland or any of his staff returned.

The anti-Christian charge came in a July news release from Cremeans' campaign headlined "Strickland paid by anti-Christian group" and was based on Strickland's congressional financial disclosures, which showed that he received \$ 1,500 from Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Cremeans said Strickland got the money for "lending his efforts to an ultraliberal anti-Christian group" that wants to tax church property and remove the motto "In God We Trust" from U.S. money.

Although Strickland makes his living as a psychologist and an instructor at Shawnee State University in Portsmouth, he also is an ordained Methodist minister. The payment was for participating in a panel show along with a representative of an organization founded by Pat Robertson, whose Christian Coalition supports Cremeans.

News releases from Strickland's camp have carried headlines such as "Cremeans fought to eliminate mine-safety agency," "Cremeans casts anti-worker vote," and "Cremeans blocks another minimum wage vote."

Many of those are **debatable**, such as Cremeans' votes against preliminary proposals in partisan bickering over shaping a minimum-wage package ultimately supported by many Republicans, including Cremeans.

Strickland gave Cremeans credit for that vote in a release headlined "Cremeans flip-flops on minimum wage."

At least, Strickland said, his blasts at Cremeans are based on the Republican's official votes.

"I believe when he (Cremeans) puts out a press release or makes a public statement, there's very little consideration whether there's any truth to it," Strickland said.

Complaints from the Cremeans' camp include a charge that Strickland's people used a man in a **chicken** suit to portray Cremeans' in a Marietta parade. Strickland said it was a mask, not a suit, and the **chicken** simply carried a sign saying, "I won't **debate Ted Strickland** -- who am I?"

The acrid exchanges may set the stage, but both camps know much of the vote will be decided by paid advertising, which is expensive in a district that spans six television markets, including Columbus.

Outside factors make it difficult to determine who's winning the dollar battle.

Strickland says Cremeans will outspend him by drawing on his personal fortune to make loans to his campaign that he will to repay from later contributions, as he did for \$ 500,000 in loans in 1994.

As of June 30, finance reports showed Cremeans with a balance of \$ 428,903, including \$ 325,000 he had loaned the campaign, and Strickland with \$ 255,000.

That's not the total picture, Cremeans contends. The AFL-CIO has committed \$ 35 million nationwide to battle Republicans in about 70 districts, and Cremeans is among the top targets.

"I can tell you right now," Cremeans told the Clinton County women, "he's going to outspend me."

Cremeans has the endorsement of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which is organizing another independent campaign fund that it says will be used to correct misinformation in the labor ads.

The attention of the national organizations has triggered the interest of the national media, several of which have labeled the district a bellwether for the Democratic attempt to regain control of the House.

Estimates are that \$ 2 million to \$ 3 million may be spent in the district by the time the race is over.