



Gore effort takes bus to Cincy

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Vice president stresses education

By Howard Wilkinson

The Cincinnati Enquirer

The Al Gore-Joe Lieberman bus swing through Southwest Ohio Tuesday was all education, all the time.

During the noon hour, as the yellow school bus bearing the Democratic presidential candidates pulled out of the Middletown High School parkinglot for the 45-minute ride to Cincinnati State Technical and CommunityCollege, Mr. Gore spoke with seven high school students from around Ohioand a handful of teachers and administrators.

"I want to hear what you have to say," he told the participants, standing in the aisle of the bus as it bounced over speed bumps and onto Middletown streets lined with waving well-wishers.

Poor perceptions

Monique Rice, a 17-year-old senior from Akron who wants to be an international corporate attorney, told Mr. Gore she worried that her inner-city school suffers "not because it is a bad place, but because the public perception is that it is a bad place."

"That is a problem, the perception," Mr. Gore said. "When you ask Americans what they think of the state of public education, they say it is very troubled but when you ask them about their own neighborhood school, they say it is terrific."

On the bus to Cincinnati -- on a southbound Interstate 75 that was closed to traffic for 32 miles while the Gore-Lieberman motorcade passed -- Mr. Gore told the students that he wants to make a \$170 billion commitment to public education, "the biggest ever."

"You know that if we are able to hire 10,000 more teachers and reduce class size, school is going to be a better experience for you," Mr. Gore said.

At Cincinnati State, his motorcade pulled up to the main parking lot at Central Parkway and Ludlow Avenue, where a crowd of about 4,000 sign-waving, cheering supporters waited, many of them for four or five hours, to see the Democratic ticket.

Mr. Lieberman, in his first campaign trip to the Tristate since being named to the Democratic ticket, gave the warm-up speech for the presidential candidate.

He and Mr. Gore, Mr. Lieberman said, "are not going to say one negative personal word about George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. But we are going to talk about their records."

Mr. Gore said he has talked to business leaders who say they cannot find qualified workers, particularly for high-tech jobs, because the education system has failed.

"We can't afford that," Mr. Gore said. "We need to have the best schools in the world so our kids can compete for jobs."

The vice president's plan calls for spending about \$170 billion over a decade. He also wants to add universal preschool, reduce class size through hiring 1 million new teachers, allow tax credits for college tuition and triple

the number of charter schools.

After the 20-minute Gore speech, fireworks blasted up into the air over Clifton, spooking the horses of mounted police and mesmerizing the crowd.

Mr. Gore and Mr. Lieberman waded into the rope line holding back the crowd, shaking hands with supporters. Mr. Gore disappeared into the bus after about 10 minutes, but Mr. Lieberman stayed behind and signed autographs.

One fan's encounter

A bred-in-the-bone Democrat and aspiring TV anchor, Meg Wagner came away starstruck.

"It was a chance of a lifetime . . . and I shook the hand of Joe Lieberman," she exulted when Mr. Lieberman and Mr. Gore left the lectern.

Ms. Wagner, 19, a Xavier University sophomore from White Oak, also was pleased by the speeches.

"I hoped to hear a strong platform for today's generation," she said and promises of tuition breaks for the middle class and more responsive health care rules hit home. "That's me."

The education theme resonated with George Psihountakis, who brought a hotdog cart to nourish the Secret Service and others at the rally. As father of three teen-agers, he was enthusiastic about promises to aid education and ease tuition burdens.

Beyond that, Mr. Psihountakis said public education is so bad that men and women who apply to work for him frequently "can't count."

A Greek immigrant, he bemoaned the fact that "the most powerful country in the world" has such badly educated citizens.

Reporter Ben L. Kaufman contributed to this story.

Cincinnati Mayor Charlie Luken talks on the dais with Vice President Al Gore during the campaign rally for Mr. Gore and vice presidential candidate Sen. Joe Lieberman on Tuesday.

Meg Wagner, 19, a Xavier University sophomore from White Oak, said she was pleased with the speeches at Tuesday's campaign stop.

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