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By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

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Early election numbers show Ohio seems to have followed most other states and elected Republicans to The Senate.

A veteran of George W. Bush's White House has kept Ohio's U.S. Senate seat in the hands of the GOP. Republican Rob Portman coasted to an easy victory Tuesday night over Ohio Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher.

Portman brushed aside criticism over close ties to Bush that include stints as White House budget director and U.S. trade ambassador.

Republican challenger John Kasich was leading Democratic Gov. Ted Strickland in the Ohio governor's race, at press time, with more than 85 percent of the votes counted. The winner will control a state critical to President Barack Obama's re-election hopes in 2012.

On a night dominated by Republican victories, Strickland's early lead among absentee voters succumbed to the higher vote totals Kasich scored, especially in rural and suburban counties.

Votes were still being tallied in crucial urban counties, including homes to Democrat-dominated Cleveland and GOP-heavy Cincinnati.

Both candidates' totals still hovered under 50 percent. The possibility of a legal challenge has risen if the results are close.

As the evening pressed on, Strickland's early lead among absentee voters was overcome by vote for Kasich in 46 of Ohio's 88 counties. Strickland had closed in on Kasich's early edge in polls leading up to Election Day with help from big-name Democrats, including the Obamas.

Strickland, a former congressman from Appalachia as well as an ordained minister and psychologist, touted to voters his efforts to curb college tuition, expand health care access for children, and rewrite Ohio's unconstitutional school-funding system.

He said education is the key to Ohio's economic future.

Incumbents of both parties held onto U.S. House seats in Ohio on Tuesday as Republicans remained hopeful that they could pick up new districts in the presidential battleground state. On the Democratic side, Representatives Marcy Kaptur, Dennis Kucinich, Marcia Fudge and Tim Ryan were easily re-elected.

Betty Sutton beat Republican Tom Ganley, a well-known Ohio car dealer.

Ganley pulled the plug on his broadcast TV advertising last month, deciding to advertise instead on cable TV and the radio which cost a fraction as much to reach more voters.

The 58-year-old Kasich, a frequent face on Fox News, attacked Strickland over the loss of 400,000 jobs. The Democratic governor, 69, pointed to national economic factors and improvements in the economy without success.

With about 78 percent of the statewide vote counted, Republican challenger Mike Dewine is holding a 48 to 46 percent lead over incumbent Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray.

Cordray held an early lead in the race to be Ohio's top lawyer for the next four years but DeWine gained throughout the evening

A rough time for State Treasurer Kevin Boyce, David Pepper, Maryellen O'Shaughnessy who, at our press time with 76 percent of the votes, were also losing. Justice Maureen O'Conner was leading appointed Chief Justice Eric Brown at our press time.

Cuyahoga County Board of Elections Executive Director Jane Platten was pleased with the number of voters who mailed in their ballots. More than 209,000 voted early, making up 20 percent of the total number of votes cast in Cuyahoga County.