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Kaptur : Ohioans seek a voice in Iowa caucuses Says Ohio primary comes too late for influencing candidates

By Dave DeWitte
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CEDAR RAPIDS — If anyone is still talking about former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack's run for the Democratic presidential nomination, it's U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio.

Kaptur, after 25 years the longest-serving United States congresswoman, lamented Vilsack's pullout from the race on a swing through Eastern Iowa Monday. She invoked Vilsack's name as she asked grassroots political groups in Eastern Iowa to be the voice of Ohioans in Iowa's first-in-nation presidential caucuses.

Iowans still influence presidential primary candidates' platforms at the grass-roots level, Kaptur said. For Ohioans, it's nearly impossible.

By the time presidential candidates campaign for Ohio's March 15 primary elections, "they're already packaged in shrink wrap," Kaptur said.

Which brings Kaptur to the issue of Vilsack's short-lived presidential bid, which ended on Feb. 23 with an acknowledgment that he could not raise enough money to compete with the Democratic "rock star" candidates.

"He was a heartland candidate," Kaptur said. "He cared a lot about energy independence, and I was personally brokenhearted that he withdrew."

Kaptur said Vilsack's withdrawal underscored the tragic importance of big money in campaign financing.

Kaptur also passed out cards suggesting questions for party activists to ask presidential contenders.

One card reflected the thousands of manufacturing jobs her district is losing as companies shift their manufacturing offshore.

Another card suggested asking candidates how they would help America become energy independent.

Kaptur talked with peace activists, women's political organizations and Iowans for Sensible Priorities on Monday. She planned to meet today with laid-off workers at Maytag Corp. in Newton.

Iowans for Sensible Priorities Director Peggy Huppert of Des Moines said her group is leveraging the Iowa caucuses by recruiting 8,000 caucus-goers to back only candidates that support its platform of diverting funds from defense spending to areas such as education, children's health care and renewable energy. The group's activists ask specific questions, record the answers, and then refine the questions to get even more specific answers the next time.

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