Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown votes with Elizabeth Warren, Chuck Schumer, Renacci says

By Amy Sherman on Tuesday, July 31st, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, left, accompanied by Sen. Charles Schumer, D--N.Y., gestures during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, March 3, 2010. (AP)

Ohio Republican U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci says his Democratic opponent Sen. Sherrod Brown votes in step with Democratic leadership and liberals.

Renacci held a July 10 press conference in Cincinnati to call for term limits. "People start voting not for their state anymore but they start voting for their leadership," Renacci said. "And we have seen that with our Sen. Sherrod Brown who votes 97 percent with Chuck Schumer, almost 95 plus percent with Elizabeth Warren."

Renacci was referring to the voting records of Schumer, who is the Democratic Senate leader and represents New York, as well as Warren, who represents Massachusetts and is a potential 2020 presidential contender to challenge President Donald Trump.

We found that Renacci is largely correct on the numbers but we will add some context.

In recent years, the average senator voted with his or her party about 90 percent of the time when a majority of Democrats took a position different from a majority of Republicans, said Steven S. Smith, Washington University political science professor.

POLITIFACT OHIO

"In this context, a serious look at a senator's record requires more digging. On what issues did the senator introduce legislation, offer amendments, address in public statements, or pursue on committee or in conference?"

Brown's voting record

Renacci's campaign pointed to vote data compiled by Congressional Quarterly, which showed that Brown voted with Schumer 96 percent of the time between 2007 and 2018. For the comparison with Warren, who joined the Senate in 2013, the Renacci campaign pulled CQ data showing Brown voted the same as Warren about 94 percent of the time.

We used ProPublica's public database which provides head-to-head comparisons, and found similar results.

So the numbers aren't in dispute. We have fact-checked several previous claims that Democrats voted with former President Barack Obama or their party the vast majority of the time and generally rated them Mostly True if the numbers were on target. Most Democrats and Republicans largely vote with their respective party, but using only the statistic doesn't tell the full story about a senator's record.

The straight-up vote comparisons here between three Democratic senators don't tell the full story about Brown's voting record, either.

Brown's campaign spokesman Preston Maddock pointed to some key votes on which Brown opposed Warren.

For example, in 2014, Brown voted to adopt the conference report on the farm bill and was tapped by leadership to reconcile differences between the House and the Senate. Warren was among Senate Democrats who opposed any cuts to food stamps and voted against the legislation.
In 2015, Brown voted to adopt the conference report to reauthorize federal transportation programs and renew the charter of the Export-Import bank. Under the bill, Brown said Ohio was set to receive an increase in money for highway and transit projects.

Warren opposed the legislation because she said it rolled back rules that protect consumers and our financial system.

In 2016, Brown voted for the 21st Century Cures Act, which authorized $1 bill to states to combat the opioid crisis. Warren said the bill was "hijacked" by the pharmaceutical industry and opposed it.

Brown also voted for some of Trump's nominees in 2017 whom Warren opposed, including Ben Carson to head up Housing and Urban Development and Wilbur Ross for commerce secretary. Brown supported U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer's confirmation, while Schumer opposed him.

While Brown has criticized Trump on several fronts, Maddock pointed to some examples on which the Democratic senator has been in agreement with the president. For example, Brown supported the Interdict Act to make it easier for customs officials to block fentanyl from getting into the U.S. The law passed the Senate by unanimous consent.

Trump signed the House version into law, while Brown was a cosponsor of the Senate version. U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, Ohio's Republican senator, also backed the bill, and both Portman and Brown attended a signing ceremony for the new law at the White House.

Brown and Trump also share some views on trade. Brown has said Trump's order on raising imported steel will help stabilize steel jobs in Ohio.

Experts say members often vote along party lines

Experts told us that it's no surprise that senators from the same party often vote the same.

"Democrats tend to vote with fellow Democrats, just as Republicans tend to vote with their party. The existence of parties and winner-take-all congressional primaries incentivizes party-line voting," University of Akron political science professor David Cohen said.

POLITIFACT OHIO

The vote comparison among Democrats omits that the Senate reaches bipartisan consensus on some issues, for example, the recent unanimous vote in the Senate to express opposition to allowing the Russians to interrogate American diplomats, said University of Miami political science professor Gregory Koger.

"There may be a lot of issues on which Brown disagrees with Schumer and/or Warren that do not come to the Senate floor, so their roll call voting record may overstate their actual policy agreement," Koger said.

Using the ProPublica database of votes, we found that Renacci voted the same as House Majority Leader Paul Ryan about 89 percent of the time.

Our ruling

Renacci said Brown "votes 97 percent with Chuck Schumer, almost 95 plus percent with Elizabeth Warren."

The numbers are largely correct and not in dispute. But it's not unusual for members of the same party to vote together, and it doesn't tell the full story about their voting record.

We rate this claim Mostly True.