

COLUMBUS STATION GOING CONSERVATIVE AS KEY STATE POSITIONS TURN DEMOCRATIC

Radio switches dial from left to right

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Just about the time the Democrats take their places in the highest positions of state government in Columbus, their liberal voice is leaving talk radio in that part of the state.

WTPG-AM (1230) is turning in its "progressive talk," featuring the likes of Al Franken, and trading it for conservatives like Michael Savage and Laura Ingraham. It changed its call letters to WYTS recently and will begin its new programming Jan. 9.

The move to the other end of the political spectrum at the Clear Channel station is purely about good business, program manager Bruce Collins said.

"The reason for the change is just due to lack of ratings performance by the radio station," he said.

In the Arbitron ratings data for the summer period, the station did not finish among the top 20 stations in the Columbus market while another Clear Channel talk radio station, WTVN-AM (610), which airs conservatives like Rush Limbaugh, tied for second place overall.

Mr. Collins said WTPG's new format will complement the other station and will also include other things like sports, general advice, and finance.

The change takes place after a midterm election in which Ohio Democrats captured a U.S. Senate seat, the governor's office, and three other key statewide offices after more than a decade of Republican rule.

Brian Rothenberg, executive director of ProgressOhio.org, a liberal organization that he said gives a voice to progressive causes, said the political climate could have something to do with the change by the radio station.

"The progressive movement gained a lot of steam in a key state like Ohio," he said. "Corporate America might not want that progressive movement to be so strong."

He said more than 1,600 people signed a petition asking the station to rescind the decision, an attempt to follow in the footsteps of residents in Madison, Wis. There, public outcry caused another Clear Channel station to give up its plans to drop liberal programming in favor of Fox Sports Radio.

Larry Rosin, president of Edison Media Research, a research company in New Jersey that tracks the radio industry, said the most likely explanation behind the change in Columbus is money, not politics.

"No doubt the heads of Clear Channel have whatever their political agendas are," he said. However, he added that in his experience, "these decisions are made almost entirely and only on their belief of what is going to make them money and not on agenda."

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