

A crucial GOP Senate race unfolds

Messer wins straw poll, but a 3-way battle with Rokita and Braun is forming

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Luke Messer’s win of the Republican Congress of Counties straw poll on Saturday was little more than an early milepost in what will almost certainly be a \$100 million U.S.

Senate race that could alter the power in Washington.

Messer won with 147 votes, followed by 82 for U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita, 36 for Mike Braun, 29 for Mark Hurt, 20 for Andrew Takami and 12 for Andrew Horning. While it generated weekend headlines for Messer, the exercise created a fascinating glimpse into how this race



Luke Messer with supporters, Todd Rokita dons a MAGA hat, and Mike Braun chats with Mark Hurt at the Republican Congress of Counties straw poll on Saturday. (HPI Photos by Mark Curry)



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Wildcard, joker & ace

By **CRAIG DUNN**

KOKOMO – Playing cards may not be your favorite pastime, however you don’t need to know much about gambling to understand big stakes. This year’s U.S. Senate primary in Indiana is no doubt a high leverage game that

will take smarts, resolve and of course millions of dollars, to win. So, the question for Hoosier Republicans is, “Who do we want playing our hand?” Luke Messer, Todd Rokita, and Mike Braun are the likely contenders to lead the Republican ticket this fall. I suggest we ask ourselves who is best positioned to beat Joe Donnelly.

A long view of political history tells us the first mid-



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term election of a newly elected president can be challenging for that president's party. When you couple this trend with a hostile media focused on derailing the Trump-Pence agenda, the political terrain this fall could be difficult. Add to this environment an affable Joe Donnelly who is willing to take both sides of every issue and run a shameless campaign based on centrist rhetoric that ignores his liberal voting record, it becomes clear that Republicans will need a responsible, thoughtful, and tough candidate.

Let's take a look at the candidates who are "all in" for 2018 and see who has the best chance at recapturing this crucial Senate seat for Indiana Republicans.

Let's start with the wildcard. Mike Braun by all accounts seems to be a decent man with a successful business, but there are many more questions than answers surrounding his candidacy at this point. With a history of voting Democrat, and some less than attractive tax-hike votes in the legislature, Mike Braun will certainly not have the luxury of winning the nomination without some serious scrutiny. However, if he did, what would Braun's general election campaign look like? The shortest and most honest answer is we don't know. That's why I believe his candidacy is a wildcard.

The question Hoosier Republicans will have to answer is whether we are comfortable with a candidate who has not built a state-wide grassroots network, and until 2012, was still voting for Democrats. Furthermore, Mr. Braun may be a nice guy, but how will he handle the onslaught of negative media and nonstop press coverage in the "gotcha" age of journalism? We've seen a simple debate answer completely derail a Senate campaign and in my view this isn't the time to pin our hopes on a wildcard. The eyes of the GOP will be on Mr. Braun as the GOP primary

unfolds.

There is also a joker in this race. I say joker because I don't know how much of what Congressman Rokita says is intended to be taken seriously. I have known Congressman Rokita for a long time, however I'm unfamiliar with the Todd Rokita I've seen on the campaign trail this last year. In his blind ambition to climb the political ladder, Rokita has simultaneously attacked other qualified candidates while bending the truth to hype his status as everyman's conservative. Both tactics are unnecessary and



Todd Rokita prior to the straw poll vote (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

unfortunate.

Todd Rokita has a record that should suffice in building a narrative to share with voters, but instead Rokita has chosen to re-create himself as an "outsider." My guess is that Congressman Rokita's campaign slogan of "defeat the elite" will ring hollow when Rokita's life story and political past are brought to light. After all, Rokita attended some of the most elite schools in Indiana and is known to boast about owning private planes since he was a young man. Somebody with this life story may not want to act as though life has dealt him a raw hand. As the guys on ESPN would say, "C'mon, man!"

Rokita has dined at the public

trough longer than all of his U.S. Senate primary opponents combined. The truth is Congressman Rokita didn't have a problem seeking their favor over the last 20 years as he sought a number of political offices, including governor.

In the end, it is not that Rokita's message is flawed, he is simply a flawed messenger who's been a part of the political elite his entire life. If you doubt this, take a look at FEC reports. It isn't ma and pa 10-dollar donations that are fueling the Rokita campaign. Maybe there is still time for Rokita to find his way, but if he stays the current course, the hypocrisy will be too much for Indiana voters. You simply can't lift yourself up by tearing others down, you can only attempt to drag them down to your level.

Further, I became very concerned with the culture of fear that hung over the Rokita Congressional staff like a cloud of misery, as good staff people made walking on eggshells a daily ritual. That's not how you treat good people.

Fortunately, there's also an ace in the race. Luke Messer is emerging as the clear choice of Indiana Republicans to defeat Joe Donnelly. He has the background, tenacity and authenticity this race demands. Messer was raised by a single mom in rural Greensburg, and worked his way through college and law school. He's built a career on leading meaningful policy change, first as a state legislator, then as a nationally respected advocate for school choice and now as a member of the leadership team in the House.

Messer is a thoughtful and strong conservative who shares the values of Indiana's conservative base,



while offering a knowledgeable and upbeat presentation to voters of every stripe. It's why he's garnering support from elected officials and grassroots conservatives alike. He's also an effective communicator who can present a conservative message and handle the media, skills that cannot be overstated. A hostile media in this midterm election could go far in undermining an otherwise good candidate.

But maybe most importantly to defeating Joe Donnelly, Messer is a likable guy. When you first meet Luke, it's likely you'll hear about his kid's basketball game before the policy issue of the day. Messer is a family man with a record of leadership for this state, and he's not claiming to be anything different. Luke Messer is the ace in the hole that Hoosier Republicans can count on before they bet the family farm.

This U.S. Senate race is too important to Indiana and the nation to take a wild gamble on an untried candidate of dubious political heritage or a candidate who bends scripture and then quotes it to fit his needs. Now is not the time to place our money and support on unprepared or unreliable candidates.

Republicans must remember how Sen. Donnelly got this seat in the first place, and keep in mind the damage done in Alabama by a bad candidate just last month. I think it's time for Hoosier Republicans to come together and get serious about winning this fall. In my estimation, we should be placing our bets on Luke Messer.

In full disclosure, I have given thoughtful consideration to all of the candidates in the Republican Senate primary and decided several months ago to support Luke Messer. It's time to send a political chameleon like Joe Donnelly packing. ❖

Dunn is the former Howard County Republican Party chairman.

Senate race, from page 1

is being run and possibly how it will turn out over the next four and a half months. The event also allowed Howeys Politics Indiana to conduct interviews with five of the six candidates, minus the elusive Takami.

Here are several early takeaways from the event:

Messer's must-win

■ Messer's campaign had the upper hand in organizing and optics. He bused in dozens of college Republicans to assure a victory that some had predicted could be in the 70% range. His campaign optics were solid, with emerging photos and video of the event



revealing a candidate surrounded by enthusiastic supporters. From an audio standpoint, Messer's speech before attendees was largely a rehash of his campaign kickoff last July in which he told stories of his upbringing by a single mom, his first football practice with the lesson "don't quit," to a conversation on leadership he had with his young son.

His delivery was rushed, almost frenetic, to the point it was getting harder to understand him in the cavernous hall. He added on a story about an inaugural dinner he had with now Trump Chief of Staff John Kelly and U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, who left without eating his cake. Kelly suggested that in a socialist way of thought, the cake was fair game for anyone at the

table.

The Kelly story was the only fresh aspect to Messer's pitch, and many of the attendees had heard the other stories before. Obscured were Messer's career achievements, leaving an opening to rival Mike Braun. Messer certainly came away from this event as the "establishment candidate." In a normal cycle, that would be a good thing, but in this environment it could become a liability. Because this was an "establishment" event, Messer had to win. If he hadn't, he would have been damaged goods. That he received under 50% of the vote gave Braun an opening that the race is far from decided.

Messer's most effective pitch to delegates was his criticism of U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly, reminding Republicans that the Hoosier Democrat votes with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer "85% of the time," adding, "Well, Chuck Schumer is wrong more than 15% of the time. We need a U.S. senator who votes like a Hoosier in Washington. Every Senate Democrat is standing in the way of the Trump/Pence agenda." That line drew wide applause.

Messer also appealed for a united party once the primary ends. That will probably happen, because many Republicans know that in 2012, a gloating Richard Mourdock continued to insult Sen. Richard Lugar and his wing of the party after his primary victory, and the GOP did not unite, with disastrous results. But as you will see, Rokita's aggressive posture toward Messer will make reconciliation a potentially arduous process no matter who wins.

Rokita devolves

■ Rokita seemed to de-evolve throughout the day. In the morning, he came off as jovial and confident. At first he seemed reluctant to talk to the press, but once he did with HPI and the Anderson Herald-Bulletin's Ken de la Bastide, he lightened up and vowed to conduct his campaign in a manner suited to legendary Chicago Bears coach Mike Ditka, or one of "smash mouth football." He said there would be a "surprise" once he took the podium. He accentuated his Lake County credentials, saying he "knows how to beat Democrats," though he has not run for office in his home county.

Addressing the attendees, Rokita definitely went "smash mouth," assailing Messer on the residency question. "You also win by living in Indiana," Rokita said. "I see Joe Donnelly on the plane every week. You're a better leader if you live in this state. You see me in church every weekend. You see me in the grocery store." Rokita added,

"Ask Dick Lugar, ask Evan Bayh how important it is to live in this state." A number of delegates we talked with expressed concerns about Rokita's tenor and pitch, and they were not allayed. But others want to see the aggres-



Luke Messer poses with his college Republican supporters, while Todd Rokita prepares for "smash mouth" politics. (HPI Photos by Mark Curry)

sion, and Rokita delivered for them.

As the day waned and Messer won the vote, a cloud seemed to hang over Rokita and it became evident to HPI photographer Mark Curry in a visual way. Rokita moved into the plaintive "rigged" exercise that fueled Donald Trump in 2016, and called the process "disrespectful." Essentially, Rokita's campaign brand is "defeat the elite," and here he was in a room of the GOP elite, or the establishment. Rokita's "surprise" (and we're guessing here) is the congressman brandishing a Trump MAGA hat. "We need a pro-Trump candidate to beat Joe Donnelly," Rokita said. "That's why the Trump/Pence team from last year endorsed me." That was in reference to an endorsement from 2016 Trump campaign chairman Rex Early and vice chairman Tony Samuel. While his opponents, with the notable exception of Andrew Horning, all acknowledged Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, Rokita's embrace of Trump was emphatic and optical. For those in the party concerned over President Reagan's 11th Commandment being trampled, Rokita let it be known he didn't care.

Rokita assailed HPI for suggesting that he had sought the now-disgraced Steve Bannon's imprimatur, and also expressed concern that the straw poll would be portrayed as an out-sized event. If Rokita had sought Bannon's support (and it's been reported both here in the

state and nationally), he dodged a bullet when it didn't come. Bannon has become an ugly Republican orphan and is radioactive, particularly with President Trump's base. As to the importance of the exercise, it will have little value other than allowing party members and the press to gauge how the candidates and campaigns function. Rokita behaved as expected. It may be the way to win Trumpian support in the primary.

Outsider Braun

■ Braun is campaigning as an outsider, businessman, entrepreneur who has a career full of private sector achievement. He assailed Rokita and Messer for having little to show from their careers in public service and politics. In conversing with Braun, he notes that he is the only modern Republican Senate candidate who has not come "through the feeder system," and he makes a compelling case that in this particular election cycle, that could be a crucial advantage. But Braun's challenge is formatting that into the world of optics and sound bites. His three flights of TV ad are bio material, designed to bring up his name ID, which he now believes is on par if not better than the congressmen. But the visuals – a boss in a manufacturing facility – don't stick out and probably won't have the impact beyond name ID. Braun's challenge is making his optics pop out to primary voters.



In addressing the assembly, the Jasper businessman cited his record, saying of him and his wife, "We made an important decision to go back to our hometown and build a business from scratch. You have to take risks if you're ever going to accomplish things. How do you handle risk? How do you get things done? Trump didn't accept the status quo, didn't accept business as usual. When I saw his signs in southern Indiana six months before the primary, that told me something. People were fed up." So he pays homage to Trump, but told HPI as you will see below that Trump's brash style contrasts with a Hoosier nature of "humility" and civility."

"He personified the general disgust with business as usual," Braun told HPI of Trump. "Where he hurts himself to some degree is his style and presentation. But any of us who have an astute eye try to look through that to see the benefits of how he broke the glass ceiling of establishment politics, and he's definitely done that. That's

why Hoosiers have stuck with him despite some of the issues that pop up now and then that makes him have to talk about that instead of all the good things that have happened."

As for running against Donnelly, Braun said, "Contrast, businessman, outsider, conservative, who has lived in the trenches."

Our impression was that Braun is coming at this race with a completely different trajectory than the congressmen. He may pose some of the starkest contrasts with Donnelly and may present the incumbent with the bigger challenge. What we don't know is how Messer and Rokita might attack Braun, with one story noting that Braun voted in the 2008 Democratic primary, with his response being that he was voting for local races. The opposition research will likely continue with unknown results. Whether Braun can capture the necessary optics to get the job done is the key factor in whether he succeeds.

As for Takami, Hurt and Horning, without funds or a base, it is hard to fathom how one of them can build enough name ID and message to separate from the field, even if Messer, Rokita and Braun end up relatively even. There is historical precedence for that, coming in 1998 when Fort Wayne Mayor Paul Helmke (with 35%) defeated John Price (34%) and Peter Rusthoven (32%) for the nomination against former governor Evan Bayh.

HPI Interview: Messer's momentum

Talking with Messer in a Crowne Plaza hallway filled with many of his supporters, Messer confidently said, "We're very excited about where we are. We think the momentum continues. As you know as head of the state party I ran this event for four or five years. We're proud of all the support from college students from across the state from our grassroots support. We've been able to get grassroots endorsements from every corner of the state. We were excited to win the Bloomington Tea Party straw poll just a few weeks back. We're very excited about the opportunity."

Like Rokita, Messer said he won't be releasing his FEC year-end report until later this month. He and Rokita ended the third quarter with roughly the same amount of money. "We're very comfortable we'll have all the resources we need to be able to compete in this primary," Messer said.

On President Trump, Messer said, "I read all of your commentary so I have a sense of where you are with President Trump. He's still popular with Hoosiers. The reality is most Hoosiers want to see Trump and his agenda succeed. I've taken myself out of the business of being a daily commentator on President Trump's latest tweet, I think that's where most people are. When I talk to everyday Hoosiers they care more about President Trump's agenda than they do about the most recent media drama."

Messer believes Donnelly will be vulnerable on his vote against tax reform. "I think the big challenge for

Joe Donnelly is he's not trying to work with President Trump. His own liberal base is opposed to President Trump and Vice President Pence," Messer said, adding that both are likely to campaign against Donnelly this fall. "It's unlikely he's going to be working with them. The tax cuts were a great step in the right direction. We need to do more this year. I am very optimistic about taking this message to Hoosiers in the fall." He plans to assail Donnelly for his vote against tax reform, saying, "I think the political fallout will come from working families in Indiana. The reality is working families are better off because we cut taxes. It will come to about \$2,000 a year. Joe Donnelly voted against that largely because his political base made him."



Luke Messer conducts a post-straw poll interview. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

Asked when Hoosiers will begin seeing the tax cut in their paychecks, he said, "Folks should see more in their take-home pay in February. The withdrawals will be made by then. If you're a middle class family making \$70,000 a year, your tax cut is between \$1,000 and \$2,000. Working families will be better off. I'm a child of the '80s. In the movie 'Star Wars' they had this thing called the Jedi mantra, when the droids tried to convince you that the reality wasn't true. The problem for

Democrats and the problem for Joe Donnelly is they want to put through that this tax cut doesn't help Hoosier families. But the reality is it helps them at home by bringing more in their paychecks, it helps them by growing the economy; the stock market is rising which is good for the 401K. It helps because more employers are willing to invest and they're hiring more workers and wages are starting to rise, too.

"I think the challenge for the Democratic Party in 2018 that they're going to try and tell everybody that you should ignore a healthy economy and all the success over the past two years because of something he said in a tweet," Messer continued. "I just don't think that's going to work, particularly if our party nominates the right candidate for the U.S. Senate. The key to beating Joe Donnelly ...

we have to outwork Joe Donnelly. We have to be in every corner of the state, from New Albany to Evansville to Terre Haute; just the last two days, we've been to South Bend and to Fort Wayne last week. We have to unite as a party. I've never pursued personal gain. If we as a party unite in Indiana we win. It will be very hard for Sen. Joe Donnelly to beat a united Republican Party in Indiana in 2018."



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HPI Interview: Rokita says 'we're winning'

Rokita insisted that despite the straw poll results, "We're winning. We're polling very well. We are out and about with the highest profile campaign, and the fact of the matter is, I know the state. I'm the only one in this race, including Joe Donnelly, who has been on the state-wide ballot twice with very good results. The state knows me, I know the state and every corner. When I was secretary of state I traveled to all 92 counties every year and a lot of times more than once a year.

That's the kind of work ethic, that kind of retail nature we're going to bring to this race. That's what's going to be necessary to beat Joe Donnelly. The guy I see coming back with me every week on the plane from Washington, D.C., as I do isn't Luke Messer. It's Joe Donnelly. In a way it would be much easier to beat Evan Bayh because he wasn't around. But Joe Donnelly is very retail and you need the right kind of candidate in the field, and I'm the only one."



Todd Rokita calls the straw poll process "disrespectful" after finishing second to Luke Messer. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

On the straw poll itself, he later called the exercise "disrespectful." Before the vote, Rokita said, "This is a party-building exercise. I won some straw polls and I put as much weight into the ones that I won as the ones that I lost. That is zero. All that matters is in May and November. I don't know how you can do this in a straw poll and then say it's a turning point in the race."

On his coming FEC year-end report, Rokita wouldn't announce numbers, but said, "We're still tallying it all up. It's been a very good quarter and it's definitely going to be competitive. If I don't raise another dime we already have enough money to get our message out."

As for Trump's recent incendiary rhetoric and his "shithole countries" comment, Rokita said, "I think we can be a welcoming nation and still put Americans first. I want to make sure when we have immigrants and refugees coming to our country that we're welcoming, but that we also have immigrants and refugees who can assimilate and value. And that's what I take from the president's comments." As for a Trump reelection bid in 2020, Rokita predicted, "I think he gets elected by the same amount of votes in my district and around the state."

Rokita denied reports that he sought Steve Bannon's endorsement, even though he supported the former top aide to President Trump for supporting Roy Moore in the Alabama Senate race, telling Fox59 in December that he would be "comfortable" with Moore in the Senate.

"You've been reporting on that, Howey, and it hasn't been necessarily accurate," Rokita said. "We haven't sought the endorsement of Bannon. You know what I need in this race? I need and expect an open race. I don't need endorsements. I just need my message to get out and have a conversation with Hoosiers and conservatives in the primary. If we do that, if we have an open field, I take this race hands down. I'm the only one where the state knows me."

As for what to expect between now and the primary, Rokita explained, "We're just going to keep working it every day, like we have been, only more. You're going to see a spirited race. You're going to see the ads you're used to seeing from Todd Rokita, about moving this state and country forward. But you're also going to see a candidate who's from Lake County. You can't forget about that. I know how to beat Democrats. This is not a race for a country club Republican. It is not a race for a white shoe Republican. This is going to be a race that Mike Ditka would say 'smash mouth football.' That's how you're going to beat an incumbent Democrat and I'm the only one

who knows how to do it."

Is he concerned about pivoting away from Trump in an attempt to seek independents and moderates in the fall should he win the nomination? "I see it as an opportunity," Rokita said. "I think the way my campaign is going to be run, and has been run, not only appeals to the anxiousness of people who want to get their country back with Trump, but it's also invigorating for the suburban female as well, and I think we're running in that sweet spot, probably not perfectly for either camp, but in a way that is respected by both."

Does Rokita expect a Democratic wave to develop? "I'll preface my remarks by saying my universe is Indiana. If you read the story but voters in any other place than Indiana, I will say, it doesn't apply. I think that in Indiana, whether it's a wave, a very rare wave for Trump in the mid-term or a wave against Trump in Indiana, we're going to be steady Eddy." And he expects Vice President Pence to be campaigning at his side next summer and fall. "Absolutely," Rokita said of Pence. "I asked him for his support and he's reiterated several times he's going to be Switzerland. He's got the federal government to run and I'm going to let him. They both will be here in the general."

HPI Interview: Braun the disrupter

Braun positions himself as the "disrupter" in this race. In his listening tour mid-summer, he said that Republicans knew he was "a business guy, outsider, someone who understands politics, but not tainted by it. Almost

anybody you talk to likes that. But still, that means there's still a tall hill to climb because there are two guys who have been in the business of politics for a long time. All of us are decent conservatives, but mine is different. I've been in the trenches building a business, not through the lens of a politician. There's never been a better time for the party to have one pathway versus the other. My two main opponents have had a life of politics. Sometimes that works and most recently when you're part of an institution with a 22% approval rating, that's the easiest way to distill the question of who would do a better job."

Braun said that his three years in the Indiana House have burnished his governing credentials. "I was on Ways and Means as a freshman, first year, Roads and Transportation and Education," Braun said. "That was a full-time job and I learned a lot of what was going to make a difference for my state. The whole mechanics of how you do things, how you speak up, when you burn your political capital, I will never forget learning as a freshman."

He believes he has the policy chops. While Messer and Rokita have not been successful in repealing Obamacare, Braun said that as a businessman, he's figured out how to lower costs for his employees. "What the insurance companies want to sell you is based on high premiums which have no co-pays, which have no skin in the game," he explained. "When you have no skin in the game, that's the classic underpinning of conservative philosophy. You've got to feel some pain in your decisions. In health care, early on it was an affordable fringe benefit because health care costs were so low. As time marched on, every family wanted the best health care for their employees and their kids. That has resulted in none of the normal principles of transparency and competition being involved. It's been distorted.

"We were tired of hearing the insurance companies tell us we were lucky that our premiums (were) going up 10% every year," he continued. "The only way you were going to fix that was by changing the underwriters. I don't want to get too much in the weeds, but we have not taken the norms as the Bible. We are doing basically the same thing the insurance companies have done but not to make a profit, but to pass those dynamics on to our employees. So they now shop around in the health care system. When they get sick or have a bad accident, we've got the best plan in the country. There's probably not a business in the U.S. that has been able to take the basic things transparently, getting you to buy into your own health care, and can say they've been able to give their employees a great plan that has not cost a nickel more. When the tax thing went through, we took it a step further. We lowered a family's health care costs not by \$100 or \$200, but by \$1,400 a year; that was the culmination of

what we've done to lower costs."

Braun has run three flights of TV and radio ads, and believes his name ID is on par, if not out-performing, the congressmen. "Luke Messer and Todd Rokita's name ID would be on the lower end of the scale for being around politics as long as they've been," he began. "Among Republican primary voters they were only well-known within their districts. So when you take the entire base of Republican primary voters, Todd Rokita was in the mid-20s and Luke's around 20%. They each represent one-ninth of the congressional districts. They are known



Mike Braun sits down for an HPI Interview with Brian Howey. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

beyond their districts, but not much. We thought they could have been in the mid-30s and high-30s. That means there's a big opening for somebody and you don't have to climb that high. What we wanted to do was not wait until January to bridge that gap. We think I'm more well-known throughout the state than the two of them are. Now we can focus on message: Businessman, outsider, entrepreneur, fixes problems in his own company, as opposed to two guys who have been part of the system. I wouldn't know of an accomplishment of either one of them that stands out. I intend to keep articulating that message."

Braun also believes he will establish a better contrast with Donnelly. "It will be a simple example. Joe Donnelly is closely aligned with Pelosi and Schumer as he would be; on cultural issues in general has managed to do a fairly good retail politicking job here in Indiana. Even among the ag industry he has done things better than either Luke or Todd in connecting with certain groups. But it's kind of a sham. Joe Donnelly is an attorney who hasn't practiced much, mostly in politics. With Todd and Luke I can say that generally the same way. I'm a problem solver, an entrepreneur, a business guy. All the handicappers now see that Todd and Luke look very similar to Joe Donnelly and may have issues that Joe does not have.

"I'm coming from a different channel," Braun said.

"I'm not coming from the political world, other than three years. I was on the school board for 10 years, which most people like in terms of a foundation. I don't think there has ever been a clearer distinction, because in Indiana politics, nobody has ever tried on the Senate level to come from the business side, outside of politics. They've gone through the feeder system that's given (Congress) a 20% approval rating across the country, including Indiana."

As for President Trump, Braun expressed a nuanced view of the controversial figure. "Let's put it this way, when he came on the scene, he was very different from most Hoosiers," he began. "We are generally going to have a high dose of humility no matter what we do. In building my business I never wanted to be overstated, I wanted to be understated so I didn't tip off the competition, although I think even President Trump would agree with that tactic when he was building a business."

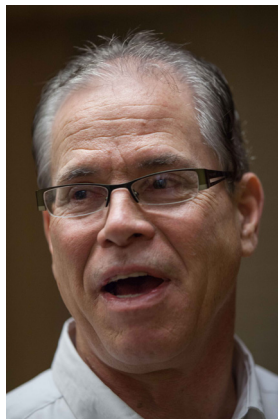
HPI asked, what do you think about his style? "He's made some of the executive orders that we never hear the press give him credit for. It would take me too long to go into them, but a bunch of them palpably help all of us in the business world. He is doing things to change in the business world that I think is healthy, instead of business as usual. I hope at some point we can focus on the good things and not a lot of these side issues that distract from it."

As for the "shithole" comment, Braun said, "That's not the way a Hoosier would say it. But this is his style. That style may accumulatively take away from all the good stuff he's done, though when the press is so out there to see him fail every step of the way, especially when the national press is so resentful that someone like him can accomplish what he did, that has an effect. By his style and the fact that he is a brash presenter, he punches back, and that turns off some people. It shows he's a fighter and he broke the glass ceiling of establishment politics that generated a 20% approval rating. Hopefully that's going to change, because you'll get more guys like me who never had any interest in building a career in politics but will give a term or two. I signed a term-limit pledge. Washington and Jefferson never intended for this to be a career with all the perks and benefits that come with it. Two terms and I'm done."

He expects Donnelly to tie the Republican nomi-

nee to Trump. "I'm a Hoosier. I've got humility. I've got a different kind of style. That's going to show through so graphically. Joe's the kind of guy who is out of sync of Hoosier values, made it in with a fluke in 2012. Had there not been a gap on the part of the opposition, he probably wouldn't be senator. It's going to be clear that he is not representing Hoosier values in general. He's done a good job of kind of serving the state. I'll work as he will if not harder because it's part of my heritage. It's part of the way I've built a business and I think people want that. They're also going to want someone who's done something more

Wednesday, January 17			
Race/Topic (Click to Sort)	Poll	Results	Spread
President Trump Job Approval	Rasmussen Reports	Approve 45, Disapprove 54	Disapprove +9
President Trump Job Approval	Economist/YouGov	Approve 42, Disapprove 54	Disapprove +12
Congressional Job Approval	Economist/YouGov	Approve 11, Disapprove 69	Disapprove +58
2018 Generic Congressional Vote	Economist/YouGov	Democrats 42, Republicans 36	Democrats +6
Direction of Country	Economist/YouGov	Right Direction 39, Wrong Track 53	Wrong Track +14
Monday, January 15			
Race/Topic (Click to Sort)	Poll	Results	Spread
President Trump Job Approval	Gallup	Approve 38, Disapprove 57	Disapprove +19
Direction of Country	Rasmussen Reports	Right Direction 40, Wrong Track 54	Wrong Track +14
Friday, January 12			
Race/Topic (Click to Sort)	Poll	Results	Spread
President Trump Job Approval	Emerson	Approve 39, Disapprove 52	Disapprove +13
2018 Generic Congressional Vote	Emerson	Democrats 45, Republicans 40	Democrats +5



than signing the backside of a government check. I've signed the front side of thousands of checks that's grown nearly 20% a year over 30 some years when the norm is 4% in a booming economy. I think if I just say that, I think people will say, 'Wow, I'm impressed. It's the truth.'"

As to what to expect between now and the primary, Braun said, "We've made up any name recognition deficit in a way that's caught everyone's attention. You don't have to be real politically involved to see there's a big difference between Luke Messer, Todd Rokita and where I'm coming from. I think that will keep fleshing out. They made a big mistake that's created a wide opening for me; the tone of the campaign has been negative, and I won't mention which one, but it's still there."

Braun was obviously referring to Rokita, and he continued, "It's the bull in the china shop, to think you can do that kind of stuff and get by with it. In most cases, it's foolish. We're not going to beat Joe Donnelly if that negative tone continues. I'm sure the guns will be turned at me on issues that have no merit. If that continues, I'm going to stay on the high road. I can stay there because I don't have that political baggage they've been using to talk about one another. When people see that, they're going to see a problem-solver, a feisty entrepreneur, and not a politician, and it will be a clear difference. It's going to be an interesting race."

HPI Primary Horse Race Status: Tossup. ❖

Harper emerges for Dem sec of state race

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana Democrats have their first statewide candidate emerging with Jim Harper of Valparaiso announcing for secretary of state. He made his announcement via a Facebook video.

“It is time for a new generation of leadership in state government. All too often, our state government has sided with those at the very top at the expense of ordinary Hoosiers,” Harper said. “I’m running for secretary of state because we desperately need a fresh perspective at the state house. Our secretary of state must set party politics aside and focus on improving the lives of all Hoosiers.”

Harper told HPI on Wednesday that while others could enter the Democratic race, he had done his “due diligence” and expects to be the nominee. “I spent the last month or so reaching out to Democrats and party leadership. I do not expect anybody else to get in.”

He seeks to face Republican Secretary of State Connie Lawson, who is seeking her second full term. She was originally appointed by Gov. Mitch Daniels to finish the term of Charlie White, who was forced to resign following a felony conviction.

The secretary of state is Indiana’s chief elections officer. “We must make sure that all eligible Hoosiers can cast a ballot,” Harper said. “I’ll fight to expand early voting, establish same-day voter registration, and end political gerrymandering. Under one-party rule, Indiana has become hopelessly gerrymandered. This must change, and the secretary of state must lead the charge.”

Harper said that Lawson should be at the Statehouse this session, pushing election reforms in the General Assembly. “We need leaders in state government,” Harper said. “We need a secretary of state who is going to stand up for average Hoosiers and make sure that government is working for them.

“As secretary of state, I’ll also fight to help middle-class Hoosiers and strengthen

our economy. I’ll work to make it easier for small businesses to do business in our state. And I’ll stand up to companies that attempt to mislead or defraud senior citizens and investors.”

Harper was born and raised in Valparaiso, and resides there. He graduated with highest honors from Indiana University and received his law degree, with high honors, from Georgetown University. After law school, Harper completed a federal judicial clerkship in Indianapolis. He now practices law in Porter County. Harper serves on the board of a non-profit law firm that provides free and reduced-cost legal services to veterans, as well as the Hilltop House, a Valparaiso non-profit that provides early-childhood education and other services to Porter County families. In 2016, Harper was the Democratic nominee for State Senate in the 5th District.

The Democratic nominee for secretary of state will be chosen at the Indiana Democratic State Convention on June 16, 2018.

U.S. Senate

Messer, Braun on track with signatures

The U.S. Senate campaign of U.S. Rep. Luke Messer says it turned in ballot signatures from nine congressional districts last Friday (Howey Politics Indiana). “We’re just waiting to hear from each county clerk on how many are verified,” said Chasen Bullock of the Messer campaign. Mike Braun’s campaign is also on track to qualify for the ballot, according to Joshua Kelley. “Mike Braun has more than the required number of signatures to qualify. All signatures have been submitted to the county clerks around the state, with more coming in the mail to Jasper each day.” Last week, Todd Rokita’s campaign said it submitted more than 9,000 signatures.

Rokita took casino donations

An Indiana congressman who has made repeated calls to “drain the swamp” in Washington collected more than \$160,000 in campaign contributions from gambling interest groups that stand to benefit from legislation he is sponsoring, an Associated Press review found (Slodysko, Associated Press). Republican Rep. Todd Rokita’s collection of such contributions has surged since 2015, when he first sponsored legislation that would end employee protections for tribal casino workers under the National Labor Relations Act. While not illegal, Rokita’s acceptance of the donations gives



Valparaiso Democrat Jim Harper will seek the secretary of state nomination.

the appearance of the pay-to-play Washington politics that he has frequently inveighed against during his Indiana GOP Senate primary campaign. The measure, dubbed the Tribal Sovereignty Act, was previously approved by the House but did not advance through the Senate. On Wednesday, the House included it in a larger bill that passed on a 239-173 vote. Rokita is seeking to challenge Democratic Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly, and has repeatedly attacked him and Rokita's chief GOP primary rival, fellow Rep. Luke Messer, as elite insiders who have stacked the deck against ordinary people for their own benefit. "Lobbyists, bureaucrats, politicians and the media. They've rigged the system. They look out for themselves and look down on us," a narrator ominously intones in one of his campaign ads. Rokita staffers say he's helping Native American workers stand up against union bosses and that he has a long history of supporting legislation to benefit Native Americans.



olis (Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). The conservative advocacy group Americans for Prosperity-Indiana is organizing the event and said Tuesday that all six GOP candidates had accepted invitations to take part. Announced candidates are U.S. Reps. Luke Messer of Greensburg and Todd Rokita of Brownsburg, Jasper businessman Mike Braun, Kokomo attorney Mark Hurt, New Albany college administrator Andrew Takami and Owen County resident and frequent Libertarian candidate Andrew Horning.

Governor

Holcomb sets fund-raising record

As Indiana Republican Chairman Kyle Hupfeter told HPI in December, the Eric Holcomb for Indiana campaign closed 2017 with \$1.71 million cash on hand, setting a new record for funds

Senate debate set for Feb. 20

Six Republican candidates for a U.S. Senate seat representing Indiana are scheduled to debate Feb. 20 in downtown Indianap-

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in the bank for a gubernatorial campaign at the end of a governor's first year in office. "Following an unprecedented 106-day campaign, Gov. Eric Holcomb rolled up his sleeves and got to work for Hoosiers, laying down five big-picture priorities that tackle the biggest challenges facing Indiana now and into the future," said Hupfer, Indiana Republican Party chairman and Holcomb for Indiana treasurer. "We're now one year in, and the results are already making a big difference in the lives of Hoosiers, from a long-term road funding plan to a dedicated team focused solely on addressing our opioid crisis. This record cash-on-hand position shows that Hoosiers across Indiana are excited to show their support for Gov. Holcomb's transformative, solutions-based approach to governing." For background, former Gov. Mitch Daniels' 2005 cash-on-hand was \$1.39 million, and former Governor Mike Pence's 2013 cash-on-hand was \$1.36 million.

Congress

4th CD: Mackey to enter race

A lifelong Lafayette resident will host an event launching his campaign Friday in downtown Lafayette (Purdue Exponent). Democratic candidate Joe Mackey will kick off his campaign at 5 p.m. at the Lafayette Brewing Company, 622 Main St. According to a press release, Mackey will outline what his leadership would bring to the district.

Legislators endorse Steve Braun

A trio of Cass County Republican leaders have endorsed conservative businessman Steve Braun in his race for Congress in Indiana's 4th Congressional District. State Sen. Randy Head (R-Logansport), former State Sen. Tom Weatherwax (R-Logansport) and former State Rep. Rich McClain (R-Logansport) announced their endorsement of Braun Wednesday. "Conservative governance has been good for Indiana thanks to the work of leaders like Randy Head, Tom Weatherwax and Rich McClain," Braun said. "I



want to go to Congress to do what I've done in the private sector, create jobs, secure the border, reduce regulations and cut spending so our kids and grandkids have the same opportunities we've had." "Steve has a proven record of creating jobs in the private sector and as a government leader," said Sen. Randy Head. "He is leading the way to train students for job openings we have right now, and his focus on vocational education will help economies in rural Indiana. We need Steve's work

ethic, business record, and Hoosier common sense working for us in Congress." "I like Steve's top-to-bottom ideas based on good research to serve the large segment of our underserved public school students, those who are not the four-year-college bound students," said former State Rep. McClain.

5th CD: Thornton to seek Dem nomination

Democrat Dee Thornton says "game on," as she seeks to challenge U.S. Rep. Susan Brooks (Howey Politics Indiana). "I'm running because too many people in our district have been left behind by the current representation," Thornton says in a video. "Congresswoman Brooks doesn't play for the home team, she plays for the highest bidder. And I am running to change that. We need representation that will stand up for all Hoosiers and who isn't afraid to sit down with their constituents."

Brooks rebukes Trump slur

U.S. Rep. Susan Brooks issued a rare rebuke to President Trump from the Indiana Republican congressio-



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nal delegation. "I was disappointed to hear the allegations that the President used disparaging language toward Haiti and African nations while discussing immigration," Brooks tweeted. "It is not productive to achieve the broader goal of reforming our broken immigration system." She was reacting on Twitter to comments made by President Trump at the White House with six senators in which he called African nations and Haiti "shithole countries." U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin reported the remark made at the White House, but none of the five Republicans said they heard the remark. President Trump said on Twitter, "The language used by me at the DACA meeting was tough, but this was not the language used." The White House did not deny Trump's use of the word on Thursday.

8th CD: Bucshon files for reelection

U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon has officially filed for reelection (TriState News). Bucshon released a statement on Friday: "After fighting six years to stop the failed Obama-Pelosi-Reid agenda, I've been proud to stand with President Trump this year to advance the conservative agenda that Hoosiers in Southwest Indiana voted for in 2016. During the past year alone we made significant progress to implement President Trump's agenda to make this country stronger and more prosperous. We passed into law historic tax relief for American families, repealed countless Obama-era regulations that would have devastated our coal and farming industries, enacted landmark reform at the Department of Veterans Affairs, making it easier to clean up misconduct in the agency, and authorized the largest pay increase for our troops in eight years."

General Assembly

SD7: Gutwein pulls out of race

A Lafayette attorney who had expressed interest in filling the term of former state Sen. Brandt Hershman, who retired a day before the 2018 General Assembly session started, says he won't go for the position (Bangert, Lafayette Journal & Courier). In a letter sent to friends and supporters this week, Stuart Gutwein said he was backing away, despite his interest in being a state senator, because "it has become clear than my current responsibilities need my attention now." Gutwein was among the potential candidates who emerged after Hershman, a Buck Creek Republican, announced in December that he would resign with three years left in his four-year term. Gutwein said that he'd spent time talking with Republican precinct committee members who will select the next state senator from District 7.

HD2: Bauer files for reelection

State Rep. B. Patrick Bauer filed for

reelection. Bauer is the longest serving legislator in the nation, elected to the House in 1970.

HD38: Teacher to challenge VanNatter

Rep. VanNatter, R-Kokomo, holds the seat in House District 38, representing portions of Carroll, Cass, Clinton and Howard counties. He currently chairs the House Committee on Employment, Labor and Pensions, and serves on House committees for Environmental Affairs and Utilities, Energy and Telecommunications (Kokomo Tribune). One Democratic candidate has emerged in the 38th District, a teacher at Rossville Middle and High School named Tom Hedde, who is also a former Camden clerk-treasurer.

HD43: Felling to seek GOP nod

Terre Haute City Attorney Eddie Felling has become the first Republican to enter the race for 43rd District Indiana state representative (Terre Haute Tribune-Star). "I am very excited and honored to announce my candidacy," Felling said in a news release. "As a Terre Haute native with longstanding family roots in Vigo County, I understand the challenges we face not only in our community but also throughout our great state."

HD44: Fidler announces

Unhappy with state leadership, Kim Fidler will be running for HD44, which covers all of Putnam, and parts of Clay, Parke, Morgan, and Owen counties (Brazil Times). "For too long," she said, "our communities have received too little attention from our current representatives" – something she plans to change.

HD49: Christy Stutzman enters

The wife of former congressman and state lawmaker Marlin Stutzman will run for a seat in the Indiana House (Francisco, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). Christy Stutzman announced Saturday in Goshen that she will seek the Republican nomination in House District 49, the Goshen News reported. Rep. Wes Culver, R-Goshen, does not seek reelection in the eastern Elkhart County district he has represented since 2008. Culver endorsed Stutzman's candidacy Saturday, the Goshen News reported.



Christy Stutzman with former U.S. Rep. Marlin Stutzman and family when he launched his 2016 Senate bid.

HD54: Saunders seeks reelection

State Rep. Tom Saunders announced that he will be a candidate for reelection

in House District 54 in the November election (Rushville Republican). The district includes Henry County and parts of Wayne and Rush counties in east central Indiana.

HD59: Rep. Smith to retire

State Rep. Milo Smith, R-Columbus, announced his retirement from the Indiana House, saying he has decided not to run for another term (McClure, Columbus Republic). "I'm grateful for the opportunity to have served the people of my district; however, after 12 years (I'm) ready to move on to something new," he said in a press release. Smith chairs the House Committee on Elections and Apportionment and serves on the Family, Children and Human Affairs, Select Committee on Government Reduction and the Distressed Unit Appeal Board.

HD61: Pierce to run again

State Rep. Matt Pierce, D-Bloomington, has filed for reelection. He has served the district since being elected in 2002. Pierce hopes to continue being a strong voice for the Bloomington community in the Statehouse. According to a news release, if reelected, Pierce promises to continue addressing the opioid epidemic as a public health crisis; being a strong voice for renewable energy; and working to improve access to affordable health care, properly fund public schools, protect state forest backcountry areas from logging and establish a nonpartisan commission to redraw legislative and congressional districts. "The next General Assembly will make critical decisions about Indiana's future," Pierce said in a news release. "I want to be a strong voice for our community during the important debates that will take place."

HD67: Rep. Frye files

State Rep. Randy Frye, R-Greensburg, filed for reelection Jan. 10 in Indiana House District 67 (Eagle Country Online). The district includes all or parts of Dearborn, Decatur, Jefferson, Jennings, Ohio, Ripley and Switzerland counties. The 2018 session of the General Assembly, which began Jan. 3, is dealing with important issues, including the opioid crisis, education, strengthening Indiana's workforce, and Sunday alcohol sales, among others, Frye said.

Indiana Primary filings

Congress: Democrat: John Roberson (CD3); Tobi Beck (CD4); Dee Thornton (CD5); Curtis Godfrey (CD7). **Republican:** David Dopp (CD1); John Meyer (CD1); Jim Baird (CD4); Steve Braun (CD4); Jason Davis, CD7); U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon (CD8).

Indiana Senate: Republican: Charles Kallas (SD1); Cole Stutz (SD4); Ed Liptrap (SD11); Sen. Andy Zay (CD17); Eric Orr (SD19); Sen. James R. Buck (SD21); Sen. Phil Boots (SD23); Mike Gaskill (SD26);

Sen. Jeff Raatz (SD27); Sen. Eric Bassler (SD39); Sen. Greg Walker (SD41); Sen. Clyde "Chip" Perfect (SD43); Christ Garten (SD45); Sen. Ron Grooms (SD47); Sen. Erin Houchin (SD47); Sen. Jim Tomes (SD49); Steffanie Owens (SD26). **Democrat:** Gary Snyder (SD17); Sen. Tim Lananane (SD25); Dave Cravens (SD26); Derek Camp (SD31); Chris Gambill (SD38).

Indiana House: Republican: Rep. Ed Soliday (HD4); Rep. Michael Aylesworth (HD11); Rep. Sharon Negele (HD13); Rep. Hal Slager (HD15); Rep. Julie Olthoff (HD19); Rep. Jim Pressel (HD20); Rep. Curt Nisly (HD22); Rep. Donna Schaibley (HD26); Rep. Sally Siegrist (HD26); Rep. Jeff Thompson (HD28); Garen Bragg (HD29); Chuck Goodrich (HD29); Rep. Mike Karickhoff (HD30); Rep. Kevin Mahan (HD31); Rep. Tony Cook (HD32); John Prescott (HD33); Rep. Todd Huston (HD37); Rep. Heath VanNatter (DH38); John D. Young (HD47); **Democrat:** Carolyn Jackson (HD1); Rep. B/ Patrick Bauer (HD2); Rep. Earl Harris (HD2); Jayson Reeves (HD2); Rep. Joe Taylor (HD7); Rep. Ryan Dvorak (HD8); Mark Back (HD19); Lisa Beck (HD19); Tom Hedde (HD38); Amie Neiling (HD32); MeChelle Callen (HD40); Evelyn Brown (HD42); Tonya Pfaff (HD43); Mark Bird (HD43); Jorge Fernandez (HD43); Dale Nowlin (DH59); Penny Githens (HD60); Rep. Matt Pierce (HD61); Rep. Terry Goodin (HD66); Steve Schoettmer (HD69); Larry Kleeman (HD74); John Hurley (HD73); Rep. Ryan Hatfield (HD77); Rep. Phil GiaQuinta (HD80); Kyle Miller (HD81); Rep. Carey Hamilton (HD87); John Barnes (HD89); Rep. Gregory Porter (HD96).

Local

Prosecutor Curry to seek reelection

Terry Curry will file candidacy paperwork today as he seeks his third term as Marion County prosecutor. He was first elected in 2010 and reelected in 2014. ❖

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Move to expand cold beer sales fails 9-1

By **SCOTT MILEY**
CNHI Statehouse Bureau

INDIANAPOLIS – A move to expand cold beer sales failed Wednesday but the second of two legislative bills supporting the Sunday sales of alcohol moved forward. A Senate committee voted 9-1 to reject Senate Bill 26 that would have allowed groceries, drug stores and convenience stores to sell beer at any temperature. Indiana is the only state that regulates the sale of beer by temperature. Cold beer is only allowed to be sold in package liquor stores.



The Sunday sales bills were developed from recommendations by an interim Alcohol Code Revision Commission. The bills, both now passing from their Senate or House committees,

would allow sales from noon to 8 p.m. on Sundays.

Last year the commission did not have enough members present for a vote to express support for expanding cold beer sales.

On Wednesday, though, the Senate Public Policy Committee heard Senate Bill 26 from Sen. Phil Boots, R-Crawfordsville, that would allow the expansion of cold beer sales. The bill was not expected to be passed out of the Indiana General Assembly. However, House Public Policy Chair Ron Alting, R-Lafayette, who serves on the code revision commission, decided to hear the cold beer legislation, Senate Bill 26, during a three-hour session. He said he wanted to open dialogue about a singular issue that had not been debated in the Senate.

In opposition to the bill, Jay Singh, the operator of a number of package liquor stores and convenience stores in southern Indiana, said he would have to refit his stores if the state approves cold beer sales in part to update security measures to prevent shoplifting particularly among minors. "Should the state allow cold beer to be sold in convenience stores and gas stations, we would be forced to carry to be competitive," Singh said.

"In our stores in southern Indiana, we have warm beer. We only have those licenses because we're trying to stay competitive with Speedway, the Ricker's, everybody else. Without those licenses, we couldn't be competitive," he said.

Limiting the hours that alcohol could be sold on Sundays has as much to do with the Hoosiers who support the plan as it does with those who don't, according to the state representative who authored one of the bills extending hours.

In June, the Indiana Petroleum Marketers and Convenience Store Association released results of a poll of 600 Hoosiers showing that 65% favored allowing of Sunday carryout sales of alcohol; 70% said they supported

the expansion of cold beer sales. "That means about 1.9 million people don't want Sunday sales. That's twice the population of our capital city. I think it's important to be sensitive to that, represent those folks and limit the hours of Sunday sales," said Rep. Ben Smaltz, R-Auburn, author of House Bill 1051.

The bill passed 12-1 out of the House Public Policy Committee on Wednesday. Similar legislation, Senate Bill 1, has also passed out of its Senate committee.

Marijuana resolution unanimously passes

An Indiana study committee would be asked to look at medical marijuana under a resolution unanimously passed Wednesday by the House Public Health Committee. There is increasing science-based evidence that marijuana and its derivatives may have various medically useful applications, according to the resolution by Rep. Matt Lehman, R-Berne. The use of medical marijuana is approved in 29 states with California being the first in 1996. "I've had a lot of people say if we do this, we'll become a California. I disagree, Lehman said. Lehman cited the process in New Hampshire where a council is to review the program's success and a patient must be registered and cannot cultivate his or her own marijuana. House Resolution 2 was praised by former State Rep. Tom Knollman who has Multiple Sclerosis and spoke in favor of the study. Lehman said he was initially opposed to marijuana use but his views changed after working with Knollman in the House. "I saw a man sitting next to me that was looking for a solution for the pain that he was in in his fight with MS," Lehman said. "So I began my own study on these issues and it led me to one conclusion and that is we really don't know all there is to know about these issues." The resolution also asks the Drug Enforcement Administration to reclassify marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule II, allowing for a wider range of scientific studies.

Firefighter bill passes committee

A bill authored by State Sen. Jon Ford (R-Terre Haute) that would reduce the age from 52 to 50 at which a member of the 1977 Police Officers' and Firefighters' Pension and Disability Fund is eligible to receive full retirement benefits passed out of the Senate Committee on Pensions and Labor by a vote of 8-0 Wednesday (Terre Haute Tribune-Star). Senate Bill 75, authored by Ford, would increase the amount a Fund member would receive for each six months of active service over 20 years. It would also reduce the maximum number of service years that may be used to compute a retirement benefit for a 1977 Fund member from 32 to 28 years.

Senate passes baby boxes

Indiana Senate Republicans announced that Senate Bill 123, which would expand the availability of newborn safety incubators, commonly referred to as "baby boxes," passed the Senate by a vote of 47-0. ❖

Trump and the ‘enemy’ American press

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Last Saturday in Nuevo Laredo, columnist and investigative reporter Carlos Dominguez was waiting at a traffic light with his son, his daughter-in-law and his grandchildren when men armed with knives flung open the car door. The Los Angeles Times reports that Dominguez was stabbed 21 times. He joined the 11 Mexican journalists slain in 2017 fighting drug cartels and public corruption, attempting to do what may be impossible now, which is to prevent a failed state from existing on America’s southern flank.



Worldwide, 80 journalists were murdered in 2017 and another 326 were detained by authorities. Both those numbers are down, mostly because a number of failed states like Syria are too dangerous and the press has pulled back. When that happens, it’s hard for us to know what is actually happening there.

I write about this today because two Arizona Republicans had the courage to call out President Trump for branding the American press “enemies of the people.” As a journalist, an American and a patriot, I’ve conveyed to my friends who support President Trump how utterly offensive to us it is for an American president to so recklessly brand one of the key pillars of democracy. It came before Trump tweeted “Fake News Awards” to CNN, ABC News, New York Times and Washington Post Wednesday night.

We could play the fill-in-the-blank game: How would you feel if someone called lobbyists “enemies of the American people”? Or cops? Or Republicans? Or Sikhs? Or Jews? You get the point. Trump’s base probably won’t.

So we find ourselves at the surreal end of President Trump’s first year in office, and watch in awe that two Republicans, including the 2000 presidential nominee John McCain, have to step up and stand for dignity utterly lacking in this White House.

McCain writes in a Washington Post op-ed, “President Reagan recognized that as leader of the free world, his words carried enormous weight, and he used them to inspire the unprecedented spread of democracy around the world.

“President Trump does not seem to understand that his rhetoric and actions reverberate in the same way. He has threatened to continue his attempt to discredit the

free press by bestowing ‘fake news awards’ upon reporters and news outlets whose coverage he disagrees with,” McCain continued. “Whether Trump knows it or not, these efforts are being closely watched by foreign leaders who are already using his words as cover as they silence and shutter one of the key pillars of democracy.”

McCain continues, “Trump’s attempts to undermine the free press also make it more difficult to hold repressive governments accountable. For decades, dissidents and human rights advocates have relied on independent investigations into government corruption to further their fight for freedom. But constant cries of ‘fake news’ undercut this type of reporting and strip activists of one of their most powerful tools of dissent. We become better, stronger and more effective societies by having an informed and engaged public that pushes policymakers to best represent not only our interests but also our values. Journalists play a major role in the promotion and protection of democracy and our unalienable rights, and they must be able to do their jobs freely. Only truth and transparency can guarantee freedom.”

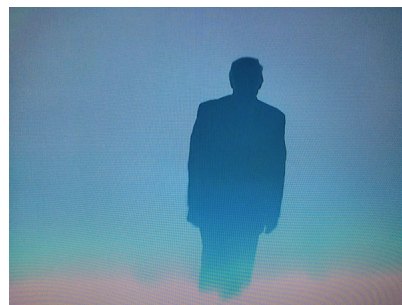
Sen. Jeff Flake, a former kindred conservative friend of Vice President Mike Pence, is retiring after unrelenting criticism from President Trump. He took to the Senate floor on Wednesday to compare the President of the United States to the Soviet tyrant Joseph Stalin, who murdered tens of million of his own people and enemies of his police state.

“Mr. President, near the beginning of the document that made us free, our Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident...’” Flake began. “So, from our very beginnings, our freedom has been predicated on truth. The founders were visionary in this regard, understanding well that good faith and shared facts between the governed and the government would be the very basis of this ongoing idea of America. As the distinguished former member of this body, Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, famously said: ‘Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own

facts.’ During the past year, I am alarmed to say that Senator Moynihan’s proposition has likely been tested more severely than at any time in our history.”

Flake continued, noting that “2017 was a year which saw the truth — objective, empirical, evidence-based truth — more battered and abused than any other in the history of our country, at the hands of the most powerful figure in our government. It was a year which saw

the White House enshrine ‘alternative facts’ into the American lexicon, as justification for what used to be known simply as good old-fashioned falsehoods. It was the year in which an unrelenting daily assault on the constitutionally protected free press was launched by that same White House, an assault that is as unprecedented as it is unwarranted. ‘The enemy of the people,’ was what the president



of the United States called the free press in 2017.

"Mr. President," Flake then said, "it is a testament to the condition of our democracy that our own president uses words infamously spoken by Josef Stalin to describe his enemies. It bears noting that so fraught with malice was the phrase 'enemy of the people,' that even Nikita Khrushchev forbade its use, telling the Soviet Communist Party that the phrase had been introduced by Stalin for the purpose of 'annihilating such individuals' who disagreed with the supreme leader."

Hoosiers see Holcomb better than Pence

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – Eric Holcomb is a better governor than Mike Pence. Polls show that Hoosiers agree with that.

Pence was sagging in approval ratings and faced a tough race for reelection as governor back when he escaped to the national stage as the Republican nominee for vice president and then was elected to that office on the winning ticket with Donald Trump.



Holcomb was elected governor in 2016 after a series of startling political developments: Named lieutenant governor to fill a surprise vacancy, selected as the Republican governor nominee after Pence was picked for vice president, and then winning over a Democratic front-runner amid

the Trump tsunami in Indiana. He now is popular in the polls; a Politico/Morning Consult poll shows Holcomb with 53% approval, just 21% disapproval.

Holcomb's State of the State address shows why he is more popular as governor than Pence. His low-key, pragmatic approach, avoiding partisan rhetoric and divisive issues that appeal to some political base, was welcomed by the legislators with whom he must work to get things done. And that approach did get things done in his first year with approval of a massive and popular infrastructure plan so needed by the state but rejected by Pence because it meant a tax increase to pay for it.

In contrast, Pence often used his State of the State address to sound themes appealing to conservatives in Iowa and New Hampshire rather than to address problems of Hoosier constituents. Pence, in leaving Congress to run for governor, did so to burnish his executive credentials for president. He was always running for president. Still is.

In that quest, Pence stumbled into controversy in pushing a "religious freedom" act that came to be ridiculed

By the time Flake finished speaking, he had summoned the warning of "1984" author George Orwell: "The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it."

I've had Hoosier Republicans question why I write the way I do about President Trump. My consistent response is that he lies all the time, and he runs an operation so unprofessional, that it is unbecoming to the White House where the best and brightest among us should be toiling to preserve the cornerstones of democracy. ❖

as freedom to discriminate. He wasn't seeking to address some serious problem in Indiana. He was addressing conservatives elsewhere who vote in presidential primaries. He alienated state legislators in his own party who wanted to deal with concerns in their communities, not concerns of conservative ideologues elsewhere.

Holcomb isn't running for president. Doesn't want to. Never will. He just wants to be a good governor. He got off to a great start in his first year. Brian Howey of Howey Politics Indiana, in picking Holcomb No. 1 in his annual Power 50 list for Indiana, said the governor was off to about as good a start as he could remember, especially with that infrastructure program to "pour concrete and spread asphalt across our highways and bridges for the coming generation."

Some critics contend that Holcomb looks good now only by comparison with Pence and that he will face difficulties ahead. Well, sure, political figures are like football coaches in always being evaluated initially with the persons they replaced. A great first season doesn't mean undefeated seasons ever after. But getting off to a successful start sure beats the opposite.

Holcomb did blunder at the close of his first year in handling the warning by the Department of Child Services director that his administration was slashing the operation "in ways that all but ensure children will die." The dispute with the director should have been handled better and before such a dire warning became public. He also should have faced the problem more directly in his address, with action, not just promises to be transparent, in looking at the situation. He can recover with decisive action on children in danger.

Critics also note that while Holcomb has highly favorable poll numbers – plus 32% in favorable over unfavorable in that Politico/Morning Consult finding – he also has a large percentage of Hoosiers saying they have no opinion or don't know him. That was 26% in the Politico poll. Yes, that could be a problem if the undecided begin to rate him unfavorably. However, it could be a plus if they get to know him more favorably, finding him more than just a little bit better than Pence. ❖

Colwell has covered Indiana politics over five decades for the South Bend Tribune.

Buncich's stunning 'death sentence'

By RICH JAMES

MERRILLVILLE – The future of two long-time popular Lake County politicians headed in different directions over the last week. On the brighter side, former Lake Circuit Court Judge Lorenzo Arredondo announced that he was running for county clerk in the Democratic primary.



Arredondo retired as judge in 2010 after 24 years on the bench. He didn't stay out of the limelight for long. Arredondo last year was the Democratic nominee for attorney general. He lost. No one, perhaps, knows the operation of the clerk's office – which is one of the largest in

the county – better than Arredondo because of his tenure as judge. Additionally, Arredondo said that he knows each of the judges in the county's massive judicial system.

Clerk Mike Brown is prohibited from running again because of term limits. He instead is running for sheriff. Arredondo thus far is unopposed on the Democratic ballot for clerk.

While one man in his 70s is vying for public office, another is headed to prison. Former Lake County Sheriff John Buncich this week was sentenced to 15½ years in federal prison on a public corruption conviction connected to bribes from towing company operators. For Buncich, 72, the sentence almost assures that he will die in prison. The sentence was imposed by District Court Judge



James T. Moody, who has a reputation for being extremely tough when it comes to public corruption cases. Moody, who has been on senior status for several years, spends a great deal of time at a vacation home in Florida.

Buncich seemed stunned when Moody announced the sentence. So commanding is Moody that he ordered Buncich into immediate custody. In past public corruption cases, as is pretty much the norm across the country, Moody has allowed defendants time to get their

lives in order before reporting to prison.

Buncich was elected sheriff four times, more than anyone in county history. He also was Lake County Democratic chairman until March 2015 when he did not seek reelection while under indictment. Buncich cast the tie-breaking vote to elect James L. Wieser county chairman. ❖

Rich James has been writing about politics and government for almost 40 year. He is retired from the Post-Tribune.

Hoosiers should like old growth forest bill

By MORTON MARCUS

MERRILLVILLE – A friend is trying to examine the big issues facing our nation and the solutions available to us. I suggested that catalog include land use which reflects and often causes many of the dilemmas Americans have failed to resolve. We complain about congestion in our urban areas while bemoaning the decline of rural areas. This is a land use issue.



The high costs of health care are a persistent concern. Our sedentary life style contributes to our need for health care, but we have organized our activities and our infrastructure to avoid exercise that involves exertion. This too is a land use issue.

The wild fires, mudslides, and floods of California are largely problems stemming from land use decisions made in the public and private sectors. Americans delight in the variety and stimulation of the built world. Yet, simultaneously, we seek to escape the pressures, noise, and excesses of what we call civilization. We want access to places offering us solitude and the refreshment of nature. This desire can be satisfied by altering our land use patterns.

For this reason Hoosiers should applaud the efforts of three state senators who authored SB 275, a bill to require the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to set aside 30% of each state forest as an Old Forest Area.

Sens. Eric Bassler, #39 (Washington), Jon Ford, #38 (Terre Haute), and Eric Koch, #44 (Bedford) understand that our state forests are part of our heritage and our future. As is well known, Indiana was a land of forests and wetlands when it became a state. Over decades

forests were cut down and wetlands drained for farming. The state seal depicts a pioneer chopping down a tree while the ambiguous sun either rises or sets.

Given the 19th century mindset and a belief in inexhaustible national resources, the Indiana legislature did not begin a state forest program at the start of the 20th century. By the Great Depression, many farmers had so denuded their land that the dangers of flooding were magnified while the nutrients of the soil drained from barren fields. The state then stepped in and expanded the state forest program, providing immediate economic relief to land owners with diminished assets. It opened an opportunity for future generations to restore and protect forested land.

Eighty years ago, many Hoosiers thought of forests only as suppliers of wood and food products. Today, we recognize that manufacturing wood products is a diminished industry and few families depend on the forests for food. Therefore, it is time to rethink our state forests. Setting aside 30% as Old Forest Areas provides



recreational and scientific benefits. At the same time, other forested areas can be logged appropriately to support local wood-using industries while allowing a diverse set of recreational uses. SB 275 deserves passage to open a new era in land use for Indiana and to meet our obligations to future generations. ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist, writer, and speaker who may be reached at mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com.

Photography With Punch

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Dave Bangert, Lafayette Journal & Courier:

The folks at Hoosiers for Rokita were cringing this week when a signature legislative win for U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita turned back on him with the sort of follow-the-money accusations he's centerpieced in a volatile U.S. Senate race all about insidious lobbying, money-fed politics, rigged systems and business as usual in Washington, D.C. They paint a picture of the Brownsburg Republican chasing a matter of principle for an underserved part of the American public when he fought for a provision in national labor law Native American casinos have been denied for more than a decade. That, Rokita's team says, is right in his conservative wheelhouse. But the campaign finance numbers, first reported by Brian Slodysko of The Associated Press, paint a conflicting picture of Rokita, our 4th District congressman who made "Defeat the Elite" his campaign mantra. This is a guy whose ads literally show a hand of pay-to-play special interests slowly feeding a stack of \$20 bills to a congressman standing in front of the Capitol building. Here you go, via Federal Elections Commission data sorted by the Center for Responsive Politics: Through 2014, dating to his first election to Congress in 2010, Rokita scratched up a single, \$1,000 donation to his campaign from Indian gaming interests. In the two-year fundraising cycles that followed, Rokita shot up the charts when it came to Indian gaming contributions. In the 2016 and 2018 cycles, lobbying money from Indian gaming amounted to more than \$149,000 so far. What changed? In 2015, Rokita was asked to carry a bill called Tribal Labor Sovereignty Act, which had stalled for more than a decade. Versions of the bill looked to amend the National Labor Relations Act, so tribal nations would have the same exemptions federal, state and local governments have when it comes to dealing with unions and collective bargaining. "It is an Achilles' heel for Todd Rokita," said Jay McCann, a political science professor at Purdue University. "Candidates do set the standard on which they will be judged. By styling himself as this sort of campaign of grievances, the way Donald Trump did, he's told voters he's one thing. ... If that's the way he decides to run, he certainly leaves himself open. Because, the record of campaign money says that maybe he's not all that." ❖



Michael Gerson, Washington Post: Sometimes it is necessary to begin with the obvious. The claim that America needs more Norwegian immigrants and fewer Africans from "shithole countries" is racist. It is not the same as arguing for a higher-skilled immigrant pool. That argument might go something like: "We need a higher-skilled immigrant pool." President Trump, according to the compelling weight of evidence, treated African countries (along with Haiti and some other nations) as places of misery filled with undesirable people. That is a prejudice based on a stereotype rooted in invincible ignorance. Why not assume that men and women arriving from poor, op-

pressed and dangerous countries would love the United States all the more? Because, well, they are those kind of people. What kind of people? The ones who don't look like Norwegians. On this issue, Trump has not earned a single benefit of the doubt. His racial demagoguery in the Central Park Five case ... his attribution of Kenyan citizenship to Barack Obama ... his references to Mexican migrants as rapists and murderers ... his unconstitutional attempt at a Muslim ban ... his moral equivocation following the deadly protests in Charlottesville ... his statement, reported by the New York Times, that Nigerians would never "go back to their huts" after seeing America ... all of these constitute an elaborate pattern of bigotry. ❖

T.A. Frank, Vanity Fair: Can avert our eyes, at least for three minutes, from the direct Trump sun and contemplate instead the Mike Pence moon. It's quiet, waxing and waning, giving off a soft, reflected light. We can't know the thoughts of the man in the Pence moon unless we go, Michael-Wolff-style, into his head. If any time permits such an exercise, it's now. You're Mike Pence. And here's what you're feeling these days. Primarily, you feel relief. The Wolff book is driving the chief, i.e. Donald Trump, POTUS, crazy, but you came out fine. You didn't dish, and neither did your staff. Wolff called you a "point of calm" and said you were "almost absurdly happy" to be Trump's veep. Sure, he got back at you with phrases like "convenient meekness" and "extreme submissiveness," and the Bannonites also called you a "non-event." But so what? Oh no—insults from Wolff and the Bannonites! The boss loves those guys. Amid your sarcasm, you remember that sarcasm isn't your style. You resolve to be better than that. Wolff's book was a gift for another reason. You're still trying to contain the damage from The New York Times article last August suggesting you were running a shadow campaign for 2020. They might as well have pasted a "Purge me" sign on your back. Now you have to over-compensate to cover your rear. You hope the boss heard your full-throated attack on Wolff's book when you were interviewed by Dana Loesch, along with the line about how "before the next seven years is out, we're going to make America great again." Get that, boss—seven years? What made the Times piece so unfair is that you've always known that job one for you, no matter how much it hurts, is loyalty. It's also jobs two and three. Job four is to lie low, which is a subset of jobs one through three. You do not grant interviews, unless it's to the safest of outlets and for the most specific of purposes. It's not that the loyalty is always easy. With such a strange boss, you and Karen both pray and wrestle daily with the question of what God wants from you. You're a devout Christian, and you care about marriage vows. The chief isn't, and doesn't. ❖

Bonaventura joins AG Hill's staff

INDIANAPOLIS — Attorney General Curtis Hill's office announced Wednesday that Mary Beth Bonaventura will join his staff next week as special counsel (Associated Press). He said in a statement that Bonaventura's "breadth of experience and depth of knowledge" will benefit Indiana's citizens. Hill's office did not respond to a question over whether he is deliberately trying to stoke a feud with Gov. Eric Holcomb by hiring her. "I'm extremely pleased to bring aboard a leader of such caliber as Judge Bonaventura," Hill said in a statement. "Her breadth of experience and depth of knowledge will continue to prove indispensable assets to the citizens of Indiana as she steps into this next phase of her distinguished public service." Holcomb's office declined to comment on Hill's hiring of Bonaventura. "We wish her well in this new chapter," said spokeswoman Stephanie Wilson. Mike Murphy, a Republican strategist and former state lawmaker, said it could be "a mercy hiring" or it could be that "Hill is trying to stake out ground as the most powerful Republican officeholder in the state." "What he doesn't understand is the governor always wins," Murphy said.



Young opposes net neutrality repeal

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Senator Todd Young says he will oppose a resolution to block the repeal of net neutrality (WISH-TV). Senate Democrats say they have already secured 50 votes, and need one more for the measure's passage. Attorney generals for 21 states are suing to block the repeal of net neutrality rules. The rules barred companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon from slowing internet traffic and favoring their own sites and apps.

Indiana is not one of the states involved in the lawsuit. Senator Young's office released the following statement about his intentions to vote against the measure: "Senator Young believes the internet should remain free from government intrusion and burdensome regulations that stifle innovation and access. He will vote against the measure."

Pence pays \$200k in legal fees

INDIANAPOLIS — Vice President Mike Pence reported Wednesday paying more than \$200,000 in leftover gubernatorial campaign funds to the Indianapolis law firm that is handling the release of his gubernatorial emails (Groppe, USA Today). The expenditure was included in his campaign finance disclosure report for the second half of 2017 that was filed with the Indiana Secretary of State's Office. Pence had been running for re-election as governor in 2016 when Donald Trump made him his running mate. Pence's emails became a subject of controversy last year when IndyStar disclosed that he had used a personal AOL account to conduct state business, sometimes discussing sensitive security issues.

8k doses of pain meds missing

NEW CASTLE — More than 8,000 doses of a frequently abused pain medication are missing from an Indiana prison (Cook, IndyStar). Officials at New Castle Correctional Facility discovered 8,114 missing doses of gabapentin last month. The medication is used to treat nerve pain and seizures, but is often abused in prisons and, increasingly, in the outside world. The missing drugs raise concerns about security and prescription practices in Indiana's prisons, where a new private company recently took over medical and pharmacy services for the state's 26,000 prisoners under a \$309 million, three-year contract.

The Indiana Department of Correction is investigating the matter.

Shutdown looms with no deal

WASHINGTON—Republicans and Democrats laid the groundwork to blame each other for a potential government shutdown this weekend as partisan crossfire intensified and negotiations for an immigration deal made little headway (Wall Street Journal). The government's funding expires at 12:01 a.m. Saturday and House GOP leaders plan to bring to the floor Thursday or Friday a short-term spending bill to keep the government running through Feb. 16. But the measure faces hurdles in both chambers of Congress and little time to clear them.

Holcomb to make South Bend news

INDIANAPOLIS — Gov. Eric Holcomb will Thursday join officials from South Bend International Airport and the St. Joseph County Airport Authority for an economic development announcement (Brown, Inside Indiana Business). The South Bend Tribune reports there has been speculation of an announcement of a new international flight to a destination such as the Bahamas since the airport became an international airport in 2014. The announcement is scheduled for 2 p.m. at the airport's information office.

Henry received late campaign donations

FORT WAYNE — An examination of Mayor Tom Henry's annual campaign finance report for 2017 revealed \$29,000 in campaign contributions from engineering and law firms just days before Fort Wayne City Council's new pay-to-play ordinance took effect. The three largest donors are Trier Law Office, Faegre Baker Daniels LLP, and Beers Mellers Backs & Salin LLP at \$5,000 each.