

# Getting the Word Out

## Rep. Pence on Communicating and Governing

By Tom Schuman

**M**ike Pence has run for Congress six times. In between two failed attempts (1988 and 1990) and four successful campaigns in the Sixth Congressional District beginning in 2000, Pence hosted his own radio and television programs in Indiana. That experience offers many benefits that he brings to his service in Washington. Pence has received increased national attention as a conservative leader in Congress. He represents the following counties: Wells, Adams, Blackford, Jay, Madison, Delaware, Randolph, Henry, Wayne, Rush, Fayette, Union, Decatur and Franklin, as well as some of the residents in Dearborn, Bartholomew, Johnson, Shelby and Allen counties. During the first full week of the 110th Congress, Pence took time to share his insights with *BizVoice*®.

**BizVoice**®: Can you talk about the importance of a group like the Republican Study Committee (more than 100 House Republicans organized for the purpose of advancing a conservative social and economic agenda) and the impact on you of being able to serve as chairman over the past two years?

**Rep. Mike Pence:** “It was a great opportunity for me in my third term in Congress to lead the largest caucus in the House of Representatives. The Republican Study Committee is the leading voice for limited government, traditional moral values and fiscal discipline on Capitol Hill. It was an opportunity during some tumultuous times for the Republican majority. I think it was a great privilege and a great learning experience, and I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”



**Congressman Mike Pence surveys the border between the United States and Mexico.**

**BV:** How about your decision to seek the House leadership post – how things just seemed to happen very quickly after the elections and what do you take away from that experience?

**Pence:** “I can tell you that my decision to run for minority leader (he lost to John Boehner of Ohio in a 168-27 vote on November 17) was based solely and exclusively on my belief that sometimes it’s put up or shut up time. Over the last six years I have been one of the harshest critics of the fiscal record under Republican control. I have opposed leaders of my own party on matters of education, the Medicare entitlement and budget issues. I thought that when American people sent a deafening message of change on Election Day 2006 that I had a duty to step forward and offer my colleagues a fresh start and a completely new direction. And in the end, throughout the course of that nine-day campaign, I received a great deal of encouragement and affirmation, but ultimately my colleagues chose to remain across the board with the leader that we had. I completely respect that.”

**BV:** Let’s talk about your communication efforts, your methods, ways you reach out to your constituents and others. Prior to serving in Congress, you did some radio and TV hosting. How does that impact the way you take on the challenge now of communicating with so many people?

**Pence:** “I really believe that if you can’t communicate, you can’t govern and our efforts on Capitol Hill have been greatly shaped by my experience as a radio and talk show host. I have tried to take the attitude that we want to take strong principled, conservative stands, but we also want to spend a great deal of our energy explaining those stands first to the people we serve and then to the broader public debate. We have invested a fair amount of energy in doing that.

“In some respects, while Congress is in the legislative business, it’s also America’s water cooler.

It's where we send 435 men and women to get together and talk through the nation's problems. The public looks on and listens in and watches the debate on the floor and watches the debate on television programs and radio. My ambition is to vote right and to make sure the people that I represent have a clear understanding of the principles that are governing my voting. I would say that my years in radio and television shape what I do every day."

**BV:** Congressman, you have a radio studio set up in your office. What does that allow you to do?

**Pence:** (While serving as a talk show host), "I watched the technology develop that would allow a broadcast signal to go over the phone lines, a digital broadcast signal. I arrived on Capitol Hill, and I was invited to come down to the Republican caucus offices for a radio interview. I walked in assuming that there would be a studio there – there was no studio. They had a phone waiting for me in a booth. I said, 'We have this new technology where you can send a broadcast quality signal back to the radio station.'

"We looked into it and we (his office) acquired the first digital line and broadcast equipment. I'm told at least 75 members of Congress now have such equipment in their offices. It will probably be standard issue in another five years. That was a material, practical example of how I brought my years of radio and television to Capitol Hill in an effort to again break down the barriers."

**BV:** Some of the other communications avenues today that are part of the mix include blogs and podcasts. Talk about how you try to incorporate those elements.

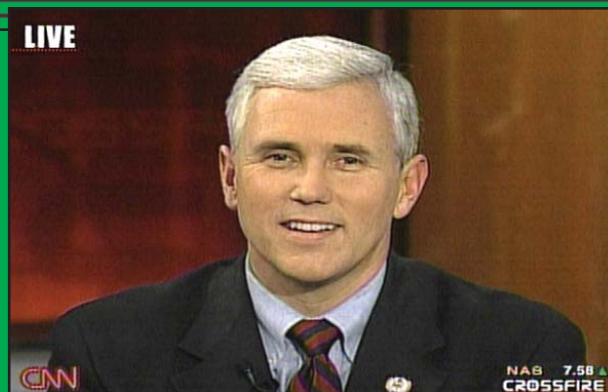
**Pence:** "Not only did we put the first broadcast studio on Capitol Hill, I'm also the first one in Congress to have a blog on my web site. Now there's been an explosion of blogs. And there should be. I have actually filed blog entries from Baghdad. I have filed blog entries from (presidential) funerals. It's just another way of breaking down the barriers between the public servant and the served."

**BV:** What kind of feedback do you get from here in Indiana and from your colleagues? What are they saying to you?

**Pence:** "Back home is what matters to me and those people genuinely appreciate how aggressive we are in communicating. Because I do about 50 town hall meetings a year, public events and try to get home on a very regular basis, I think it is more for my mental health than constituent services. If I don't see a corn or soybean field about every week, I get a little grumpy.

"People who are adept (at) surfing the Internet give us pretty high marks. And, on behalf of my staff, we have actually won some national awards for our web site since our very first term in Congress.

"Again, I go back to if you can't communicate, you can't govern. I really believe in principled Republican leadership, but I also believe the only way that is possible is if you spend a great



Pence appears on CNN during the 2004 Republican National Convention.

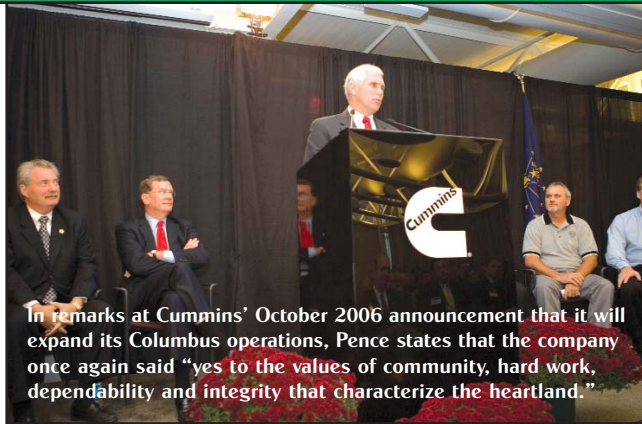


A soldier at Camp Atterbury receives recognition.



Pence meets with President Bush in the Oval Office.

deal of time explaining your voting record to the people you serve. I think you can take the tough stands on a principled basis so long as people back home understand why you are doing it. You know some of these are pretty tough calls. I just opposed an increase in the minimum wage, but I am making sure my constituents have full access to my basis for doing that. That is the driving force behind about a dozen radio shows we've done this week, the blog entries, the press releases and all of that."



In remarks at Cummins' October 2006 announcement that it will expand its Columbus operations, Pence states that the company once again said "yes to the values of community, hard work, dependability and integrity that characterize the heartland."

**BV:** How about the other side of communications, constituents reaching out to you. What do you say to your constituents and others about the best methods, practices and approaches when they want to communicate with you in Washington?

**Pence:** "I tell them I read all of my mail, including my e-mail. I never get on a flight to Indiana that I don't have a big thick folder of mail to go over. Harry Truman gave that advice after having been president. He said it was one of the reasons he was able to keep his feet on the ground and touch the American people. I think he had two pieces of advice. He said, 'Say your prayers and read your mail.' I read my mail, and I say my prayers too."

"You don't get a lot of 'atta boys.' There aren't a lot of constituents that will sit down and tell you they were thinking about what a great guy you were. So, usually about nine letters out of 10 are pretty critical. But even the critical letters, they are very informative; they help me to understand where we could do a better job explaining our positions. And, of course, we respond. Our staff will send a personalized response from me that details my positions on issues."

"Certainly with the advent of e-mail that's increased, but one way we control that flow is we don't respond by e-mail. If we get a letter by e-mail, for instance, we put it in the mail system. You tend to play a little bit of ping-pong on the Internet by e-mail. We simply don't have the manpower to have a running dialogue with thousands of Hoosiers. We certainly can get a letter out within 10 days of when we receive their note."

**BV:** Can you give a broad overview of what you expect in this Congress as far as legislation that is going to impact the business community?

**Pence:** "I think we are off to a rocky start. The Democrat majority has come out of the gate with wage and price controls. I think that we are going to see an environment that unfortunately is not going to be putting a premium on the real world challenges that face small business owners and family farms. We just fought a losing battle today on the minimum wage. The House actually passed a 41% increase in the minimum wage without any tax

breaks, without any breaks in regulations, without a training wage. And without acknowledging the unbroken history in the increases of the minimum wage that suggest that for every 10% increase, 2% of entry level jobs are eliminated in this country."

"Before the end of this week (in mid-January), we will be treated to the passage of enormous price

controls in the Medicare Part D. It will be couched as giving the government the ability to negotiate prices with the drug companies, but I think most common sense Hoosiers know that when the government negotiates with the private sector, it's like the alligator negotiating with the chicken. The government will dictate what the prices are. I think it should be a bit of a wake-up call to American enterprise to see that the new Democrat majority spent its first week in power passing wage and price controls. We are going to do our level best from the minority to expose those policies and practices. But I think more government and more regulation, and ultimately higher taxes, will be the legacy of what I hope is a short-lived Democrat majority on Capitol Hill."

**BV:** You have a wide-ranging district, but I want to ask you about Columbus. Why is it such a special place and discuss its role in the bigger Indiana business community?

**Pence:** "Columbus is where I grew up. It's where I make my home in Indiana now and it will always be home for however many turns I get around the sun. But I'm pretty biased, so I think Columbus is truly a remarkable small town in America. In a very real sense, it is that "Athens of the Prairie" that *Life* magazine called it. That is largely due to the beneficence of the late J. Irwin Miller, who built an extraordinary Fortune 500 company by the name of Cummins. He was not content simply to make diesel engines; he wanted to make a difference in the community."

"Decades ago he put forward an astonishing offer that for (owners of) any building, public or private, that would permit him to select the architect, he would provide the architectural fees. As a function of that, last time I checked there are more examples of modern architecture in this little Midwestern city than any city in the world except for Paris."

"With the presence of a truly international business in that small town, I think sometimes people will meet me and be quite surprised that I am from a small town in the Midwest. Cummins was one of the first companies in America to truly be aggressive about affirmative action. We had a remarkably diverse community for such a small town in the Midwest in the '60s and '70s as a result of Cummins' hiring practices, and I just think my life has been enriched from it."

**INFORMATION LINK**

**Resource:** Rep. Mike Pence at <http://mikepence.house.gov>