

Congressional Count

Guest Experts Break Down Washington Races

We know from history (including as recently as this year's primary season) that election momentum and political fortunes are ever-changing. What is taking place in July may well have a totally different outlook in late October. And events outside our state certainly play a major role in those eventual outcomes. Nevertheless, deadlines are deadlines and we found three avid political pundits willing to offer their early insights.

We asked:

Unexpected incumbent exits have led to more intrigue than normal in Indiana's congressional elections this fall. As you take an early look at November 2, what do you see as key factors in determining who will represent Hoosiers in Washington; (and/or for those willing to step out on a limb) who wins the big races?



Trying to predict elections can be like calling my wife to tell her I'll be home late because I'm out with the guys having cigars and martinis. If she's watching the "Bachelorette," I'm in good shape; if not, it's couch city. So trying to predict the 2010 mid-term elections will pretty much depend on the mood of the voters come November.



Right now, voters are mad – and rightfully so. Unemployment is up, jobs are scarce and voters are looking to take their wrath out on someone; but if past is prologue, at the end of the day Hoosiers will go with what they know. For all the talk of change, with the exception of the 9th Congressional District, current or former office holders all won their primaries. Dan Coats, Dan Burton, Jackie Walorski, Mark Souder (although he didn't stay long and was replaced by Marlin Stutzman) and Todd Rokita all won their races and the challengers, particularly the Tea Party candidates, didn't even come close.

Moving to the national level, the wind favors the Republicans for now, but this is the Midwest. If you don't like the weather, just wait 10 minutes. Democrats Joe Donnelly and Baron Hill both have fund-raising advantages over their challengers. Even Tom Hayhurst, who is running against Stutzman, has a cash-on-hand lead. At the Senate level, Coats and Brad Ellsworth are virtually tied (in the money race).

I covered the Republican and Democratic state conventions and both parties were pretty energetic; albeit their motivations were different. Republicans reminded me of Democrats in 2008, and the Dems reminded me of the Republicans in 2002. The GOP seemed more optimistic about its chances, while Democrats did seem more motivated by the fear of losing.

At the end of the day, it's all going to come down to who comes out (to vote). The electorate is in a funny mood right now. So when November 2 comes rolling around, I would not be surprised if the candidates who win are the ones who called while the "Bachelorette" was on.

By Abdul Hakim Shabazz

Morning show host on WXNT 1430-AM Indianapolis

Indiana's key congressional races this fall will be like the fierce contests of 2006, not the less-competitive contests of '08. So, brace for a barrage of those nice, friendly TV ads aimed at eviscerating the opponent.

Just as in '06, Indiana will be a battleground in determining control of Congress; this time, however, determining whether Republicans take control from Democrats.

Four years ago, it was Democrats seeking to take control of the House from Republicans. And they did, with Indiana playing an important part. Three Democratic challengers – Joe Donnelly in the 2nd District, Brad Ellsworth in the 8th and Baron Hill in the 9th – defeated Republican congressmen in races targeted nationally by both parties. Millions of dollars poured into the state, much of it for negative TV spots.

Donnelly, Ellsworth and Hill easily won re-election in '08 in a year so Democratic that Barack Obama carried Indiana, the first Democratic presidential nominee to do so since 1964. Republicans didn't put up much of a battle in those key House districts.

They are battlegrounds again.

It's not exactly as Indiana goes, so goes the House. But Republicans count on regaining those three seats or at least a couple in their mathematics for House control.

Donnelly and Hill face determined challengers. Republicans also target the 8th District, with Ellsworth running statewide for senator rather than seeking re-election to the House.

Indiana also could be crucial in the outside chance of Republicans gaining control of the Senate. A year ago, political wisdom was that Democrats couldn't lose the Senate and that Sen. Evan Bayh couldn't be beat in Indiana. Bayh skedaddled. Republican Dan Coats now leads Ellsworth in the Senate race, and Republicans have a shot at controlling the Senate as well as the House.

Crucial issue: Health care reform

Ellsworth, Donnelly and Hill voted for it, although all three are "Blue Dog" moderates who opposed more sweeping changes sought by progressives.

They must sell the positive aspects of reform, a formidable task in view of polls showing the legislation is misunderstood by and unpopular with many Hoosiers.

Republicans want repeal. They must sell that dumping everything, good and bad, with focus again on health care somewhere in the future is the best course.



By Jack Colwell

Longtime political columnist based in South Bend

The 2010 election results for Indiana and the Midwest will have a significant impact on control of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate. In addition to the obvious benefits of setting the legislative agenda, the winners also gain the right to play cartographer in 2011. With so much riding on the outcome of this election, the business community has a lot to gain ... or lose.

Just like in 2006 and 2008, this election will not be about social issues; it will be decided on business issues and, if properly communicated to voters, employers and employees will see significant victories. In open seat contests, Indiana will likely send Dan Coats to the Senate and Todd Rokita and Marlin Stutzman to the House. In contested races in the 2nd, 8th and 9th districts, Indiana will likely see two, with a real chance of three, seats move from Democrat to Republican hands.

The next Congress will look significantly different for Indiana and the country. For the third straight cycle, there will be a large freshman class. The impact of this turnover will have a long-term effect on business policy, shaping it for the next decade.

Politics proceeds policy for now, however, and only after the results are counted and the ink is dry on a new set of maps will legislative bodies temporarily turn to the business that Hoosiers want them to focus on – job growth, economic development, debt and health care. The intersection of the issues voters want to talk about and the need for lawmakers to act on those issues gives the business community an opportunity to positively change Indiana. That opportunity begins now.

Company owners and their employees must pay attention **AND PARTICIPATE** in this election if they want to have influence on the agenda that will literally determine the success, or failure, of many Hoosier businesses. The Indiana Prosperity Project is one way to educate employees on business issues, candidate's positions on those issues and the electoral process.

Without electing new pro-jobs, pro-economy candidates to the Legislature and Congress, we will continue to see an agenda that is detrimental for employees and employers. Fortunately, this election will provide the business community with significant victories for candidates who support such a pro-jobs, pro-economy plan.



By Michael Davis

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