

## Luke Messer Popular Newcomer Eyes Progress

By Rebecca Patrick

**T**he former state representative and executive director of the Indiana Republican Party hit the ground running when he arrived on Capitol Hill. During his first week, Congressman Luke Messer (6th District) was elected to a leadership position for newcomers and within 100 days in office, he had two bills clear the House with bipartisan support.

At the end of May, Messer spoke with *BizVoice* about settling into office and the significant major issues facing Congress.

***BizVoice*®:** You were elected president of the Republican freshman class right after you arrived on the job; what duties are associated with that?

**LM:** “It gives you a bit of a public platform – to be a voice for the freshman class. I appeared on C-SPAN, MSNBC, Fox News, PBS and elsewhere speaking on behalf of the freshman class. You are also a liaison with House leadership. I’ve also led a couple special orders; one on the Second Amendment and one on Obamacare on behalf of our class.”

***BV:*** How are you personally trying to overcome the general public’s perception of Congress?

**LM:** “There is a reason why the approval rating is so low and that’s because, in recent years, Congress has not done a very good job. ... I’m working hard to try to make a difference.

“I’ve reached out to Matt Cartwright (of Pennsylvania); he’s the president of the Democratic (freshman) side. We don’t agree on a lot of issues, but we do agree that you can stand on principle and still be civil with the folks on the other side of the aisle. We’ve started a series of dinners and lunches. We recently had a group of us go lay a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery. We had Bill Gates come in for a lunch. And we are just trying to change the culture here a little bit.”

***BV:*** In general, what’s high on your policy priority list? Also, describe the two bills you have moving in Congress?

**LM:** “I think the two biggest issues facing our nation are interrelated. First is spending – we have to stop spending money we don’t have. ... It’s a false choice to say you have to spend more money on something to do it better. The second relates to jobs and the economy, whether that is affordable energy policy or a common sense immigration policy or simplifying the tax code to

Rep. Luke Messer (near left) participates in the Benghazi hearings that included testimony from then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.



promote job creation. There's a lot that can be done to create a better environment for jobs in this country.

"The Budget Transparency bill (H.R. 668) would require the President's budget to calculate a per taxpayer cost of the federal deficit each year. In recent years, with a trillion dollar budget deficit and 145 million taxpayers the cost per taxpayer of that debt is about \$6,900 a year. That's a lot of money. The bill was amended into the Senate budget, so it's already passed there too, but now we've got to get it passed in a clean version because the Senate budget is unlikely to become law over here (in the House).

"That bill actually was sort of fun. (House Minority Leader) Nancy Pelosi came down to the floor while I was managing it; she was kind of arguing against it, but ended up voting for the bill anyway.

"The Improving Postsecondary Education Data for Students Act (H.R. 1949) is now entering the Senate. It's simply about helping families and students have the information they need to make a good decision when deciding whether and where to go to college. While there is a lot of information out there, unfortunately it feels like a data dump to most families. At the same time, colleges are overburdened with excessive and ineffective reporting requirements. Our goal with this bill is to try to reduce the burdens on colleges and get families the information they need.



The congressman takes a recent tour of the Honda automotive plant in Greensburg.

"We're hopeful for both bills. I'm proud they were bipartisan, passed by large margins and both are about providing better information to taxpayers."

**BV: You just voted for full repeal of Obamacare. Realistically, what can Republicans do to halt or improve this policy?**

**LM:** "I was going to say most Republicans but really most Americans believe that Obamacare is a job killer and bad for patient outcomes. It puts the federal government in between patients and their doctors when it comes to making health care decisions. There are few topics for which I hear more strong feelings than on Obamacare. People are fired up.

"I voted for repeal; I believe that's the best policy for our country. I still believe there's a small window in which that could happen if the plan turns out to be the near-term disaster that some believe it might be in the coming months.

"I also believe that we should take policy steps to improve this bad law. So I've supported repeal of the medical device tax. It's bad policy and un-American. There's a chance we get that repealed. I would support efforts to increase the 30-hour

workweek eligibility requirement to 40 hours – to align it with other federal work requirements for a full-time employee. I support perhaps raising the number of employees necessary (for an employer) to fall within the requirements of Obamacare from 50 to 100 for example. I support these improvements even though I think the best policy would be to repeal the bill."

**BV: Immigration reform activity is heating up in Congress. Where do you stand and what do you see taking place this year?**

**LM:** "Virtually everyone I talk to understands that our current immigration system is broken; it doesn't work for individuals, doesn't work for business and it doesn't work for the government.

"It's important that we don't create a system that treats those who broke the law better than those who waited in line. Those who came here unlawfully will have to pay penalties and back fees. There are other steps that can be done. The two most likely places for early success are on border security and documented status for workers.

"If we are able to reach agreement on those two important topics, then we have an opportunity for further dialogue about what we do about citizenship once those workers are documented. My sense today is that we don't yet have a consensus about what to do about citizenship. Which makes it difficult if you tie all three together. That's the challenge. There's an opportunity to come up with a plan this year to deal with those

first two topics. Probably it's going to take demonstrated success on those to be able to move on to citizenship."

**BV: What's your take on the Keystone Pipeline? Will it finally be approved by the President?**

**LM:** "To me, this is a no-brainer. It's an opportunity to create thousands of jobs, and the building of the pipeline is an opportunity to provide more affordable energy. If we don't build it, that pipeline will be built across Canada, out towards China – and give China access to that lower cost energy. I'm hopeful. You're starting to get signals that the President may be reconsidering the Keystone Pipeline."

**BV: What's your message to the business community about the activities in Washington?**

**LM:** "Stay engaged. This is a critical moment in the history of the American economy. We are making very big decisions on health care, energy policy, tax policy, regulatory policy and the like. We need to make sure that the voices of business and the voices of job creators are heard."

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resource: Congressman Luke Messer at <http://messer.house.gov> or (202) 225-3021**