

Controlling the House

Same Story: Another Close Battle Looming

By Tom Schuman

The 2006 general election takes place on November 7. When it definitely will be known who the next speaker of the Indiana House of Representatives will be is far more uncertain.

“This year is a very bad year to be opening up shop and predicting who is going to win races,” says Michael Davis, vice president of political affairs for the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and director of the Indiana Business for Responsive Government political action committee. “There is certainly a chance for more recounts. We may not know on Election Night, or even the day or two after (which party will be in control of the House).”

In 2002, 13 House races were decided by less than 10% of the vote. In the 50 contested races, the vote margin was 1,790 votes – 369,455 votes for Democrats compared to 367,665 for Republicans. Five races were decided by less than 2.3%. In 2004, the number of races that ended with a margin of less than 10% increased to 16.

Davis would not be surprised to see that rise to as high as 20 races this time around. Why?

“Typically, at this point (three months prior to Election Day at the time of this interview) there are about 15 races in play. On our radar screen this year, there are about 25 races,” he projects.

The large number of competitive races runs contrary to conventional wisdom. Following redistricting at the beginning of each decade, the open seats and close races take an upward spike. That total generally dwindles as election cycles move farther away from the redistricting period.

By the numbers

Republicans, of course, maintain a 52-48 advantage in the House. Four years ago at this time, it was the Democrats with a 53-47 majority. (Republicans cut that margin to 51-49 after the 2002 election and added three seats two years later to gain control). But in the 2002 and 2004 election cycles, pro-business advocates were defending a small number of seats, while targeting a larger number for possible incumbent defeat. Those numbers are reversed in 2006.

Here’s the breakdown:

- A total of 75 of the 100 races are in the “pretty much decided” category – 39 favoring Democrats and 36 Republicans
- Five races could move into the competitive category, with three of those seats currently held by Republicans and two by Democrats
- Of the 20 remaining, nine Republican incumbents face formidable challenges and the party is also defending four open seats. On the Democrat side, six incumbents and one open seat are seen as up for grabs

Several factors account for the turnaround. Seven of the nine Republican incumbents in the latter category are just completing their first term in office. Five of those seven – Troy Woodruff (District 64), Tim Harris (31), Billy Bright (69), Bruce Borders (45) and Bill Davis (33) – defeated Democrat incumbents in 2004 who had poor pro-business voting records. While open seats are most commonly viewed as the leading opportunity for a political party change, a close second is the freshmen class of legislators.

All freshmen are among the most vulnerable, according to Davis, who adds, “This time around that category is more noticeable because it is a larger class. The numbers show there are more GOP seats vulnerable than Democrat seats. But there are enough vulnerable incumbents on both sides that I believe both parties will lose (some current) seats.”

The ultimate question, however, is whether there will be an overall two-seat (or three-seat) swing. A net change of two for the Democrats produces a 50-50 tie with control of the House going to the party that wins the race for secretary of state. Republican incumbent Todd Rokita is a strong favorite over challenger

2004 Combined Vote Totals for the 57 Contested House Races

Republicans	664,561	50.41%
Democrats	640,918	48.62%
Margin	23,643	1.79%

2002 Combined Vote Totals for the 50 Contested House Races

Democrats	369,455	50.12%
Republicans	367,664	49.88%
Margin	1,791	0.24%

Source: Indiana Business for Responsive Government

IBRG Endorsement Guidelines

The mission of Indiana Business for Responsive Government (IBRG) is to aid in the election of candidates whose legislative voting records and/or positions on business-related legislation will enhance the Indiana General Assembly's commitment to a favorable business climate. In this regard, IBRG seeks to be an example to the Indiana business community whose philosophies support broad business issues.

1. Eligibility of a candidate, incumbent or challenger to be endorsed shall be based on evaluation of his or her public record on business-related issues as identified by the legislative policies of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, expectations of winning and other considerations consistent with enhancing the pro-business makeup of the Indiana General Assembly.
2. Endorsements shall be made without consideration of political party affiliation.
3. Every incumbent candidate whose two-year aggregate vote score is 70% or greater shall be eligible to be considered for endorsement. Four-year aggregate vote score information will also be provided to IBRG's Criteria and Endorsement committee and IBRG Policy Group for their consideration.
4. The voting record of an incumbent or anticipated voting record of a challenger may be indexed to the district's P-Base rating* in evaluation of the candidate's pro-business performance or potential. Any incumbent with a P-Base score of 1.5 or greater and an aggregate vote score of 50% or greater is eligible for consideration.

5. Endorsement shall not carry with it the guarantee of financial assistance. Financial assistance will be given only where need is clearly indicated or from the Pro-Business Champions' Fund**, the race in question has significant implications to the pro-business commitment of the Indiana General Assembly and with the approval of the Financial Control subcommittee or the IBRG Policy Group.
6. Endorsement shall be made by an affirmative vote of three-fifths of the Policy Group present in accordance with the foregoing guidelines.
7. Endorsements may be given to opposing pro-business candidates, whether primary or general election, when appropriate, and when each candidate meets all of the criteria in the endorsement guidelines, with no guarantee of financial assistance to either of such opposing candidates.
8. Financial assistance will not be granted, in any form, to a candidate that has not received endorsement.
9. Endorsements and financial assistance shall be confined to candidates for the Indiana General Assembly.
10. Debt retirement contributions shall not be given to candidates following a campaign.

*A research document that expresses the support for business by the registered voters within a legislative district.

**An exception is made for the Pro-Business Champions' Fund, which is designed to recognize incumbent legislators who have demonstrated conspicuous leadership on important issues to the business community.

Joe Pearson, a former deputy agriculture commissioner.

Making their choices

While national issues have a larger impact at the congressional level (see the roundtable story on Page 18), Davis contends that races for state representative and state senator are indeed local. The "overall environment may be harder to peg," in 2006, but he doesn't see incumbents being defeated due to outside factors such as the war in Iraq or high gasoline prices.

"States are mostly immune to what goes on at the federal level – the national issues," he states. "While it adds to the environment that people are somewhat dissatisfied with the direction of the country, at the end of the day it's how well they know the candidate and pocketbook issues – their job, the economy."

Democrats are openly placing their hopes on opposition to Daylight Saving Time (DST) in 2005 and the Major Moves infrastructure and job creation legislation that passed in 2006. There was little evidence of an impact from either in the May primary. Davis doesn't expect a major shift come November.

"With the exception of maybe a couple of races (in districts along the Indiana Toll Road), these are not going to be deciding issues," he offers. "It will be on the radar screen of a few voters, but for most it will not be in the top two or three issues. Even in those few districts, I would argue that the economy and jobs will be more important than Major Moves or DST."



Attention is once again focused on Indiana House races.

INFORMATION LINK

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IBRG 2006 Endorsements

(through August 16, 2006)

Senate Incumbents

Ron Alting, Lafayette, District 22
Mike Delph, Carmel, District 29
Gary Dillon, Pierceton, District 17
Jeff Drozda, Carmel, District 21
David Ford, Hartford City, District 19
Dennis Kruse, Auburn, District 14
Sue Landske, Cedar Lake, District 6
James Lewis, Charlestown, District 45
James Merritt Jr., Indianapolis, District 31
Frank Mrvan Jr., Hammond, District 1
Johnny Nugent, Lawrenceburg, District 43
Allen Paul, Richmond, District 27
John Waterman, Shelburn, District 39
Thomas Wyss, Fort Wayne, District 15
Richard Young, Milltown, District 47
Joseph Zakas, Granger, District 11

House Incumbents

Robert Behning, Indianapolis, District 91
Matthew Bell, Avilla, District 83
Bruce Borders, Jasonville, District 45
Randy Borrer, Fort Wayne, District 84
Brian Bosma, Indianapolis, District 88
William E. Bright, North Vernon, District 69
Tim Brown, Crawfordsville, District 41
James Buck, Kokomo, District 38
Lawrence Buell, Indianapolis, District 89
Woody Burton, Greenwood, District 58
Robert Cherry, Greenfield, District 53
Suzanne Crouch, Evansville, District 78
Bill Davis, Portland, District 33
Richard Dodge, Pleasant Lake, District 51

Cleo Duncan, Greensburg, District 67
Jeff Espich, Uniondale, District 82
Ralph Foley, Martinsville, District 47
William Friend, Macy, District 23
David Frizzell, Indianapolis, District 93
F. Dale Grubb, Covington, District 42
Eric Gutwein, Rensselaer, District 16
Tim Harris, Marion, District 31
Steve Heim, Culver, District 17
Phillip Hinkle, Indianapolis, District 92
Clyde Kersey, Terre Haute, District 43
Sheila Klinker, Lafayette, District 27
Eric Koch, Bedford, District 65
Donald Lehe, Brookston, District 15
Daniel Leonard, Huntington, District 50
L. Jack Lutz, Anderson, District 35
Carolene Mays, Indianapolis, District 94
Richard McClain, Logansport, District 24
Winfield Moses, Fort Wayne, District 81
Michael Murphy, Indianapolis, District 90
Tim Neese, Elkhart, District 48
Cindy Noe, Indianapolis, District 87
Phillip Pflum, Milton, District 56
Phyllis Pond, New Haven, District 85
Scott Reske, Pendleton, District 37
Kathy Richardson, Noblesville, District 29
Michael Ripley, Monroe, District 79
Thomas Saunders, Lewisville, District 54
John Smith, Kokomo, District 30
Marlin Stutzman, Howe, District 52
Jeffrey Thompson, Lizton, District 28
Gerald Torr, Carmel, District 39
P. Eric Turner, Marion, District 32

Dennis Tyler, Muncie, District 34
John Ulmer, Goshen, District 49
Jacqueline Walorski, Lakeville, District 21
Matthew Whetstone, Brownsburg, District 40
David Wolkins, Winona Lake, District 18
Troy Woodruff, Vincennes, District 64

Endorsed Challengers/Open Seats

Senate

Phil Boots, Crawfordsville, District 23*
Dale Brewer, Valparaiso, District 4
Andrew Phipps, Muncie, District 25*
Greg Walker, Columbus, District 41*

Endorsed Challengers/Open Seats

House

Ron Arnold, Washington, District 63
Connie Basham, West Lafayette, District 26
Christopher Byrd, Corydon, District 70
Reid Dallas, Terre Haute, District 46
Kathryn Densborn, Indianapolis, District 86
Tom Dermody, La Porte, District 20*
Sean Eberhart, Shelbyville, District 57*
Jeremy Hiler, Mishawaka, District 5
Tom Knollman, Union City, District 55*
Andrew Smith, Evansville, District 77
Milo Smith, Columbus, District 59*
Ed Soliday, Valparaiso, District 4*
Steven Stemler, Jeffersonville, District 71*
Amos Thomas, Brazil, District 44*
Bill Ullrich, Greendale, District 68
Jim Wathen, New Albany, District 72

* Open