

SENATE SHOWDOWN

All Eyes on Hoosier Race

By Rebecca Patrick and Tom Schuman

Elections for U.S. Senate seats from Indiana between 1988 and 2006 could be described as routine with large victory margins and little drama becoming the norm. Oh, how times have changed:

- In 2010, Evan Bayh opted not to seek re-election, opening the door for Dan Coats to return to office
- Two years later, the state's longest-serving senator, Richard Lugar, was defeated in the Republican primary by Richard Mourdock, who lost the general election to Joe Donnelly
- A spirited race between Bayh and Todd Young in 2016 saw the newcomer (after three terms in the House) defeat the former governor/senator trying to make a comeback

The spotlight remains this year, with incumbent Donnelly seeking re-election against Jasper businessman Mike Braun – who defeated congressmen Luke Messer and Todd Rokita in the Republican primary.

BizVoice® spoke separately with Donnelly and Braun in July. Their answers to five questions, edited only for space, follow.

JOE DONNELLY

What is the most important thing to do differently in Washington, in Congress?

“We need to do what we do in Indiana, which is to work together. It’s a country reference, but I think it’s really apt. When there is a barn-raising, no barn goes up unless everyone is working together to try to put it up and get it done. And everybody is important. That’s what we need to do in Washington. The reason why is we get so much more done when we bring everybody’s talents to the table.

“Over the last six years, I’ve been able to have 43 of my provisions made into law; 21 in the Trump administration alone. With that, I was always having teammates and Republican teammates; we worked together to get legislation passed. That’s why the Lugar Center rated me the most bipartisan House or Senate member, who is still serving, in the last 25 years. So we need to bring the Indiana wisdom of working together to Washington. And worrying only about improving things and making things better as opposed to worrying about politics.”

Tariffs are in the spotlight with potentially large economic consequences for Indiana. What would you do to protect the interests of

Hoosiers regarding free trade?

“We need to have smart trade policy. I think the administration has lost some focus here, and what I mean by that is the focus was on fixing the initial injury (China and the steel industry) – that’s where it should be and where it should stay. What’s happened is it’s drifted into everything else that’s going on in our country.

“The actual injustice that we’ve seen, which was done to our steel companies in northwest Indiana with the Chinese dumping it below cost – we’ve needed to fix that. That was a just cause, but it was also a very tightly focused cause that may have been \$3 (billion) to \$5 billion in solutions. We are now in a situation where the administration is talking about \$500 billion in tariffs just against China alone.

“I won’t mention the individual companies, but in various business lines I’ve had people come to Washington and in Indiana and say, ‘Joe, if this (tariff situation) doesn’t get fixed, I may not be in business next year.’ That is an immediate flashing red signal that we have problems.

“So we really need to bring this back to the original focus; expanding the scope of this only makes the situation worse every single day. I also personally sat down with the President (in July); he wanted to talk about the Supreme Court nomination, which I was



happy to do. At the end of it, I said, ‘Mr. President, if you don’t mind, I have something I need to talk about.’ He said, ‘Sure, go ahead.’

“I told him these tariffs are incredibly damaging right now to manufacturers in Indiana, to our farmers across the state, and if this doesn’t change we are going to see businesses disappear. We are going to see families who have Hoosier homesteads that are 100 to 150 years old be on the verge of possibly losing them. We need to fight for our people, rather than get them into deeper trouble.”



Senator Joe Donnelly cites his ability to work with colleagues, no matter their political party, as one key reason he should be re-elected.



Do you think Congress should play an increased role in determining when tariffs are implemented?

“(In mid-July) legislation passed in the Senate by an overwhelming margin that states there needs to be a role for Congress in the 232 process (on trade; the action was largely seen as symbolic in nature). That is the process that has led us to this point. We can strengthen that. (As of mid-August, efforts from lawmakers to have a vote to mute the President’s ability to impose tariffs – on the basis of national security reasons under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 – have proven unsuccessful.)

“We need a partner; we need the President to understand. We’ve needed to fix the steel piece and we can. What we also need to do is make sure that doesn’t leak over to everything else.”

What would be your one or two top policy priorities for 2019 and why would they be at the top of the list?

“This is a moment in time. What I mean by that is tariffs; fixing that situation right now is critically important to our state because these are policies that can cause incredible damage to our businesses and farmers.

“Secondly, I would mention the opioid scourge we are dealing with in our state. I have passed the CARA legislation – Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act – that helped change prescribing practices (and included several of his provisions). The 21st Century Cures Act, which I worked on with my House friend, Fred Upton – just across the line in Michigan – to help provide additional funding for Indiana as well. We have in the farm bill my provisions to help

with telemedicine so folks in rural communities have the ability to contact Methodist Hospital in Indy or even Mayo Clinic in Minnesota and get the very best addiction treatment assistance.”

Why should voters re-elect you to continue representing Indiana in the United States Senate?

“I’ve worked nonstop for six years to make the lives of my fellow Hoosiers better. We have seen during this time incredible economic growth, positive economic indicators every single year. I said I would work nonstop to make our business climate better, to make job opportunities better, to make economic growth better. If you look, it’s dramatically improved from 2012.

“The whole economy across the state is growing and I want to be someone who continues that, as opposed to getting in the way. The economy is growing, our tech position gets stronger every year. We are a more welcoming community than we were six years ago. So on almost every measurable front, we have made significant progress and that’s what this is about. I also want – if I’m fortunate enough to be re-elected – to end this opioid scourge in this next term.

“I don’t answer to anyone but Hoosiers. Whether it’s been President Bush, President Obama or President Trump, my job isn’t to just say yes to a President, it’s to represent the people of Indiana. My job is to tell the President when he’s right; when he is, I’ll vote with him every time. I voted with President Trump 62% of the time. But when he’s wrong, to let him know that this policy doesn’t make sense and there are better ways to do it. That’s what I talked to him about with the tariffs. We can get all of this done without causing all of this damage.

“Other people in the race have said, ‘I’m going there (to Washington) to support President Trump on everything.’ We don’t want to support the administration’s efforts on these tariffs because it’s going to absolutely devastate Indiana, and it’s not ending anytime soon as far as we can see. . . . I hope it does; it appears to at least be a couple years we are doing this. That’s what some folks in various executive departments have said. So what we need is a senator who will fight for Indiana, not just be a copy machine for anybody. Look, there were a lot of times I voted against what President Obama wanted and folks were saying why did you vote that way; it was because it was the right thing for Indiana. That’s what I’m hired to do. I’m hired to be the Indiana senator, not to be working for somebody else.”

MIKE BRAUN

What are Hoosiers telling you they want to see done differently in Washington?

“Most of what I’m hearing is that it’s a dynamic change. They’re interested in having someone go there who isn’t out of the typical mold. I think the reason I did so well in the primary and, here again, leading in the general is because I’m a business guy who has just a minimal amount of government experience. I’m going as a business person outsider, taking that skill set to Washington. I think people are pretty well fed up with the results we have been getting. That’s the message I have been preaching from the get-go and it’s resonating.

“When it comes to the issues, ironically jobs and the economy aren’t doubling everything else (in voters’ views). They’re still at the top but not doubling because we’re doing so well. Hoosiers are interested in securing the border and solving the problems that are associated with it. They are interested in seeing Washington live within its means like all the rest of us do.

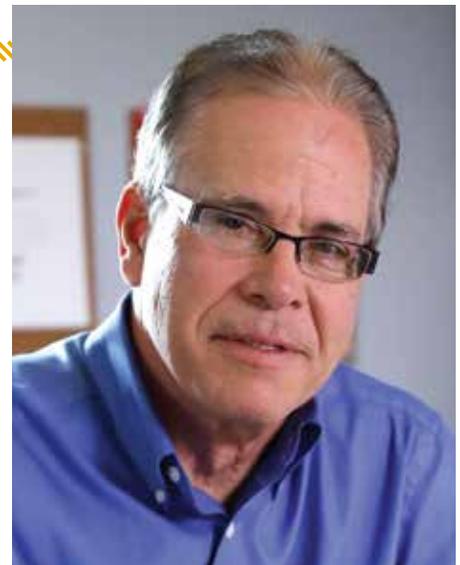
“The other two things I hear a lot about are the cost of health care, along with coverage, things all of us in business have been trying to tackle for many years. We’re lucky that we found a pretty good solution nine, 10 years ago to change the behavior and the costs associated with health care. And then infrastructure – we’ve got such a unique location, that we have to have roads and bridges that live up to the moniker of the state: Crossroads of America.”

Tariffs are in the spotlight with potentially large economic consequences for Indiana. What would you do to protect the interests of Hoosiers regarding free trade?

“President Trump and the House and Senate are all on board for free trade ... it’s a world economy. Within that context, so much of trade was based on 30, 40 years ago when we were just trying to nurture trading partners and so many of them were still recovering from the war and rebuilding their countries and you have new developing countries that have risen to the scene. A lot of what we did was tolerated and embedded into early trade arrangements; now that everybody is at full strength and fully able, the President is trying to address the inequities that were built in early.

“That’s something that I don’t know we can maintain long term. I think he’s done a pretty good job of using that as a little bit of a stick. He and all others are trying to at least get some retrenchment on old inequities built into trading relationships. I think he’s going to get them addressed. I think it’s going to take longer than they might hope. You have to be careful with how much pressure you try to apply in the short run because that could trigger retaliatory tariffs and it has a little bit. So far, I think it’s all in the category of moving the dynamic a little bit to where we rectify some of the inequities.”

Do you think Congress should play an increased role in determining when tariffs are implemented?



“I think that would be kind of difficult in the sense ... for as little as Congress gets done currently to throw that into the mix. It just doesn’t feel like it would get done properly. On the other hand, I think if it got to where it was being used too aggressively, Congress might do what it normally hasn’t done and get involved in an impactful way and a smart way.

“I think Congress has chosen too often to just stay on the sideline and kick things down the road. I don’t think we’re there at this point and I hope it’s not needed. I really believe that there is a good sense among the President and his key aides when pushing too hard is too much.”

What would be your one or two top policy priorities for 2019 and why would they be at the top of the list?

“Let’s go back to health care. I think Democrats are going to pivot back toward health care because they’re losing on the tax reform. On health care now, most people expect pre-existing conditions to be covered and no limit on a particular health care incident – both of which were embedded in Obamacare. That needs to be addressed and covered by conservatives when we repeal Obamacare because that was a disaster. You had big government and big health care together and they did not deliver us a product that made sense.

“On the other hand, Hoosiers and Americans believe those two aspects – if we’re going to do it through the free market or not a one-payer system – have to be addressed. That’s what we have done in my own business. Even if it wasn’t the law, we still covered pre-existing conditions and no limit on a health care incident. It can be done but you have to reform your system, and you’re



Mike Braun says business experience, and the important lessons it delivers, have helped prepare him to serve in the U.S. Senate.

generally going to have to find a different product than what the insurance companies want to sell you.

“The other thing would be trying to get better infrastructure. Indiana actually has a long-term plan in place but maybe formalize something between the federal government and the states similar to the Community Crossings grant that we put into place in our state – where there is more of a 50-50 match. I think it’s just a pipe dream to think that the federal government is going to pay for 80% of bridges and roads like they have in the past when they’re broke and running trillion-dollar deficits. It’s not going to happen.”

Why should voters elect you as the next U.S. senator from Indiana?

“You’re going to get a guy who has lived conservatism in the trenches of building a business. I’ve got a great perspective of what’s important to a small business. We were one for 17 years. When I started at Meyer (Distributing), we had 15 employees and that’s about what we had in 1998 after 17 years. We’ve grown to become a large business. I call it a large small business because we’ve tried to incorporate all those characteristics that we’ve been successful in doing.

“I’ve lived through the issue of having to make health care work in my company. I’ve been involved in the Statehouse and privately in pushing infrastructure for our state. I think there’s a clear choice. Joe Donnelly has been in the game of politics. Most of the people that pull the levers in the Senate and Congress come from that background. There never could be a clearer difference. The approach of enterprise and people having more of their resources, not looking to government to solve all their problems, is the message I will be taking with creative ideas and solutions. I think Joe represents a point of view that is opposite of that.”



Long days on the campaign trail for Braun (with his wife Maureen) started in 2017 with his primary battle against congressmen Luke Messer and Todd Rokita.



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