KRIEG DEVAULT

Insights

Take Five: 5 Things you Need to Know About Indiana Government - February 2024

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Last week was a busy week in Indiana politics. Not only did the General Assembly complete the first half of the 2024 legislative session, but Friday, February 9th was also the filing deadline for political candidates across the state. While primary candidates have until February 16th to withdraw their candidacy (February 22nd for presidential candidates), the field for the May 7 primary election is largely set.

1. Indiana General Assembly Halftime Report

In this year's short session, strengthening Indiana's childcare structure has been a top priority for both chambers, with the House passing **HB 1102** and the Senate passing **SB 2**. The Senate passed two bills to address reading skills and proficiency in **SB 1** and **SB 6** for the House to consider, and this issue was also identified by Governor Holcomb in his State of the State address as an important priority. As always, while most legislation was passed with large majorities and bipartisan support, there were some controversial issues, including the repeal of the Indianapolis Mile Square Economic Enhancement District authority in **HB 1199**. While a replacement mechanism is included as part of **HB 1121**, Downtown Indy, the Indy Chamber, and various downtown businesses are opposed to the repeal of the sustainable funding source that the EED provides. Finally, one bill has already been passed by both chambers and signed into law by the Governor: **HB 1383** concerning various wetlands definitions and requirements.

2. US Senate

In the US Senate Race, Congressman Jim Banks (IN-03) is the strongest candidate in the field, with the benefit of the Indiana Republican Party's formal endorsement and about $3 million in cash on hand to start 2024. Banks is being challenged by businessman John Rust, who faced an uphill battle for ballot access. Indiana's current law states that a person must have either voted in a party's previous two primary elections or have approval from the county party chair where they reside to gain ballot access. Rust was not able to meet either of these requirements but was successful in a lawsuit against the Indiana Secretary of State and other parties, where a Marion County judge **ruled that the law was unconstitutional**. Assuming he prevails in the primary, Banks will face former Democratic legislator Marc Carmichael or former Democratic US Senate candidate and psychologist Valerie McCray in the fall.

3. Governor

The biggest race in Indiana's primary election will be the Republican race for Governor, as current Governor Eric Holcomb cannot run again due to term limits. While there are six official candidates, five hopefuls stand out as legitimate contenders. Publicly released polling shows current US Senator Mike Braun with a commanding lead, but Lieutenant Governor Suzanne Crouch and businessmen Brad Chambers and Eric Doden all have sizeable war chests and are campaigning across the state. Former Attorney General Curtis Hill is also a contender. The winner of the primary will likely face former Republican Superintendent of Public

Instruction Jennifer McCormick, who changed parties and is the Democrats' chosen candidate for the race.

4. Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General

General election candidates for the other statewide offices of Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General will be determined at each party's convention, which the Republicans will hold on June 15 and the Democrats will hold on July 13. Typically, convention delegates select the preferred running mate of the party's candidate for Governor, but Noblesville pastor Micah Beckwith has launched a campaign for the position without affiliating with any particular candidate. While none of the gubernatorial candidates have officially announced potential running mates, Congressman Greg Pence (IN-06) declined to run for re-election and is supporting Lieutenant Governor Crouch, with speculation that he would be her choice for the position. With the crowded state of the Governor's race, candidates announcing their choice for Lieutenant Governor may be a chance to differentiate themselves and gain support for the May primary.

Convention delegates will also select their respective nominees for Attorney General. Incumbent Republican Todd Rokita has been beset by controversy, including the **recently released disciplinary agreement** in which he was reprimanded by the Indiana Supreme Court for his comments regarding Dr. Caitlin Bernard last year. Republicans may be interested in nominating a less controversial candidate at convention, as they did when Todd Rokita beat the then-incumbent Attorney General Curtis Hill in 2020, and potential candidate names that have emerged include Madison County Prosecutor Rodney Cummings, Hamilton County Republican Party Chair Mario Massillamany, and state Senator Aaron Freeman. On the Democratic side, army veteran and 2022 Secretary of State candidate Destiny Wells and nonprofit executive and former Marion County Clerk Beth White have both announced their candidacies. As **Sabato's Crystal Ball put it in an article from January 31** when the rating for Indiana's Attorney General race was updated from Safe Republican to Leans Republican, "It would be a heavy lift for any Democrat to beat Rokita—no Democrat has won a statewide contest in Indiana since 2012—but a Democratic win is no longer outside the realm of possibility."

5. State Legislative Elections

Due to impending retirements, the General Assembly was already guaranteed to look significantly different next year. A host of challenger filings could make for an even more drastic change. Nine incumbents will not return to the legislature next year, either due to retirement or because they are running for Congress.

In addition, numerous incumbents will be facing primary challenges this Spring. Senators with a primary challenge include the following:

- Sen. David Vinzant
- Sen. Brian Buchanan
- Sen. Mike Bohacek
- Sen. David Niezgodski
- Sen. Justin Busch
- Sen. Jean Breaux
- Sen. Mike Young
- Sen. Rod Bray

Representatives with a primary challenger include the following:

- Rep. Ragen Hatcher

- Rep. Jake Teshka
- Rep. Sharon Negele
- Rep. Jeff Thompson
- Rep. JD Prescott
- Rep. Heath VanNatter
- Rep. Greg Steuerwald
- Rep. Alan Morrison
- Rep. Beau Baird
- Rep. Bruce Borders
- Rep. Joanna King
- Rep. Lorissa Sweet
- Rep. Ben Smaltz
- Rep. Matt Hostettler
- Rep. Zach Payn
- Rep. Alex Zimmerman
- Rep. Jim Lucas
- Rep. Karen Engleman
- Rep. Jennifer Meltzer
- Rep. Martin Carbaugh
- Rep. John Bartlett
- Rep. Justin Moed
- Rep. Vanessa Summers

A link to the full list of candidates, courtesy of State Affairs and Howey Politics Indiana, can be found **here**.

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