

Deciding on Congressional candidates

By Ed Breen

Rest assured that the Republicans and Democrats of the Fifth Congressional district of Indiana will nominate someone of each party to be on the November ballot. One of them will succeed Susan Brooks as the Congress person from this patch of central Indiana that is home to about 650,000 of us.

But those people, one Republican and one Democrat, may be pretty much strangers to the people who vote for them. Quarantine, social distance and masks are the mortal enemies of the tools of the political trade: Glad-handing, back-slapping and baby-kissing. There's been none of that for two months and there shall not be prior to the voting day, which was moved from May to June to accommodate COVID.

In fact, with 15 candidates on one ballot and five on the other next Tuesday — June 2 — a smattering of a few dozen or a few hundred votes will determine who speaks for a half-million of us in Washington for

the next two years.

Much of this could not be foreseen a year ago when Brooks, an eight-year veteran in the House, said she would not seek another term. What could be anticipated was a large number of candidates, particularly on the Republican side of the ballot. But 15? No, not even the old pros anticipated that. And the five on the Democratic side includes a couple of marquee names, which indicates that the Dems in Hamilton and Madison and Tipton and Grant counties believe the earth has shifted just enough for them to win back a Congressional seat that some thought might have been gerrymandered away forever.

The reality — and certainly at least a small piece of Brooks' decision to walk away — was the declining margin of her victories in the past couple of elections. Two years ago, she won again, but Democrat Dee Thornton won 43 percent of the vote in a district that was showing signs of turning "purple," no longer safely red as it had been in the days of Dan Burton.

So, forward they came, Republicans of all stripes; some embracing Donald Trump and some hollering disavowal of links or love of Trump.

Kent Abernathy, Andrew Bales. Micah Beckwith. Carl Brizzi. On through Victor Wakley. They will be alphabetical on your ballot, be it paper, early voting or the old-fashioned Election Day vote.

Some were in early and were out among the voters before the pandemic. Abernathy was one of them. So was Beth Henderson and Chuck Dietzen. And Kelly Mitchell, the current State Treasurer who was anointed by then-Gov. Mike Pence to block then-Marion Mayor Wayne Seybold's run at state office. Pence did not like Seybold and visa-versa.

But it is the emergence of an immigrant from the old Soviet Union who now lives in Noblesville who has astounded. Victoria Spartz. Born in Ukraine. You have heard her name and seen her picture. If you live in the Fifth District of Indiana is it nearly impossible not to

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A MOMENT

Ed Breen



have seen her.

Spending heavily out of her own wealth — some say as much as \$750,000 of her money — she has flooded the mail to the homes of registered Republicans, sometimes two mailings a day. She has littered Ind. 37 from Marion all the way to the Indianapolis beltway with signs: Her name, her picture and the message that she is in the Trump camp and vows to become — her words — "Nancy Pelosi and the Socialists worst

nightmare."

And it seems to be working. A poll by a conservative political action committee taken last week found her with 32 percent of support among Republicans. Next in line are former Indianapolis prosecutor Carl Brizzi with 14 percent and Beth Henderson at 13 percent. All the rest, including State Treasurer Mitchell, are tagging along behind.

An interesting side note: Brizzi, a career Republican, is building his campaign at a distance from Trump, which has an influential group called the Club for Growth in a tizzy. The PAC has paid for a mailer in which a Brizzi picture is accompanied by this: "I am not a Trump guy. I know that the orange man does crazy things." And which way might that cut in precincts where there is no reason for Democrats to vote for Democrats? Grant County, for example, where there is but one county-wide unopposed Democrat candidate on the ballot.

Among the Democrats, Dee Thornton, who lives in Carmel and made

Susan Brooks nervous two years ago is there again. In fact, she never left. She has quietly cultivated support across the district.

But a couple of heavy-weight names have joined her: Christina Hale, who was John Gregg's running mate four years ago and acquitted herself well in a hopeless campaign, and Andy Jacobs. Jacobs, of course, is the son of longtime Democratic liberal icon and Congressman Andrew Jacobs Jr. Jacobs' mother is longtime TV personality Kim Hood, who paired with Tom Cochran years ago to pioneer early evening television.

And, if you're curious, when you get to the poll you will find nine — count 'em, nine — names of Democrats running for president, a race that was over with before the pandemic arrived.

Oh, and just in case . . . you do have the option to vote for former Massachusetts governor and senate candidate Bill Weld. He is right there on the Republican ballot, running against Donald J. Trump.

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