

Howey’s Power List for 2021

If you seek a sense of the ebb and flow of politics and politicians in Indiana — who’s hot, who’s not — no better to place to start than Brian Howey’s annual accounting, which he calls the Power 50. It always comes around about this time of year, just as it has for 20 years now.

Howey is one of no more than three or four people who obsess over the antics of Hoosier politicians. He, Abdul Hakim Shabazz, Adam Wren, Niki Kelly.

Start with the bad news. Not a single one of the 50 is one of us. Not a Grant County person on the list, or even one who somehow represents Grant County. The closest we come is Ron Klain, who takes over as chief of staff in the President Biden White House this week.

He has a tie to us, but it is tenuous. An Indianapolis native who went to North Central High School, class of ’79, Klain has been on the Washington fast track for quite a few years. He was Biden’s chief of staff during his eight vice-presidential years and headed up Al Gore’s vice-presidential staff during the Clinton years. He got considerable

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notice when he was the “Ebola czar,” the Obama point man when an Ebola outbreak seemed a serious threat back in 2014.

His Marion link? It is through the Klain family, which operated scrap metal and construction businesses in Marion for many years. Jason Klain and Lawrence Klain were family members. Thanks to Jody Able Tzucker, daughter of the late Milton Able of Milton’s Clothing store fame, we have the whole story. Says she:

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“Ron Klain is a first cousin twice removed of Jason Klain. His father was Stanley, grandfather was David, and great-grandfather was Samuel. Samuel Klain and Jason’s father were brothers. So Ron’s great grandfather Samuel was a brother to Lawrence Klain and Jason’s uncle.”

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himself, who topped the list last year. He slips to 10th in the power ranking, but stays on the list because he is, of course, Mike Pence. In the wake the last couple of weeks, all bets are off on what will be the personal and political future for Mike and Karen.

A couple of D.C. players — Alex Azar and Sema Verma — remained on the list, but because of what they might choose to do back home again in Indiana. Azar, a former Eli Lilly executive who has been Secretary of Health and Human Services, may

well be looking to succeed Eric Holcomb in the governor’s office in 2024. But so are Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and maybe a few more.

Seema Verma, who has run the monster that is Medicare and Medicaid for four years, will be returning to Indiana, if ever so briefly. Her future may be in Silicon Valley in the far West.

A couple of mayors worked their way onto the list. Start, of course, with a former mayor and presidential candidate, Pete Buttieig, who is up there as Transportation Secretary in the Biden Cabinet and seventh on Howey’s list. Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry and Fishers Mayor Scott Fadness are both in the middle of the pack, Henry for his surprising longevity in a fourth term and Fadness because he is running the fastest growing city in the state.

On the Congressional list, Jim Banks is there, although he’s in a swamp of his own making at the moment with his support of Trump and being among the Congressional delegation who wanted to send the Electoral Vote back to

the states. Banks, now third district Congressman, was once Marion’s state senator in the General Assembly before he went federal.

Both U.S. Senators Mike Braun and Todd Young are on the list, but so is former Democrat Sen. Joe Donnelly, who was unseated by Mike Braun, but may have his sights set on a return visit to Washington. His first opportunity is against Todd Young in two years.

A couple of those listed may have been beneficiaries of COVID in some strange way. Health Commissioner Dr. Cristina Box is up in the rarified air in sixth place, probably because she has acquitted herself well in the weekly public appearance with Gov. Holcomb to tell Hoosiers how to stay alive in the Age of COVID.

“She is about as close to Holcomb as anybody in the administration,” Howey concluded.

Bottom line: Eric Holcomb is firmly in possession of the number one spot. Howey’s assessment:

“He is poised to become one of the most powerful governors in Indiana’s history.”



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