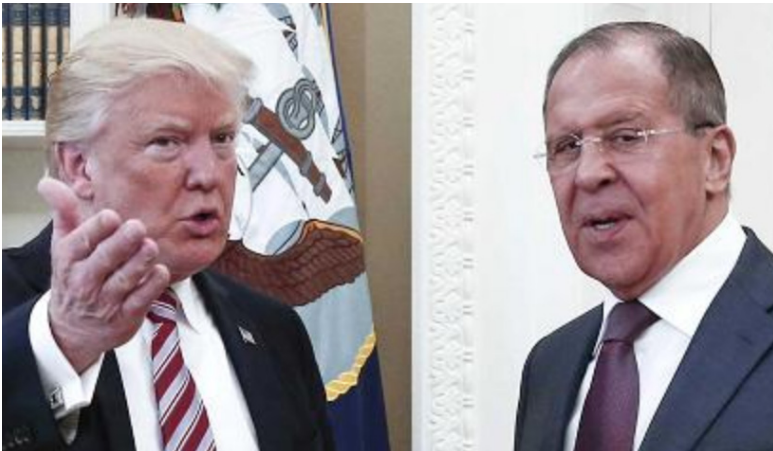


Trump controversies swirl by Pence



Freelancing Trump in ‘downward spiral’ as Pence stays positioned

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Let me make one thing perfectly clear: Vice President Mike Pence arduously sticks to highly scripted, time-tested, narrow talking points. And President Trump? Not so much. Sad!

This past week, we’ve witnessed a honeymoonless White House teetering somewhere in a legal and consti-

tutional no man’s land. It shifted into higher gear Wednesday with the Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein’s hiring of former FBI Director Robert Mueller as special counsel for the Russia/Trump campaign probe. And it has raised the specter of a potential Trump impeachment and the potential of a Pence presidency.

On Wednesday, Pence filed FEC paperwork for the creation of a new leadership PAC.

Since Trump fired FBI Director James Comey on

Continued on page 3

Trump Jr. reminds GOP

By **TONY SAMUEL**

INDIANAPOLIS – What a huge week for the State GOP and especially for original Trump supporters in Indiana. Having a Trump in the state six months to the night of being first on the board to elect Donald J. Trump president, and one year to the week of winning the critical Indiana primary, was a big-league way to cap off a great year.

The 20-point general election victory followed but also overshadows Indiana’s primary win when candidate Trump won all nine congressional districts, thus collecting all 57 Indiana delegates and knocking out his last two opponents. Remember the surprise withdrawal by Sen.



“There’s two people I think Putin pays: Rohrabacher and Trump. Swear to God.”

- House Majority Leader

Kevin McCarthy, in a conversation recorded in June 2016.

House Speaker Paul Ryan ordered the remarks kept secret.



Howey Politics Indiana
WWHowey Media, LLC 405
Massachusetts Ave., Suite
300 Indianapolis, IN 46204
www.howeypolitics.com

Brian A. Howey, Publisher
Mark Schoeff Jr., Washington
Jack E. Howey, Editor
Mary Lou Howey, Editor
Thomas Curry, Statehouse
Mark Curry, photography

Subscriptions

HPI, HPI Daily Wire \$599
 HPI Weekly, \$350
 Ray Volpe, Account Manager
317.602.3620

email: HoweyInfo@gmail.com

Contact HPI

bhowey2@gmail.com
 Howey's cell: 317.506.0883
 Washington: 202.256.5822
 Business Office: 317.602.3620

© 2017, Howey Politics
Indiana. All rights reserved.
 Photocopying, Internet forward-
 ing, faxing or reproducing in
 any form, whole or part, is a
 violation of federal law without
 permission from the publisher.



Ted Cruz that night followed by Gov. Kasich the next day? Back then, Donald Trump Jr. was in the state in April, stumping for his Dad. Having him back was a cool reminder of how important Indiana was for the Trump nomination.

That May 3 primary win, at a time when pundits could only focus on what would keep Donald Trump from the nomination, propelled him on a clear path to well over the 1,237 delegates needed without having to worry about any further competition. Don Jr. acknowledged it in his speech before over 1,000 loyalists, saying that it all started in Indiana.

Kudos to Kyle Hupfer, doing a terrific job in his new role as state chairman, for asking Don Jr. to headline the first state GOP dinner under new leadership. I am especially pleased that Republicans in Indiana have unified around our president.

Hopefully it stays that way after the latest round of unsubstantiated stories coming out of the Washington Post and New York Times and pure hypocrisy coming from national democrats following James Comey's firing. Not to digress, but it is funny how Comey's firing completely confused Hillary's comeback after she had again blamed him for her loss. I don't think we've heard from her since – what can she say now? And why are stories with unnamed sources, that are easily debunked, so quick to become the latest bombshells from the unglued media? A mob mentality has now taken over the national media and national democrats. Remember that none of the people that we are hearing from have even seen the Comey memo. But back to that dinner in and about Indiana, where heads are more level.

For true Trumpers, it was great not just to have Don Jr. in town but also to have the Indiana Trump

state chair Rex Early introduce the nation's first son. After more than a year of campaigning and traveling the state with him, I knew that Rex was honored, excited and nervous to be on that stage and again in the spotlight. Of course he came through like a true Marine and added some humor when sharing how Don Jr. took time out from hunting for votes to do some turkey hunting while in Indiana last spring, a passion shared by Rex.

The reminder of all of the hard work and how rewarding the payoff has been was followed by a call to stay vigilant and continue the effort in 2018 to win back the Senate seat held by Joe Donnelly, "My father will need that vote," said Don Jr.

Another reminder from the



Donald Trump Jr. gets a hug from Rex Early at the Indiana GOP Spring Dinner. Early chaired the presidents 2016 Indiana campaign. (HPI Photo by Tony Samuel)

primary came when Don Jr. mentioned Bob Knight's support and that he wants to keep helping. Candidate Trump held seven rallies in the last 13 days before that primary win, not just with Bob Knight but also with Gene Keady, Digger Phelps and Lou Holtz via a video endorsement shown at the South Bend rally, proving Trump was a unifier, not a divider. He united Indiana sports fans.

April, 2016, was significant for another reason. On April 20, the day after Trump had devastated his

opponents in the New York primary, he made his first campaign visit to Indiana, holding the first of the two state fairground rallies. He made a stop at the Governor's Residence for his first meeting with then Gov. Mike Pence which went extremely well and was the actual beginning of a great partnership that was cemented again in Indiana on July 12 and 13. On those dates, Gov. Pence had the good fortune of a flat tire to the Trump plane after a rally in Westfield, following a fundraising event at the Columbia Club.

That flat tire led to an unscheduled dinner meeting at a downtown restaurant attended by Donald and Eric Trump and Gov. Pence and First Lady Karen Pence, and then a hastily scheduled morning breakfast meeting with Don Jr. and Ivanka flying in to participate.

The rest is history, but much of this story is forgotten because of the dizzying pace of events that followed, including the Republican Convention in Cleveland, the race to the finish on Nov. 8, the transition and now four months into the first term.

It was great to have Donald Trump Jr. back in Indiana with a positive message and as a reminder of the events that occurred before and after that May 3 primary. Incredible things have happened for Indiana and from Indiana for this Trump presidency, and they will continue.

❖

Samuel is president of Samuel Solutions in Indianapolis and was vice chair of the Indiana Trump campaign in 2016.

Trump/Pence, from page 1

May 9, we've witnessed him undercut his defenders, including Pence, acknowledging to NBC's Lester Holt a week ago, "I was going to fire Comey, my decision. There is no good time to do it; by the way, I was going to fire regardless of recommendation."

That came after Pence said on May 9, "Let me be very clear that the president's decision to accept the recommendation of the deputy attorney general and the attorney general to remove Director Comey as the head of the FBI was based solely and exclusively on his commitment to the best interests of the American people and to ensuring that the FBI has the trust and confidence of the people this nation." Politico reported, "Pence knew this wasn't about Rosenstein writing a memo, the president seeing it and suddenly deciding to fire Comey," said this person. "He knows better than that."

We've learned that Trump pressed Comey for his "loyalty" in February and then asked him to terminate the FBI investigation of former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, who had lied to Pence last January, something that the vice president wasn't informed of for about two weeks. These actions have conjured the Nixonian era phrase "obstruction of justice."

It's insightful when the legendary White House utility infielder, David Gergen, who worked for both impeachable Presidents Nixon and Clinton, picks up the narrative telling CNN, "I was in the Nixon administration, as you know, and I thought after watching the Clinton impeachment I'd never see another one, but I think we're in



impeachment territory now for the first time." Or the 2000 Republican presidential nominee, U.S. Sen. John McCain, who described the emerging Trumpian scandals as reaching "Watergate size and scale."

And Republican U.S. Sen. Bob Corker said the Trump White House was in a "downward spiral."

New York Times reporter Charlie Savage asked the question, what is obstruction of justice? Several federal statutes criminalize actions that impede official investigations. While some examples of illegal ways to thwart the justice system are specific – like killing a witness or destroying evidence – the law also includes broad, catchall prohibitions. For example, Sections 1503, 1505 and 1512 of Title 18 have variants of language making it a crime if someone corruptly "obstructs, influences or impedes any official proceeding." Could that cover asking the FBI director to drop part of an investigation, and later firing him? In theory, yes. Such statutes were broadly drafted. Georgetown Prof. Julie O'Sullivan, a former federal prosecutor, said the power relationship between a president and the FBI director could elevate a request to shut down a case into an act that amounts to impeding an official investigation. "He really needs a lawyer," Ms. O'Sullivan said of Mr. Trump. "He is building a beautiful case against himself."

As bomblets, MOABs, boulders and shards careen down Capitol Hill to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, we find the Trump White House in a state of bedlam and paranoia. Axios reported: "Republicans close to the White House fear that Tuesday's revelations could take President Trump into a legal or constitutional realm where his staff and supporters can't save him. 'A whole new door has opened,' said a well-known Republican operative who has worked to help the Trump White House. 'A week ago, we were talking

about the agenda grinding to a halt,' the Republican said. 'Now, the train is going down the hill backwards.'"

The New York Times reported: "Mr. Trump's appetite for chaos, coupled with his disregard for the self-protective conventions of the presidency, have left his staff confused and squabbling. And his own mood, according to two advisers who spoke on the condition of anonymity, has become sour and dark, turning against most of his aides – even his son-in-law, Jared Kushner – and describing them in a fury as incompetent, according to one of those advisers." And this from Politico: "Nobody knows where this really goes from here," the White House official said. "Everyone is walking around saying, 'What is next?' Another official said, 'We are kind of helpless.'"



The Mueller factor

The appointment of former FBI Director Mueller as the Department of Justice's special prosecutor for the Russian/Trump campaign probe injects a new dynamic. Mike Allen of Axios observes this morning: President Trump gets a Russia respite — at the price of long-term peril. The surprise appointment of straight-arrow Mueller as Special Counsel ("to oversee the previously-confirmed FBI investigation of Russian government efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election and related matters") lets the White House and Hill try to get traction on other topics. But Yahoo's Michael Isikoff, steeped in federal law enforcement, told Greta Van Susteren on MSNBC that the selection was the "worst possible choice for the White House ... dangerous."

Mueller is by-the-book, focused on making cases, viewed as impervious to outside influence. Mueller also happens to be friends with the spurned Jim Comey, another reason that the choice — announced by Rosenstein, who apparently was irate that the Comey firing was initially pinned on him by the White House — is worrisome for the West Wing.

Hoosier GOP shift begins

Some Hoosier Republicans began shifting their tone this week. U.S. Sen. Todd Young reacted to Trump's relay of highly classified material to the Russians, telling Roll Call it was an "incredibly serious situation." U.S. Rep. Jim Banks said, "President Trump has the authority to disclose intelligence information but the implications of sharing sensitive material must be carefully considered. The lives of intelligence professionals around the globe and vital international partnerships depend on the responsible safeguarding of sensitive information."

And the contours of the 2018 U.S. Senate race began to take shape, with U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita ardently defending Trump, saying, "Every day Washington liberals

throw some new phony attack at the wall to see what sticks. While they play political games, the Middle East is on fire and Iran has been empowered. North Korea is threatening the world. Russia has never been more influential since the fall of the Berlin Wall. All of this is because of the naive, failed foreign policy of the Obama administration and Washington liberals including Joe Donnelly. They've made

America less safe. I have confidence that President Trump, Vice President Pence, Secretary Tillerson, Secretary Mattis, Director Coats and our intelligence and law enforcement agencies will keep America safe."

His potential opponent, U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly observed, "This White House needs to get its act together. This information should never have been shared with the Russians or anyone else without the okay of whoever shared it with us. Lives are on the line in the fight against ISIS and other extremist adversaries. This isn't a game."

The notion of 'President Pence'

Through all of this self-inflicted turmoil that threatens to swamp the GOP agenda, the once obscure notion that there might be a "President Pence" between now and 2021 has just ratcheted up several notches.

Pence has emerged as what Politico describes as "the invisible man," with reporters Matthew Nussbaum and Eliana Johnson writing: "While many vice presidents angle for power inside the West Wing, Pence has defined his role narrowly. His thinking, according to those close to him, is that the vice president has only two constitutional duties – to serve as president of the Senate and to be prepared for the worst. The rest is up to Trump. The former Indiana governor speaks with Trump multiple times a day and is a regular presence in the Oval Office, senior administration officials say. He has cultivated good relationships with Ivanka Trump and son-in-law Jared Kushner, remains close with chief of staff Reince Priebus and senior adviser Kellyanne Conway, has developed a bond with economic adviser Gary Cohn, and even has a good rapport with Steve Bannon."

It's worth noting that while Pence is a constant Oval Office presence, he was nowhere to be seen when the Russians showed up last week.

This week, Pence launched his own leadership PAC - Great America Committee - which will be led by longtime aides Marty Obst and Nick Ayers. Its registration was posted with the FEC on Wednesday. "The Vice President is playing a leading role in passing legislation on the Hill," Ayers told Politico. "He wants to support House and Senate members who are helping pass the president's agenda."

"Having Pence in reserve is one of the few things, I think, that is calming Republican nerves," Rice University presidential historian Douglas Brinkley told Politico today. "It would just be a more mild-mannered Pence who never

says anything offensive, who doesn't take to Twitter, who goes to Church every Sunday."

Pence's loyalty to Trump in a White House where the president has lined up yes men hasn't translated into the kind of Dick Cheney clout within the administration or a position within Trump's inner circle, Nussbaum and Johnson reported. Nor is it clear Pence has tried to place himself there. "If he isn't ineffectual, he sure is invisible," said one prominent Republican. Another, a longtime friend of the vice president, said that it's "not clear that he has any more influence than any other senior staffer." Chris Ruddy, a friend of the president's and CEO of the conservative media company Newsmax, called him "the perfect vice president for Donald Trump" in part because he "lets the president glow without distraction."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich observed, "He hasn't gotten any scars in the first 100 days. In a place this controversial, I'd say that's pretty good."

But we've watched Trump's "glow" go from the kind of limelight one earns with one of the greatest political upsets in American history to that of radioactive.

Can't fire a veep

Pence occupies a unique position amid the churning turmoil. While Steve Bannon, Reince Priebus, Kellyanne Conway and any cabinet secretary who crosses a Trump apparatchik could conceivably hear "You're fired," Trump cannot fire his vice president. Pence can be marginalized, as President Wilson did with Vice President Thomas Marshall a century ago. Pence seems to be doing what he does best, which is to hover over the flotsam and jetsam with a sunny disposition, irritating no one, and positioning himself for perhaps the great reward emanating from the most epic Shakespearean political drama we'll ever witness.

Thus, the coming months will be fascinating for Mike Pence. It could be a painful experience.

Twice, with the Flynn lies and now his defense of the Comey firing, Pence has been undercut by President Trump. This has happened to H.R. McMaster, Sean Spicer and a host of others who have defended the president, only to find themselves contradicted on the Twitter machine or in Trump interviews. Trump veers off script like a carnival bumper car or a Rosie O'Donnell rendition of the National Anthem.

James Hohmann of the Washington Post called loyalty to Trump a one-way street. "Many West Wing staffers have sacrificed their personal reputations by parroting falsehoods on behalf of Donald Trump. How will their devotion be repaid? Perhaps with pink slips," Hohmann writes. "The president has a congenital inability to take personal responsibility for his own mistakes. Throughout his career, he's sought out scapegoats whenever situations

get hairy. He's doing it again amid the continuing fallout from his decision to fire James Comey as FBI director. Trump demands unquestioning loyalty from his subordinates, but kowtowing and paying fealty do not ensure that he'll return the favor."

Trump clearly prefers yes men. Just last weekend, senior officials attested to this. "I understand I have to earn his confidence every day," Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on NBC's Meet the Press. Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, explained on Fox News last Thursday, as the Comey imbroglio blew up, "The president expects people who are serving in his administration ... to be loyal to the administration." And UN Ambassador Nikki Haley said on ABC's This Week, "The president is the

CEO of the country. He can hire and fire whomever he wants. That's his right."

The Haley quote was rebuked by MSNBC's Joe Scarborough, who reminded Trumpers that the presidency is nothing like a private business run by a CEO. It is subject to constitutional checks and balances that chafe President Trump, and he must work with Congress to achieve objectives, instead of just ordering them performed.

"Trump is like a pilot opting to fly a plane through heavy turbulence then blaming the flight attendants when the passengers get jittery," Post reporter Phil Rucker observed. "Some of Trump's allies said they are worried that the president views the Comey episode entirely as a public-relations crisis – a branding problem – and has not been judicious about protecting himself from legal exposure as the FBI continues to investigate possible links between his campaign and Russia."

The ultimate Pence calculation

Last June, when scores of establishment Republicans wouldn't touch Trump's veepstakes with a 10-foot pole, Mike Pence was all in. He sought to become the top yes man. It was a historic roll of the dice. It saved Pence's political career from a potential Indiana reelection defeat. But it has placed the former Indiana governor at the nexus of scandal, dysfunction, paranoia and turmoil.

The speculation that President Trump might not want to serve a full term – something he fueled with strange comments last July in the middle of the campaign – has evolved into a scenario where his own actions and words might bring him to trial in the Senate. Trump's antagonism of the U.S. intelligence community (he compared them to Nazis) and the press ("enemies of the people"), and his firing of the meticulous note-taking Comey have positioned this president on a withering firing line.

Listening to this staccato, keeping his head below the crosshairs, is Vice President Pence, a heartbeat away.

❖



The day Ruckleshaus stood tall vs. Nixon

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

BRECKENRIDGE, Colo. – The storm clouds of scandal that had gathered over President Nixon in 1973 appeared to have reached a climax when Vice President Spiro Agnew abruptly resigned, pleading “nolo contendere” to taking bribes as a public servant in Maryland. Lead-



ing that investigation had been Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckleshaus.

When Agnew resigned, Ruckleshaus, a former state senator from Indianapolis and the 1968 Republican U.S. Senate nominee, headed to Grand Rapids to launch a background check into the newly nominated vice president, U.S. Rep. Gerald Ford. In an interview with C-SPAN’s Brian Lamb, Ruckleshaus

related that Attorney General Eliot Richardson told him, “We’ve got an even worse problem than the vice president.”

“That’s not possible,” Ruckleshaus reacted. Richardson responded, “Yes, it is. The White House seems determined to fire Archibald Cox.” Cox was the Watergate special prosecutor investigating President Nixon. “And I remember saying, ‘Don’t worry about it. They’ll never do that. There would be too much of a public furor if they tried.’”

On Oct. 19, 1973, Cox had given an impassioned press conference, defending his investigation that began with the Watergate break-in of the Democratic National Committee and had become a direct threat to Nixon.

“Whether ours shall continue to be a government of laws and not of men is now for Congress and ultimately the American people,” Cox said.

As the heat turned up in Washington, Ruckleshaus returned from Grand Rapids two days prior to the Cox news conference. The pressure from Nixon to fire Cox intensified as he was seeking the White House Oval Office’s tapes.

Thus, the so-called “Saturday Night Massacre” was set. Nixon ordered Richardson to fire Cox on Oct. 20 and he refused. “He subsequently asked me, and I told him the same thing, that I had been thinking about this all week.

I was aware the pressure was building, and I’d decided I didn’t want to do it,” Ruckleshaus explained. “In my judgment, Cox had done everything he was supposed to do as special prosecutor.” Richardson resigned and Ruckleshaus was fired.

The “Saturday Night Massacre” created the ultimate slippery slope for Nixon, who was ordered by the Supreme Court to turn over the Watergate tapes in July 1974. He resigned on Aug. 8, facing imminent impeachment.

The relevancy of this episode gained traction on Tuesday when President Trump fired FBI Director James Comey.

There were three investigations into Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign and whether there was collusion with the Russian government to impact the outcome: The U.S. House, the U.S. Senate and the FBI. Only one of those, the FBI, could press criminal charges against the president, his inner circle, or campaign aides.

Trump’s rationale? In a memo from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, Comey refused “to accept the nearly universal judgment that he was mistaken” to go public in July with his reasons for recommending no criminal charges against Clinton and he had “usurped” the attorney general’s authority.

Trump, who was reportedly fuming about the Russia probe for the past two weeks, has now fired Comey,



Manhattan District Attorney Preet Bharara, and Acting Attorney General Sally Yates, all with authority to investigate the president.

In this wake, NBC’s First Read points out: “Every time President Trump has faced the choice between advancing his own interests and upholding the country’s separation of powers, traditions and norms, he’s picked the former.” He won’t release his taxes. He wants to break up the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. He hasn’t divested business conflicts. He claims Obama wiretapped him. He calls the FBI investigation “phony” and “fake news.”

The riveting question is why didn't Trump fire Comey in January when he took office? He would have had wide support, including here. Instead, this comes after Comey's March 20 testimony confirming the FBI probe while refuting Trump's claims of the Obama wire-taps.

As Jay Caruso, writing on the conservative blog RedState, observed, "The answers to both steamroll President Trump's rantings and ravings about them on Twitter and in public."

Conservative commentator Peter Wehner, observed, "A powerful, independent person Mr. Trump did not appoint and whose investigation he clearly feared has been summarily fired. He would not use power benevolently but unwisely, recklessly, and in ways that would undermine our democratic institutions and faith in our government."

Comey impacted the 2016 election twice and in unprecedented form for an FBI director. He had lost confi-



dence of both Republicans and Democrats. If Trump was to fire Comey, he should have done it on Jan. 20, because on March 20, we now realize that the president is possibly in the legal crosshairs.

Here are two reactions of note: The Russians have to be doing the Soviet equivalent of the high-fives for all of the resulting Yankee chaos. Asked about the Comey firing just hours before he was to meet with Trump on Wednesday in the Oval Office, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said,

"Was he fired? You're kidding? You're kidding?"

Yes, America, they're not laughing with us, but at us.

And C-SPAN's Lamb asked Ruckleshaus if he ever worried the U.S. would fall apart back in 1973-74. "I never had any doubt that the system would hold. In a sense, the wheels . . . came off those individuals, they didn't come off the country," Ruckleshaus said. "The country held together very well." ❖

Running for office?



PoliticalBank is the only resource candidates and elected officials need to move their campaigns forward.

"Great job on a useful and innovative website. Your site empowers candidates and helps equip voters in a new & comprehensive way."

- Mayor Blair Milo, LaPorte, Indiana

PoliticalBank is a simple, interactive platform and a powerful, cost-effective alternative to the "old way" of online campaigning, without the hassle of designing your own campaign website or the expense of hiring web developers or consultants.

- ✓ Raise money online
- ✓ Increase your Name ID
- ✓ Connect with voters
- ✓ Define your own campaign
- ✓ Clearly convey your stance on important issues

Get started in less than 10 minutes on a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Campaigns start here. Visit www.PoliticalBank.com

Are political spouses fair campaign game?

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Ahhhhh, the political spouse. Are these people fair political game?

The issue surfaced with the Associated Press story last week that Jennifer Messer, wife of U.S. Rep. Luke Messer, made \$580,000 since 2015 for legal consulting she largely does from the Washington, D.C., area for the city of Fishers, “an unusually large sum even in a state rife with highly paid government contractors,” according to a review by the Associated Press.

Mrs. Messer makes \$20,000 a month working as a contract attorney for Fishers, according to the AP’s review of public documents. Messer defended his wife, calling her the “brains of the Messer outfit” and saying the contract predated his political career. Messer is blaming a planted story line by his potential 2018 U.S. Senate opponent, U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita. In an email to supporters obtained by Howey Politics Indiana, Messer said, “For what it’s worth, the story is a complete hatchet job directly attributable to Rokita. Just about the only element not distorted is the headline. Needless to say, it’s rare for campaigns to start by attacking an opponent’s spouse. But, I guess we all knew Todd is anything but ordinary. Most importantly, this is completely unfair to my wife. I, of course, ran for office, but she did not. She has worked 16 years to build a career.”

This follows a 2016 campaign/media dynamic where the campaign of U.S. Sen. Todd Young repeatedly planted negative stories on U.S. Rep. Marlin Stutzman (and his family) to Brian Slodysko of the Associated Press. And it worked! Young easily won the primary and Slodysko was named Indiana Journalist of the Year by the Society of Professional Journalists.

In the modern era of Indiana politics, political wives have taken on a variety of roles. Marvella Bayh was the revered matriarch of a senatorial dynasty. Judy O’Bannon wielded considerable influence as a conspicuous



partner of Gov. Frank O’Bannon and wowed Democratic crowds with her impassioned narratives. Karen Pence was an impactful presence in Gov. Mike Pence’s inner circle. Ruthie McIntosh played a key role with U.S. Rep. David McIntosh. Lake Superior Judge Marisa McDermott is the wife of four-term Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr.

Other political wives, such as Maggie Kernan, Cheri Daniels and Josie Orr were known for different reasons, playing limited roles for Govs. Joe Kernan, Mitch Daniels and Robert Orr, often by their own design. Mrs. Kernan, for instance, was a South Bend bank executive during her husband’s tenure as lieutenant governor and governor.

One other political wife stands out: Susan Bayh, wife of former U.S. Sen. and Gov. Evan Bayh. She was the topic numerous reports that when Bayh retired from the U.S. Senate in 2011, he left with a fortune estimated to be around \$14 million. Much of that was attributed to Mrs. Bayh, who held an array of lucrative corporate board positions for Curis Inc., Dendreon Corp., Dyax Corp., Emmis Communications, and Wellpoint Inc.

Because the Bayhs appeared to have cashed in on his political position, Mrs. Bayh stood to be a campaign issue when Sen. Bayh was presumed to be preparing for a reelection bid. When he suddenly bolted the race in February 2010, there was wide speculation that Mrs. Bayh’s exposed finances were a key reason. It resurfaced in 2016 when Bayh tried a political comeback, pushing Baron Hill out of the U.S. Senate nomination last July. The Bayh brand was damaged by the campaign of Todd Young and a variety of U.S. Senate and conservative PACs, who went on to claim a 52-42% upset victory.

The 2016 Senate race also skirted another political spouse, Christy Stutzman, who played a significant role in the Senate campaign of U.S. Rep. Marlin Stutzman. The Young campaign successfully seeded stories with the Associated Press about potential campaign finance violations involving the travels of the Stutzman family. She was also a topic of stories during a couple of shakeups in the Stutzman Senate campaign.

In this context, Jennifer Messer stands to join Susan Bayh as a spouse who “cashed in,” as the AP narrative goes.

Jennifer Messer begged to differ, saying in an op-ed article circulated last week, “Last week I was featured in a news story about the fact that I provide legal services for the city of Fishers. The story was unfair, intellectually



The family of U.S. Rep. Luke and Jennifer Messer.

dishonest and straight-up sexist. You know the charge; congressman's wife (by the way, I have a name; it's Jennifer Messer) gets paid too much for not really doing very much, leaving the presumption that me and the local municipality are doing something wrong."

Mrs. Messer presented "the facts," saying, "I have worked with Fishers for nearly eight years, and Fishers was my client two years before my husband was elected to Congress. I am paid well for my legal services but the city is paying less today for legal services than it was before its contract with my firm. I work diligently for Fishers and have never, in eight years, taken my job for granted. My job is a privilege, not just because I love the economic development work that I do, but because I work with a group of rock-stars. These are people who wake up every day and want to make Fishers a better place for its residents, potential residents and businesses."

Fishers Mayor Scott Fadness defended Mrs. Messer, writing in a Facebook posting, "I have worked with Jennifer on legal matters for the city since 2010, before her husband was in Congress. Jennifer was the author of our transition ordinance that transformed our town to a city. Since her start with the city we have transitioned our legal department from an all-outsourced department to a hybrid with some in-house staff and some contractual. Jennifer has stayed on through a contractual professional services agreement. She is responsible for drafting and negotiating a majority of the economic deals that are conducted on behalf of the city. She has an hourly rate that is less than \$200 an hour and substantively less than what you would find in large firms with this type of special expertise."

Fadness added, "I am disappointed at the tone of this story. Jennifer is smart, capable, and professional. Her work stands on its own and the value that she brings to the city is real, regardless of who she is married to. My goal is to always build the best team for my city, with the best experience and expertise."

There is a nexus in the Messer/Fadness relationship. Both have worked extensively with GOP political operative Jennifer Hallowell and her husband, former Marion



First Lady Judy O'Bannon (top with Gov. Frank O'Bannon, Maggie Kernan with Gov. Joe Kernan, and Susan Bayh on the campaign trail in 2016. (HPI Photos by Brian A. Howey and Mark Curry)

County Republican chairman Kyle Walker. Both preside over an extensive financial network that has been associated with political figures ranging from former Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard to former Marion County prosecutor Carl Brizzi. It's true that Mrs. Messer's tenure with Fishers pre-dates Rep. Luke Messer's congressional career, though he ran for Congress in 2000 and 2010 when he challenged U.S. Rep. Dan Burton, losing 30-28% in a crowded field. He served three terms in the Indiana House and had been executive director of the Indiana Republican Party. In short, Messer has long been seen as a rising star in Hoosier politics, and he has

risen rapidly to the fifth most powerful position in the U.S. House.

This is one of these stories where no laws were broken. There are no clear ethical violations. By all accounts, she is a talented attorney in her own right. But the money she made off municipal taxpayers raised eyebrows in Republican circles. It was a topic among Republicans who didn't have a bone to pick with Rep. Messer.

Don't be surprised if this is an active issue through the 2018 Republican primary.

Rokita names finance team

Rep. Todd Rokita, R-4th, has taken a step toward launching a U.S. Senate bid by appointing a statewide campaign finance staff (Francisco, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). Rokita has named Dan Domezich to chair the team. Domezich, an attorney from Schererville, is a former treasurer of the Indiana Republican Party and a former state legislator who has worked on campaign finance teams for GOP presidential candidates Donald Trump, Mitt Romney and George W. Bush. "There is no better political fundraiser in Indiana," Rokita said in a news release. Other members of Rokita's finance team include Jamie Weber

and Dave Buskill, who have worked on Rokita’s House campaigns, and Washington-based fundraisers Laura Van Hove, Jon Graham and Mike Gula. Rokita is considering seeking the Republican nomination next year for the seat held by Sen. Joe Donnelly, D-Ind.

Democrats aim at Messer, Rokita

Democrats are running YouTube ads targeting two leading Republicans likely to run for U.S. Senate for their recent votes in favor of the Affordable Care Act replacement (Lange, IndyStar). The six-second advertisement released by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee features a mock medical bill with rising costs next to the words “Drug addiction treatment – pre-existing condition.” It encourages Hoosiers to hold U.S. Reps. Todd Rokita, and Luke Messer accountable for their vote on the measure. Opponents of the House’s health care plan have criticized the bill for weakening protections against those with pre-existing conditions.

Rokita slams Donnelly over Comey

Hoosiers for Rokita released the following statement regarding Sen. Joe Donnelly’s response to FBI Director Comey’s dismissal: “Sen. Donnelly knows full well the FBI director serves at the pleasure of the president of the United States. Director Comey had lost the confidence of Democrats and Republicans, and in consultation with

the attorney general, President Trump made the decision to dismiss Comey and start fresh. The FBI needs to move beyond the political controversies which have consumed it over the past year. Joe Donnelly is showing his true colors once again with his cynical, politically motivated calls for an investigation. To pacify his liberal political base, which he admits to voting with nine out of 10 times, DC Joe Donnelly is locking arms with extreme liberals in their phony outrage. Donnelly’s boss, Chuck Schumer, had lost confidence in Comey, until of course President Trump acted within his authority and removed him. Hoosiers should expect better from their senator than a rubber stamp for the divisive, obstructionist policies of Washington liberals.”

Congress: 4th CD Democrats talk

Democratic 4th District candidates Sherry Shipley and Joe Mackey focused on health care issues at separate events on Tuesday in an effort to find support to win the seat currently occupied by U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN). Shipley gathered with Greater Lafayette residents to hear concerns about the proposed replacement for Obamacare (Tuggle, WBAA). Mackey said that if the ACA is repealed, another possible (though not definite) result would be small hospitals, like St. Vincent Clay in Brazil, closing, leaving one hospital for every four or five counties in rural Indiana. “Hoosiers are good people but we need to be great when it comes to health care,” Mackey said. “Trumpcare’

4 Drivers
33 Goals
1 Mission

FUELING ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITY
AND PROSPERITY
STATEWIDE

INDIANAVISION

2025

A PLAN FOR HOOSIER PROSPERITY

www.indianachamber.com/2025

is actually 'Republicancare' because they own it" referring to the bill that was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and sent to the U.S. Senate.

Siekman weighs another 6th CD

An attorney from Rising Sun has kicked off a CrowdPac campaign to raise funds and gauge support for a bid in the 6th Congressional District. Democrat Lane Siekman touts "his lifelong ties to Indiana to give him insight into the challenges facing district residents, workers, and businesses," the website stated. "Our healthcare is in jeopardy, public education is not being supported, and questions about integrity in government are on the minds of many Hoosiers," according to the Siekman CrowdPac web page. "Yet Luke Messer refuses to talk with his constituents or hold town halls. Rep. Messer must be held responsible. It is also very likely that he will jump to take on Joe Donnelly for the Senate, leaving the 6th as a open seat in 2018. Either way he must be stopped. We cannot afford to just crown another Republican successor in 2018." According to WRBI, Siekman has served as legal counsel for many government entities and is the executive director of the Ohio County Economic Development Corporation and secretary of the southeast Indiana Regional

Growth Alliance.

Counties: Sheriff candidates emerge

The race to be the next Marion County sheriff is in full swing (WTHR-TV). Sheriff John Layton can't run in 2018 because he's reached his term limit. This week, two people threw their names in the hat for his job. Southport Police Chief Tom Vaughn is one of them. Marion County Sgt. Jim Grimes announced earlier this week he's seeking the Republican nomination for sheriff.

Parties: Hammond elected Rules vice chair

John Hammond III, Indiana's Republican national committeeman, was elected as vice chair of the Republican National Committee's Standing Committee on Rules at the organization's spring meeting in San Diego, Cal., a news release announced (Howey Politics Indiana). The committee is charged with continuously reviewing the rules of the Republican National Committee and proposing updates to those rules. The committee comprises 56 members, one from each state, territory and the District of Columbia. Indiana Republican Party Chairman Kyle Hupfer is also attending the spring meeting. ❖



TrumpCare political health for GOP

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND — The focus of the political stethoscope, for so long examining the poor health of Democrats who voted in Congress for Obamacare, shifts now to measuring the prospects for political health of Republicans who voted for Trumpcare.



A health care plan, especially if complicated and pushed through without the public or even supporters in Congress really understanding the effects, can cause terrible health problems for those who vote for it. Democrats learned that. Will Republicans now learn the same lesson?

There is no doubt that Trumpcare will be a major issue in the 2018 elections. Polls show it is unpopular, just as Obamacare was when Republicans hammered it and

Democrats to win congressional elections.

Now, ironically, just as Republicans control Congress and the presidency and can repeal it, provisions of the Affordable Care Act, Obamacare, have become popular. A Gallup poll shows 53% approval of Obamacare, highest favorability ever, for the first time over 50%. So the GOP is having a difficult time figuring out how to dump it without severe health care and political health woes.

The monstrosity pushed through the House, without hearings or analysis of the cost and impact of what was put together with arm-twisting and political dealing, is no answer to the nation's health concerns. It was passed quickly so that President Trump could claim a victory after unflattering reviews of his first 100 days. He gleefully celebrated passage with a Rose Garden rally. He called the thing "incredibly well crafted."

House Republicans who voted to pass it know better. The last thing they want is for that version of Trumpcare to become law. If it did, they would lose control of the House in 2018.

The thing was denounced by doctors, hospitals, the AARP, health insurance providers and consumer groups. Critics said it would knock millions off health insurance, trim protections for folks with pre-existing conditions, hurt especially the poor, the middle class, the old and children and provide less care at more cost.

The thing, however, is not going to become law. It will be junked in the Senate. So either an improved Trumpcare will emerge, with actual cost and impact clarified and with some of the worst parts eliminated, which is what House Republicans hope and pray for, or nothing will be

done. Nothing is a bad choice. Obamacare, even if becoming more popular, has serious flaws that need to be fixed. Health care will suffer if nothing is done.

Democrats quickly pounced on that House version. The Indiana Democratic Party immediately denounced two Hoosier Republicans, Congressmen Todd Rokita, 4th District, and Luke Messer, 6th District, for voting for "this horrifying bill" and warned that voters will remember what they did "the next time Congressmen Messer and Rokita are on the ballot."

Other Republican House members from Indiana, including Jackie Walorski, 2nd District, also voted for Trumpcare. But they were not mentioned by name in the initial blasts. Strange? Not at all. Rokita and Messer are regarded as top contenders for the Republican nomination for the Senate for the race against Sen. Joe Donnelly, the Democratic incumbent, in 2018.

Other Republican House members will be hit later if Democrats find viable challengers. But the most important targets for Democrats now are Messer and Rokita, because one likely will be in that high profile Senate race. Democrats want to tattoo on their foreheads their votes for Trumpcare.

Even if the Senate provides a much improved Trumpcare, Democrats still will hammer at that House version. And Republicans who voted for it will say, as Messer already has, that the House vote was only a needed first step. He described the bill as "a green flag, not a checkered flag," marking the start of the race, not the finish. ❖

Colwell has covered Indiana politics over five decades for the South Bend Tribune.

The Gary air show joke

By RICH JAMES

MERRILLVILLE — The Gary Air Show – or I should say the lack of it in recent years – has become a joke.



It was announced this week that there won't be a show in Gary on the shore of Lake Michigan this year. The same was the case in 2013 and 2014.

The cancellation this year is because Gary can't afford the \$350,000 needed to provide the support to make the event a reality. Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson

said she was unable to find a corporate sponsor. The mayor had a year to secure the money and apparently was unable to do so.

And I can understand why firms like U.S. Steel Corp. and the Northern Indiana Public Service Co. wouldn't

want to pony up the money. Speros Batistatos, the president and CEO of the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority, said the loss of the show is devastating because of the hundreds of thousands of people it attracts. Batistatos' organization used to be one of the sponsors of the show and lost \$1.4 million over a nine-year span.

I've never believed the air show was such a good thing for Gary. It has been such a wonderful financial thing for Gary that Batistatos was going to move the show far south to Fair Oaks Farms a few years back when it couldn't be in Gary on the shores of Lake Michigan because of logistics reasons.

It still was going to be a financial bonus for Lake County despite the new location, Batistatos said. But it never happened. Heavy rains prior to the show made the farm fields surrounding Fair Oaks unsuitable for parking. While it is a wonderful show, I've never believed it is a financial benefit for Northwest Indiana.

Basically, the visitors drive to the show, watch it for several hours and drive home. They may buy a hot dog

and soft drink from vendors at the show, but they don't spend a dime in the city of Gary.

If it was a financial windfall for Gary, Freeman-Wilson would have found the money to make the show a reality. The show is good for Gary only in that it puts a depressed city on the map. That's it.

Freeman-Wilson said, "Our first job is to be good stewards and our team has determined that we cannot afford to host the Gary Air Show. We know that a fully sponsored show is attainable and we will begin immediately to work on making that happen." If a fully sponsored show is attainable, one has to wonder why the city didn't embark on that mission a year ago. ❖

Rich James has been writing about state and local government and politics for more than 30 years. He is a columnist for The Times of Northwest Indiana.

Parsing Indiana's anemic GDP

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – It is a pity no town crier rings our news about the latest data for our nation and state. Last week the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis made public the 2016 GDP figures. Did members of the Indiana General Assembly or the state administration pause to study and reflect on these numbers? I doubt it.



Possibly some isolated journalist picked up a news release on the Internet, but I doubt it. And what would that lone soul report? "Indiana ranked 42nd of the 50 states with a growth rate of just 0.8% in GDP during the closing three months of 2016, compared to the national advance of 1.9%."

No s/he didn't, not if s/he wants to do any interviews with state officials in the rest of this calendar year. S/he would have to dig and find something cheerful to give every Hoosier a warm, fuzzy feeling: "Indiana doubled New York's economic growth rate in the last quarter of 2016. Details at 11, 10 Central time." This wouldn't be exactly true, but close enough to be acceptable.

The people who sell the idea that Indiana is in the midst of a boom would discount a single quarter and compare 2016 quarter four, with the same quarter a year earlier. Then our annual GDP growth rate was 1.4% (23rd)

compared with the national 1.8% rate.

We always learn by comparing different periods of time. Thus, from the start the business cycle in 2002 to its end in 2009, our state's average annual rate of economic growth was just 0.55% (46th) while the nation managed a 1.4% annual rate. Business boomers, on the other hand, would favor our 15th-place ranking from 2009 to 2016 (2% vs. the nation's 1.9% GDP growth rate).

Some Hoosiers often prefer the middle ground. For the entire 14 years from 2002 to 2016, Indiana's economy averaged 1.3% growth while the nation averaged 1.7%. We rode 34th in the GDP derby.

All of these many numbers tell us just one thing: The national economy is moving along, slowly, but moving while Indiana usually lags behind. Yes, we have spurts of growth, but they are few and far between.

Ah, but the worldly wise will tell you, "Indiana is changing even faster than the rapid change in the nation." Statistically, that's difficult to prove with the data at hand. From the bottom of the Great Recession in 2009 to the end of 2016, the composition of Indiana's economy (our industry mix) has changed by just 3.40%, hardly a stunning difference from the nation's change of 3.37% percent.

Where Indiana was 19.5% different from the nation in 2008, we have drifted to a 20.2% difference. That's hardly spitting distance. Should we aim to be more (or less) like the U.S.? Whichever we choose, when will our state stop dithering and get moving? ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist, writer, and speaker who may be reached at mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com.

Pondering regular government shutdowns

By LEE HAMILTON

BLOOMINGTON – Every few months we have to contemplate the very real possibility that the government might close its doors. Is this really the best we can do?

Think about this for a moment. Two days away from a federal shutdown, Congress comes up with a stopgap measure to keep the government operating – for a week. A few days later it arrives at a bipartisan budget deal lasting a bit over four months. This, in turn, moves the president to take to Twitter with the following statement: “Our country needs a good ‘shutdown’ in September to fix mess!”



With respect to President Trump, this assertion seems more focused on settling political scores than on the good of the country. There is no such thing as a “good” shutdown. The last time it happened, in 2013, it cost the economy \$24 billion, according to Standard & Poor’s at the time. National institutions get

shuttered, federal workers are out of a job for an indeterminate period, federal loans and support for veterans are frozen, state and local governments – and all the businesses, non-profits and community organizations that depend on them – face cash shortages, and the country’s most economically vulnerable must shift for themselves. All that and more happens during a shutdown.

Yet this is the state of budget politics in this era. We’re the world’s greatest democracy, and every few months we have to contemplate the very real possibility that the government might close its doors. Is this really the best we can do? If the non-profit or business you respect most operated in this manner, would you be anything but appalled? Somehow, we’ve allowed ourselves to see this as standard operating procedure for the federal government.

How can it be that the most important document of the federal government – remember, the budget is the national blueprint for what we’ll do and how we’ll do it – gets handled in such a distressing, irrational, ineffective, uneconomic, and almost nonsensical manner? I’ll tell you how: We keep electing people who tell us they’re distressed about conducting business in this fashion and then year after year fail to get us back on track.

Because make no mistake, we know how to do it better. Congress did it for many decades. It handled appropriations bills through committee hearings, gathered expert opinions, allowed members to propose improvements, and vetted federal taxing and spending thoroughly

in both the House and the Senate before passing it on to the president. We had a steady annual process that may have had its difficulties, but offered the country a democratic and politically rational mechanism for deciding on our priorities and how to fund them.

We haven’t followed it since the middle of the 1990s. Instead, we’ve been forced to live with a process marked by high-stakes fiscal brinkmanship. Every important decision of government is reflected in the budget, but now we operate through omnibus spending bills and continuing resolutions, all of which put the government more or less on automatic pilot. Operations and processes that should be reviewed annually get no real scrutiny. New initiatives are rarely considered.

The current budget deal, negotiated between Republicans and Democrats, at least has the virtue of having included both parties at the table with give and take on both sides. In Washington these days, that’s what passes for good government. But let’s not mistake it for good process. Congress is still putting the budget together with no accountability, no transparency, and scanty debate. Most of it is written in secret largely by leadership staff. The process largely excludes ordinary members of Congress, except to vote after very limited debate. It offers little opportunity to consider amendments or expert testimony, or to conduct careful evaluations of proposed improvements and reforms. The ordinary self-corrective mechanisms that should keep government on an even keel are not operating.

And here’s the interesting thing: In all my conversations with public officials familiar with the current state of affairs, I can’t find a single one who defends it. They all know it’s bad process. But they keep using it year after year.

This is a real challenge to our representative democracy. The government faces enormous responsibilities at home and abroad, and the budget is the blueprint for how it’s going to deal with them. Isn’t it time we started getting it right? ❖

Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government; a Distinguished Scholar, IU School of Global and International Studies; and a Professor of Practice, IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Trump imperils 2018 GOP Senate gains

By **KYLE KONDICK**
Sabato's Crystal Ball

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — As the White House lurches from one self-inflicted crisis to the next -- “chaos is the new normal,” as the Columbia Journalism Review put it in a Tuesday morning headline -- Senate Republicans have to be worried that President Donald Trump’s difficulties will imperil their opportunity to make gains next year despite a very favorable map.

While Republicans can and probably will suffer at least some erosion in their House majority next year, with significant losses possible but far from guaranteed, the GOP could end up netting Senate seats next year even in a bad environment (and could net several in a good one). A new model from RealClearPolitics suggests that even with President Trump at a weak 40% approval -- his current average approval rating according to the poll aggregators -- the likeliest projection would be for no net change in the Senate.

As noted previously in the Crystal Ball, Republicans are only defending nine seats this cycle (including a special election in Alabama later this year), while Democrats are defending 25 seats (including two held by independents who caucus with the Democrats). The Democrats hold 11 Senate seats in states that Trump won in the presidential race last year, and all but one of those is on the ballot this year (the exception is Michigan Sen. Gary Peters). Republicans, meanwhile, only hold three Senate seats in states Hillary Clinton won, and only one is on the ballot next year (Nevada Sen. Dean Heller).

So Republicans have many more targets than Democrats do this cycle, but invariably some of those targets will develop better for them than others. Two states where Republican prospects, never particularly strong, seem to be fading are Maine and Minnesota, where we’re making ratings changes this week. Despite Trump’s near wins in both states -- Hillary Clinton only carried Maine by three points and Minnesota by just half that -- incumbent Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Angus King, a Maine independent who caucuses with the Democrats, both appear to be in good position to win next year.

Klobuchar appears unlikely to face a credible opponent as Republicans focus more on the open governors’ race, and she has a significant amount of crossover appeal: A Star Tribune poll found her with a 72% approval rating (Morning Consult had her at a less impressive but still strong 63%). Klobuchar moves from Likely Democratic to Safe Democratic, and assuming she wins reelection she could very well be a presidential contender when the Democratic nomination contest begins in earnest following

next year’s midterm.

In Maine, King got welcome news last week when term-limited Gov. Paul LePage (R) decided not to run. King probably would have been favored over the combustible LePage, but facing a challenge from an often underestimated sitting governor would have made the incumbent’s life much harder. State Sen. Eric Brakey (R) is running, but with credible Democrats likely to take a pass on the race, Brakey’s task is difficult against the popular King. Moreover, Maine hasn’t voted out an incumbent senator in nearly four decades (Bill Hathaway, a Democrat, was the last incumbent to lose, back in 1978). We’re moving this race from Leans Independent/Democratic to Likely Independent/Democratic.

House races

Just last week, we argued that close to two-thirds of the 435 House districts are essentially either too Republican or too Democratic to be credibly targeted by the other party. But there are a few exceptions: Rep. Collin Peterson (D, MN-7), for instance, holds a seat that Donald Trump won by 31 points -- a seat that is significantly more Republican than any other held by Democrats.

Now there could be another exception: a competitive race in a seat that was Trump’s 13th-best district by margin of victory in the entire country.

Rep. Evan Jenkins (R, WV-3), a former Democrat who defeated longtime incumbent Nick Rahall (D) in 2014, is running against Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV). That creates an open-seat race in his southern West Virginia seat, which backed Trump by 49 points in 2016, better than his 42-point statewide margin. However, many voters in this ancestrally Democratic, depopulating coal country district split their tickets: Gov. Jim Justice (D) won the district by 17 points in 2016, 10 points better than his seven-point statewide margin. If he wins reelection next year, Manchin almost certainly needs to carry WV-3, and probably by more than just a few points.

The open seat has attracted a credible Democratic candidate: newly-elected state Sen. Richard Ojeda. Ojeda, an Army veteran who unsuccessfully challenged Rahall in the 2014 primary, defeated a sitting Democratic state senator in a primary last year, which was held just a few days after Ojeda was severely beaten in an attack that may have been politically motivated. Ojeda backed Trump last year, just like so many other registered Democrats in the district. Several Republicans are either running or considering running, including ex-state Del. Rick Snuffer, who lost to Rahall in 2012, state Del. Rupie Phillips, and state Republican Party Chairman Conrad Lucas.

Despite West Virginia’s shift to the Republicans over the last two decades, open-seat House races in the state can be quite competitive: In 2014, Rep. Alex Mooney (R, WV-2) only won by three points in his successful bid to



replace now-Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R) in the House.

Unique local considerations and the possibility of plenty of ticket-splitting in WV-3 prompts us to move this open seat from Safe Republican to Likely Republican.

We also have a couple of ratings changes in some upcoming special House elections.

Greg Gianforte (R), the GOP's 2016 gubernatorial nominee, remains a favorite in next week's Montana House special election over musician Rob Quist (D). However, Republican outside groups have spent about \$4 million to boost Gianforte's bid, a clear sign that they are taking the possibility of an upset quite seriously in a statewide "district" that Trump carried by 20 points. Democrats have spent a more modest \$630,000, although Quist has out-raised Gianforte and thus is hardly starved for resources. The election is next Thursday (May 25), and the likeliest outcome seems to be a Gianforte win in the single digits. If that's what happened, the outcome would continue the trend of Democrats significantly outperforming Clinton's 2016 showing in the lion's share of federal and state legislative special elections held so far, a positive sign of Democratic voter engagement in the Trump era. A Quist win, though unlikely, would not be a complete shock given the amount of attention the race has received, and we're moving the race to Leans Republican as a way of allowing for an upset.

Meanwhile, we're still about a month away from the much-anticipated special House election in GA-6, where former congressional aide Jon Ossoff (D) faces former Georgia Secretary of State Karen Handel (R) in what has become the most expensive House election of all time. There have been only two nonpartisan polls since the initial round of voting last month: Handel led by two points in one poll and Ossoff led by two in the other. There's every reason to expect a very close outcome.

On Tuesday, former state Rep. Ralph Norman appeared to win a primary runoff to become the Republican nominee in SC-5, although his lead over state House Speaker Pro Tem Tommy Pope -- 200 votes, or about half a percentage point -- was so small that a recount looms. Assuming he is the nominee, Norman starts as a heavy favorite against Archie Parnell (D), a former Goldman Sachs tax adviser, in a race that hasn't yet attracted national spending outside of the GOP primary. As with the other special elections, where Parnell performs in relation to Clinton is worth watching: She lost the district by 19 points last year.

There's really no indication that Parnell has much of a shot to win. But we're going to move this race from Safe Republican to Likely Republican anyway. Why? Because even though these special elections are different, Trump's problems make them all alike in the sense that the GOP has to constantly be on guard for upsets.

Both the SC-5 and GA-6 specials will be on Tuesday, June 20. Given the seemingly endless

flood of new and potentially damaging revelations coming out of the White House, the circumstances under which those elections are contested a month from now could be significantly different than they are now.

Alternative Trump 'deep state' campaign

WASHINGTON — Enemies from within have launched a "deep-state" smear campaign, news organizations are acting with ulterior motives, and the worst attacks are yet to come (Peters, New York Times). Pushing back against the biggest threat so far to Donald Trump's young presidency, his most fervent supporters are building alternative narratives to run alongside the "establishment" media account — from relatively benign diversions to more bizarre conspiracies.

"They're going to say that Donald Trump has Alzheimer's," said the president's friend and longtime associate Roger Stone, who made an online video laying out how the president's own cabinet could trigger a never-used provision of the Constitution's 25th Amendment to stage a coup on the grounds that Mr. Trump is mentally unsound. "This is the game plan. Watch carefully," Mr. Stone swore.

As Americans process a dizzying week of damning revelations about the president — his firing of the F.B.I. director, James B. Comey; his disclosure of highly sensitive intelligence to the Russians; and his plea to Mr. Comey to drop the bureau's investigation of his fired national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn — Mr. Trump has found shelter on the right, where the collective judgment of the conservative media and the Republican Party so far seems to be to dismiss the allegations as "fake news," shift the blame and change the subject.

With varying degrees of credibility and credulity, conservatives have fed stories that Mr. Trump is the victim of sabotage by an adversarial intelligence community full of Trojan horse holdovers from the Obama administration.



ANTELOPE CLUB

615 N. DELAWARE ST. - DOWNTOWN INDY

antelopeclub@hotmail.com



>> Lunch & dinner 6 days a week

>> Cigar lounge

>> Beautiful view of Downtown from our 2nd floor patio

YOUR FRIENDS ALL HANG OUT HERE... DO YOU?

David Brooks, New York Times: At certain times Donald Trump has seemed like a budding authoritarian, a corrupt Nixon, a rabble-rousing populist or a big business corporatist. But as Trump has settled into his White House role, he has given a series of long interviews, and when you study the transcripts it becomes clear that fundamentally he is none of these things. At base, Trump is an infantalist. There are three tasks that most mature adults have sort of figured out by the time they hit 25. Trump has mastered none of them. Immaturity is becoming the dominant note of his presidency, lack of self-control his leitmotif. First, most adults have learned to sit still. But mentally, Trump is still a 7-year-old boy who is bouncing around the classroom. Trump's answers in these interviews are not very long — 200 words at the high end — but he will typically flit through four or five topics before ending up with how unfair the press is to him. His inability to focus his attention makes it hard for him to learn and master facts. He is ill informed about his own policies and tramples his own talking points. It makes it hard to control his mouth. On an impulse, he will promise a tax reform when his staff has done little of the actual work. Second, most people of drinking age have achieved some accurate sense of themselves, some internal criteria to measure their own merits and demerits.

But Trump seems to need perpetual outside approval to stabilize his sense of self, so he is perpetually desperate for approval, telling heroic fabulist tales about himself. "In a short period of time I understood everything there was to know about health care," he told Time. "A lot of the people have said that, some people said it was the single best speech ever made in that chamber," he told The Associated Press, referring to his joint session speech. By Trump's own account, he knows more about aircraft carrier technology than the Navy. According to his interview with The Economist, he invented the phrase "priming the pump" (even though it was famous by 1933). Trump is not only trying to deceive others. His falsehoods are attempts to build a world in which he can feel good for an instant and comfortably deceive himself. He is thus the all-time record-holder of the Dunning-Kruger effect, the phenomenon in which the incompetent person is too incompetent to understand his own incompetence. Trump thought he'd be celebrated for firing James Comey. He thought his press coverage would grow wildly positive once he won the nomination. He is perpetually surprised because reality does not comport with his fantasies.

Third, by adulthood most people can perceive how others are thinking. For example, they learn subtle arts such as false modesty so they won't be perceived as obnoxious. But Trump seems to have not yet developed a theory of mind. Other people are black boxes that supply either affirmation or disapproval. As a result, he is weirdly transparent. He wants people to love him, so he is constantly telling interviewers that he is widely loved. In Trump's telling, every meeting was scheduled for 15 min-

utes but his guests stayed two hours because they liked him so much. ❖

Jon Webb, Evansville Courier & Press: You don't need this, Donald. Quit. Look at yourself. Pacing around the White House in a ketchup-stained bath robe. Cursing and asking the nearest adviser if you can legally have Jake Tapper shipped to Chechnya. The media are gnawing at your ankles again. They accuse you divulging classified information to a hostile country. Interfering with investigations. Stabbing Jimmy Hoffa and entombing him in the walls of Trump Tower. That last one's not true — at least not yet. Give them 24 hours and you'll be the Black Dahlia killer. Tuesday evening brought one of the biggest blockbusters yet. I would say it's the biggest, but that statement could be outdated within minutes. The New York Times is reporting that you asked former FBI director James Comey to cease the federal investigation into Michael Flynn's alleged ties to Russia. They even have a memo drafted by Comey himself, in which he lays out a February meeting in point-by-point detail. It's the kind of report that makes Nixon's skeleton wince. Trump pressed James Comey to close FBI inquiry into former adviser Michael Flynn. Even if Trump revealed classified intel to Russia, it's still classified for everyone else. We're creeping closer to obstruction of justice here, pal. And while you'll still have plenty of GOP lawmakers and hardcore supporters and right-wing media types go out of their way to defend you, what's the point? You don't need this, Donald. Quit. ❖

Michael Gerson, Washington Post: Even in an era of marriage diversity, it remains the most unlikely match: President Trump and his loyal evangelical base. In the compulsively transgressive, foul-mouthed, loser-disdaining, mammon-worshipping billionaire, conservative Christians "have found their dream president," according to Jerry Falwell Jr. It is a miracle, of sorts. In a recent analysis, the Pew Research Center found that more than three-fourths of white evangelical Christians approve of Trump's job performance, most of them "strongly." With these evangelicals comprising about a quarter of the electorate, their support is the life jacket preventing Trump from slipping into unrecoverable political depths. The essence of Trump's appeal to conservative Christians can be found in his otherwise anodyne commencement speech at Liberty University. "Being an outsider is fine," Trump said. "Embrace the label." And then he promised: "As long as I am your president, no one is ever going to stop you from practicing your faith." Trump presented evangelicals as a group of besieged outsiders, in need of a defender. This sense of grievance and cultural dispossession — the common ground between The Donald and the faithful — runs deep in evangelical Christian history. ❖



Mueller named special prosecutor

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department appointed Robert S. Mueller III, a former F.B.I. director, as special counsel on Wednesday to oversee the investigation into ties between President Trump's campaign and Russian officials, dramatically raising the legal and political stakes in an affair that has threatened to engulf Mr. Trump's four-month-old presidency (Washington Post). The decision by the deputy attorney general, Rod J. Rosenstein, came after a cascade of damaging developments for Mr. Trump in recent days, including his abrupt dismissal of the F.B.I. director, James B. Comey, and the subsequent disclosure that Mr. Trump asked Mr. Comey to drop the investigation of his former national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn. "My decision is not a finding that crimes have been committed or that any prosecution is warranted," Mr. Rosenstein added. "I have made no such determination." In a statement, Mr. Trump said, "As I have stated many times, a thorough investigation will confirm what we already know — there was no collusion between my campaign and any foreign entity. I look forward to this matter concluding quickly."

Holcomb to sign East Chicago bill

INDIANAPOLIS — The governor's office announced that Gov. Holcomb will ceremonially sign HEA1344, regarding assistance for residents in lead contaminated areas of East Chicago. The event is slated to begin at 11:30 a.m. CDT at Riley Park Recreation Pavilion in East Chicago. Among those joining the governor will be State Sen. Ed Charbonneau (R-Valparaiso), State Sen. Lonnie Randolph (D-East Chicago), State Rep. Earl Harris, Jr. (D-East Chicago) and other state and local officials and stakehold-

ers. Holcomb will visit Michigan City, to sign new Indiana State legislation that will provide funding for the double-tracking of the South Shore Line between Gary and Michigan City (WIMS). Holcomb, Mayor Ron Meer and several guests will take a ceremonial ride on the South Shore Line.

Holcomb returns to DC lobbyist Hohlt

INDIANAPOLIS — Gov. Eric Holcomb has turned the reins of Indiana's lobbying efforts back to a D.C. insider who has experience pushing the state's interests (Kelly, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). Deborah Hohlt has returned as the state's primary lobbyist after serving in that role for eight years under former Gov. Mitch Daniels. When then-Gov. Mike Pence came on in 2013 he went another direction with Josh Pitcock, who is now his chief of staff in the Vice President's office.

McCormick will review vouchers

INDIANAPOLIS — Republican state Superintendent Jennifer McCormick told NPR Indiana's voucher program should be reviewed to determine whether it's a wise use of tax dollars. "You know, we're spending roughly \$146 million on a program and not really reviewing it," she said. "That is irresponsible."

McCarthy: Trump paid by Putin

KIEV, Ukraine — A month before Donald Trump clinched the Republican nomination, one of his closest allies in Congress — House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy — made a politically explosive assertion in a private conversation on Capitol Hill with his fellow GOP leaders: that Trump could be the beneficiary of payments from Russian President Vladimir Putin (Washington Post). "There's two

people I think Putin pays: Rohrabacher and Trump," McCarthy (R-Calif.) said, according to a recording of the June 15, 2016, exchange, which was listened to and verified by The Washington Post. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher is a Californian Republican known in Congress as a fervent defender of Putin and Russia. House Speaker Paul D. Ryan immediately interjected, stopping the conversation from further exploring McCarthy's assertion, and swore the Republicans present to secrecy. Before the conversation, McCarthy and Ryan had emerged from separate talks at the Capitol with Ukrainian Prime Minister Vladimir Groysman, who had described a Kremlin tactic of financing populist politicians to undercut Eastern European democratic institutions. News had just broken the day before in The Washington Post that Russian government hackers had penetrated the computer network of the Democratic National Committee, prompting McCarthy to shift the conversation from Russian meddling in Europe to events closer to home.

Fox News founder Ailes dies at age 77

WASHINGTON — Fox News reported this morning that network founder Roger Ailes died today at age 77. Ailes was fired from Fox News after a number of sexual harassment suits were leveled at the network.

Special judge for ex-Columbus mayor

COLUMBUS — The former mayor of Columbus who filed a lawsuit against the city's police department was unsuccessful in getting the case moved out of Bartholomew County (WCSI). However, the case brought by Kristen Brown will be heard by a special judge. The former mayor has been battling city officials on issues related to information being made available to the public since she was replaced by current Mayor Jim Liehner in January.

