

Trump, Kavanaugh effect bury Donnelly

Mike Braun pulls off an emphatic upset as voters embrace the president

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – It would be easy to consign Mike Braun's epic, not-even-close upset of U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly to a Democratic blunder on Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation.



Donnelly, along with U.S. Sens. Heidi Heitkamp and Claire McCaskill all voted against Kavanaugh and

lost emphatically. West Virginia Democrat U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin supported Kavanaugh and won easily.

Until the allegations of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford surfaced in mid-September, Donnelly had narrow poll advantages and Democratic voter intensity far outpaced Republicans. He was a plausible and



Senator-elect Mike Braun addresses the GOP victory rally Election Night as U.S. Sen. Todd Young looks on. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

probable ye a vote on Kavanaugh, which had that occurred, might have left this race on more parochial footing.

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Big showdown that wasn't

By **MARK SOUDER**

FORT WAYNE – The U.S. Senate election in Indiana was perceived to be a pivotal showdown for control of that body. It was supposed to be another test of the Republican-lite strategy employed by Evan Bayh to carry Indiana, a method he conceived after watching his father fall in an upset to Dan Quayle in 1980.



What is hard to remember, even for those who remember that there were two Bayhs, is that the time span from 1980 until now is the same amount of time between Truman's transition to Eisenhower and 1980. Things change, even in Indiana.



“I have supported the Mueller investigation from the beginning because we need answers about Russia’s attempts to influence our elections. I believe Mueller’s efforts should continue without political interference.”

- U.S. Rep. Jim Banks, after A.G. Jeff Sessions resigned



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Since Evan Bayh was crushed by Todd Young in 2016, the question lingered: Would Joe Donnelly become the new Evan Bayh? Republicans argued that Donnelly was an accidental senator, only winning because of Richard Mourdock's mistake in 2012. While I felt Mourdock probably would have won, I never felt that Donnelly's win was pure luck or an accident. The race was already close, and it should not have been.

Donnelly had maximized his opportunity, and thus was ready when a mistake occurred. That's different than being an accident. Recent appointments to fill a statewide slot like Dan Coats and Eric Holcomb show that you still have to capitalize on a surprise opportunity.

But there is no doubt that it is a lot easier to capitalize on such an opportunity if you are a Republican in Indiana. That's important to understand, because in a general election there are many other factors at play beyond the candidates. In

the 3rd CD this election, Congressman Jim Banks ran a flawless campaign on top of very successful two-year first term. He defined who he was – a veteran and social conservative who also favored economic conservatism. He stressed his military service and support in most of his ads, but was bold in stating his pro-life, pro-gun, pro-tax cut views as well. Banks also received an award for his sterling constituent service.

However, his opponent Courtney Tritch had looked like a promising candidate. She proved to be a total flop. To illustrate that point, look at the facts: In 2016 Jim Banks won 70.1% of the vote. His opponent Tommy Schrader didn't even file

a campaign report. In 2014, Marlin Stutzman won 65.8% of the vote. His opponent Justin Kuhnle raised just \$101,000.

This year, Tritch raised \$883,696. Democrats were excited. This was to be a big breakthrough. There was a blue wave coming. Donnelly would be a strong top of the ticket (he did run far ahead of Tritch). Instead, Banks only received 0.3% of the vote less than Stutzman did in 2014, when his opponent couldn't even mount a campaign. In fact, Banks's percentage wasn't much higher against Schrader, a sad case of a homeless guy without a job who had been disowned by the Democrats. It was among the worst defeats in



the district's history, going all the way back to when the Fort Wayne district was created.

Money matters, but not always. Braun essentially bought a Senate nomination with his contributions to his own campaign. He was competing against two well-funded, well-known congressmen, so Braun had to demonstrate some election experience (as a state legislator and on the school board), clear business success, and commitment to conservative values. He also had to show in the debates that he was a plausible version of an Indiana Trump. He did. But without the money, he would have been buried.

Congressman Trey Holling-



sworth certainly didn't win his initial nomination in 2016 based on long-term community involvement, local politics, and a campaign ground game. He established his conservative credentials through his ads funded by personal investment. Republicans chose him as their preferred advocate, and then rejected any Democrat opposition. He has now defeated two credible candidates, certainly more credible than Tritch, by large margins (though not by as much as Banks's victories).

Issues do matter.

Greg Pence had both name recognition with a positive association, and money, though not his own. He didn't win through creative use of free media, though anytime the name "Pence" was aired or written anywhere in the district, no matter which Pence it was, it certainly worked to his advantage. As Donald Trump has proven, "brand" marketing, especially when associated with issues favored by a majority of voters, is a key to winning elections. Greg Pence proved that both name ID and issues matter.

In large part, the two-party system has served America well. Sometimes it fails, but no system is perfect. For years, the assumption was that if a Republican was running for office in a Democrat area, the Republican had to move to the middle to win – vice versa for a Democrat. That is what Evan Bayh and Joe Donnelly did.

Donnelly did as good a job portraying that image as anyone humanly could. He stressed this split personality in every way he could, short of wearing a "Make American Great Again" hat on the campaign trail. Had the Democrat nominee been a card-carrying, charismatic socialist like Bernie Sanders, he might have turned out more Democrats, but lost many of the voters Donnelly added from the middle. It is not clear whether the peak vote of a strong liberal advocate like Mayor Peter Buttigieg might have matched Donnelly's vote. Donnelly's 2018 tally (losing by 8 points) might be as high as an avowed liberal can achieve, whereas this election probably was toward the lower end of Donnelly's potential vote because of other factors that also hurt him.

Those other factors include: 1) the female trio of Republican state elected officials – Secretary of State Connie Lawson, Treasurer Kelly Mitchell, and Auditor Tera Klutz – that won with from 57% to 60% of the vote. The closest

race among the seven winning Republican congressional campaigns was Jackie Walorski, who won with 56.3%. The next closest was Hollingsworth at 59.6%. The Democrats won Lake and Marion counties. As big as they are, you don't win Indiana with just two of nine districts. Not to mention the Republican state legislative super-majorities, another drag on any hope Donnelly had.

For Donnelly, if he hoped to straddle the middle of the road successfully, he would have needed to join with West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin in voting for Judge Kavanaugh. He did not. He likely would not have won anyway, and the Democrat base vote might have declined further, but Donnelly's decision certainly undermined his credibility on abortion to many people and his claim of supporting Trump. While he viewed the Kavanaugh vote a different way, the fact is that to pro-life supporters it was "the" most important pro-life issue. It was also the last high-profile vote during the election cycle. Had the Supreme Court nomination votes been reversed, voting against Kavanaugh early and for Gorsuch during the election cycle, Donnelly would likely have gained some votes. But he voted his conscience (even if I didn't agree) knowing the risk.

So, issues matter.

Then there was the Trump factor. The president crusaded here, joined by Bobby Knight in Southport and Lou Holtz in Fort Wayne. President Obama came in to promote Democrat turnout, which just waved a red flag in front of the rest of the state. But who was Donnelly supposed to bring in – Schumer? Pelosi? Bill or Hillary?

Maybe Alec Baldwin?

We Republicans can only hope that the Democrats will decide that their path to victory is to be openly liberal, instead of trying to run away from their national party. These things go in cycles, but if the Democrats want to try to veer left, perhaps – from a Republican perspective – they can extend our dominance even longer. We can always hope that they learn the wrong lessons. ❖

Souder is a former Republican congressman from Indiana and a regular HPI contributor.

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After the sensational Ford/Kavanaugh showdown, and Donnelly's decision to vote against Kavanaugh, the Republican base was ignited in a race now nationalized.

In the weeks leading up to Tuesday, around 300,000 Hoosiers voted early, vastly outpacing the 2014 mid-term and even the 2016 presidential race. On Election Day, a plethora of media outlets reported record mid-term voting as long lines wrapped around voting centers nationwide.

"I think the Kavanaugh effect was real," said U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, who campaigned with Braun at the Allen County Republican Bean Dinner and in Mishawaka last week. "I have never seen anything unite like Republicans did since then." Graham added that Braun and other Senate Republicans won due to "Kavanaugh, caravan and a good economy."

Democrat decimation

The Donnelly loss – by 152,693 votes with 93% reporting this morning – which completes the modern decimation of the Indiana Democratic Party after an eight-year slide, came due to the party's severe under-performance in its remaining bastions – Lake and Marion counties, and the university cities – and its virtual unilateral withdrawal from rural Indiana where only ousted House Minority Leader Terry Goodin represents a mostly agrarian district.

Donnelly had a mere 50,000 vote plurality out of Lake County and just a 52,000 vote edge out of Marion County (though 30,000 absenteees remain to be counted today). In his home St. Joseph County, he carried just 54%, winning by just under 9,000 votes. He won Tippecanoe County by just 7%, or a little less than 4,000 votes, and Monroe County with 60%, or by a little under 7,000 votes. Donnelly and Braun were in a virtual tie in bellwether Vigo County, separated by a mere 20 votes, while Donnelly carried Vanderburgh by less than 400 votes. There are still absentee ballots to be counted in Indy and 22,000 to be counted in St. Joseph and a significant number in Vanderburgh, so some of these pluralities will change over the next few days.

In 2012, Donnelly won Lake County by 74,000 votes, Indianapolis by 120,000 votes, Monroe County by 12,000, St. Joseph by 15,000 votes, and Vigo by 8,000.

If you're an Indiana Democrat, you have to be asking why the now two current titular heads, U.S. Reps. Pete Visclosky and Andre Carson, weren't more active in the two remaining blue congressional districts that wildly under-performed for Donnelly this time, with epic stakes

for the state party on the line.

To show how the Indiana Democratic Party has eroded, the contrasts with Evan Bayh's 1998 U.S. Senate win over Fort Wayne Mayor Paul Helmke are jarring. Bayh won Lake County by 59,000 votes and Marion County by 47,000 votes. In St. Joseph, Bayh won by 26,000 votes and Monroe by just under 8,000 votes. To take that contrast further, Bayh won Elkhart with 52% of the vote, and carried river counties Gibson (73%), Floyd (68%), Crawford (70%), Clark (72%), Posey (74%), Vigo (76%) and Sullivan (79%). All of those counties went Republican this time, many in the 60th percentile.

Braun won Hamilton County by 11,000 votes, by 10,000 in Hancock, just under 5,000 in Boone, just under 14,000 in Hendricks, and by 15,000 votes in Johnson. To-



Former IU coach Bobby Knight cracks up President Trump and Vice President Pence at Southport HS last Friday night.

tal, Braun won by the doughnut counties by about 50,000, off-setting Marion.

But in outer Indiana, Braun rolled up big pluralities across what Vice President Mike Pence has long called the "amber waves of grain," winning Gibson County with 64%, Jackson County with 65%, Jasper with 66%, Jennings with 65%, Kosciusko with 70%, 66% in Lawrence, 67% in Montgomery, 70% in Morgan, 66% in Putnam, 73% in Ripley, 73% in Dearborn, 69% in Decatur, 75% in Daviess, 65% in Shelby, 72% in Wells, 67% in Whitley, 68% in LaGrange, 63% in Harrison, and with 58% in Elkhart, by 10,000 votes there. Spread out across the 80 or so rural counties, Braun rolled up much of his 152,000 plurality. For Donnelly, it was death by 80 localized cuts.

It isn't as if President Trump's policies have gone without serious consequence. Decatur, Tippecanoe and Gibson counties are home to sprawling Japanese auto plants that have been hit by Trump's tariffs. The rest are prime farm counties, where soybean farmers have seen the president's tariffs ransack commodity prices. Trump was able to engineer a \$12 billion bailout for this year, and



Senator-elect Mike Braun addresses the GOP victory party at the JW Marriott as Chairman Kyle Hupfer, Gov. Holcomb, Sen. Young and others look on. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

many of these farmers (79% in a national poll published by Hoosier Ag Today) are sticking with the president, believing he has a long-term vision. Many soybean farmers are switching to corn for the 2019 planting season.

A staple of Donnelly's reelection narrative was that he had visited all 92 counties every year. Donnelly put an earnest to jovial face on his version of the Democratic brand, but in rural Indiana it just didn't compete with the straight-talking, no-nonsense Braun who promised to take his executive prowess to Washington to solve the health care problems in the same fashion he did for his company, Meyer Distributing.

A nationalized race with Trump

Braun, with the assistance of President Trump, nationalized the race. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence rallied to Braun's side two days after the primary in Elkhart. In late August, an Evansville MAGA rally supplied Braun and national Super PACs with video and audio bytes that served as the thrust of his homestretch advertising campaign.

Then Trump came back to Indiana three times in the final two weeks (including the Future Farmers of America convention), where he burnished the fears of a migrant caravan that made it to Mexico City by Election Day. He vowed to put 15,000 U.S. troops on the border and threatened to close it down. Trump branded "Sleepy Joe" as resisting Kavanaugh and opposing his tax cuts (which polls show are not popular here in Indiana nor nationally). He also warned his supporters that Democrats would raise taxes and open the borders to breeders, rapists, thieves and M-13 gang members. Hoosier voters responded to the dog whistles.

"There's only one way to stop this Democrat-led

assault on America's sovereignty. You have to vote Republican tomorrow," Trump told more than 10,000 people at the Fort Wayne Coliseum. "This election is about safety, and this election is about jobs. For years, you watched as we let foreign countries plunder our wealth, shutter our factories and steal our jobs. But those days are over. And in case you haven't noticed our country is respected again."

At these MAGA rallies – more than 20,000 turned out in Fort Wayne and Southport in the final four days of the campaign – Hoosier voters lapped up the rhetoric. Braun embraced Trump. He stuck to his strict talking points, avoided the press after debates, and, unlike 2012 GOP nominee Richard Mourdock, didn't make a mistake. His media strategy wasn't nearly as good during the general campaign as it was in the primary when he triumphed over U.S. Reps. Luke Messer and Todd Rokita by designating them as cardboard cutout "twins." When the dust settled on Tuesday night, he had retired three sitting members of Congress. U.S. Sen. Todd Young was with him on stage at the J.W. Marriott Tuesday night, himself defeating four former members (Mike Sodrel, Baron Hill, Marlin Stutzman and Evan Bayh). The new Hoosier Senate tandem has been a status quo wrecking crew on Capitol Hill.

Donnelly tried to make a case for Obamacare, though he mostly touted his support for legal protections for those with "pre-existing conditions" that Trump and Braun would take away. He tried to find cover on his Kavanaugh rejection by reminding voters he voted for Justice Neil Gorsuch. But Hoosier voters believed that Kavanaugh got screwed by ancient, prep-day allegations that could never be proved. U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein ended up doing as much damage to Donnelly as President Trump did.

While state and national polls put concerns over health care far above immigration (41% to 23% in an NBC

exit poll), Hoosiers voted for Trump on his self-proclaimed "referendum on me" campaign, with Braun the most conspicuous benefactor.

"What we need to do is to take to Washington what works in the real world. What works in Jasper, Indiana, or Warsaw, Indiana," the victorious Braun told jubilant Republicans at the J.W. Marriott, adding that he wanted to bring people to "fix things in a dysfunctional system. That's my goal."

Braun described four limo rides with President Trump. "Trump unplugged on four rides," Braun said with wonderment as the crowd hooted. "He asked, 'Do you think we ought to bring Bobby Knight in your campaign?' Promises made, promises kept." And the crowd went wild. Last Friday, Braun found himself on stage with Trump, Pence and Coach Knight for the Southport rally.

Donnelly addressed somber Democrats around 9:25 p.m., telling supporters that he "had the unbelievable opportunity to serve the people." He applauded his staff, told them he would always be there for them, and added, "I've been filled up so much by you. We love this country so much. We need to make sure we bring this country together rather than divide it. We're all in the same boat together. We're all American."

Trump redefines the GOP

The Washington Post's Robert Costa, a Notre Dame graduate, put it in a national context: "Trump has fundamentally redefined the modern Republican Party, lurching a historically free-trade institution toward protectionism on trade and infusing its appeals with racially charged conspiracy theories, rampant demagoguery and proud declarations that he is 'absolutely a nationalist.'"



Sen. Joe Donnelly gives his concession speech Tuesday night as family members look on.

Mike Braun was an eager adherent.

Costa continued: "Those cracks, however, have mostly been papered over as conservatives have relished their influence inside the White House and Republican majorities in both congressional chambers, beaming behind Trump in the Rose Garden and Oval Office as he has scribbled his signature on their bills. They have celebrated his role in revamping the federal judiciary, passing a sweeping tax cut and significantly increasing funding for the U.S. military."

The irony there is that on a few of those Donnelly bills, President Trump's scribbled signature was used to make a case that the Democrat backed the president "62% of the time."

A majority of Hoosier voters were looking for a 100%. ❖

Democrats make tiny General Assembly gains

By BRIAN A. HOWEY

INDIANAPOLIS – While two House races remain incomplete due to a lack of totals from Porter County, it appears Indiana Democrats gained only one seat in the Indiana Senate and just three in the Indiana House. The GOP super majorities are intact as of this writing. Absentee ballots put Rep. Joe Taylor over the top after it appeared he lost on Election Night,

Republican State Rep. Julie Olthoff trails Democrat Lisa Beck by 504 votes in HD19 with 61 of 65 precincts reporting. There have been no totals reported from HD4, where State Rep. Ed Soliday was challenged by



Democrat Frank Szczepanski.

Democrats picked up two other seats with Chris Chyung defeating State Rep. Hal Slager by 86 votes in HD15, while Chris Campbell defeated Republican State Rep. Sally Siegrist 57-43%. In two off the radar races, Rep. Joe Taylor defeated Republican Troy Dillon, 11,265 to 10,550. And in HD35, State Rep. Melanie Wright staved off Republican Ben Fisher by just 339 votes. Both were heavy union districts and reveal that many union members are still in the camp of President Trump and Republicans.

Democrats held on to the open HD71, where Dr. Rita Fleming defeated Matt Owen. Fleming garnered 13,214 votes (or 55.6%) over Republican Owen's 10,010 (42.4%). "I am surprised," Fleming told the News & Tribune Tuesday night. "But I will tell you I worked really hard and I truly wanted to not just work hard administratively, but I wanted to talk

to people. I wanted to talk face to face, I wanted to shake their hand, and I think that makes a difference."

In the Senate, Democrat J.D. Ford won a rematch against State Sen. Mike Delph by 4,733 votes as of this morning. "I just want to pause for a second to appreciate the historical significance that has happened tonight," Ford said at the Hyatt in Downtown Indianapolis in what was one of the only bright spots for Indiana Democrats. "Tonight, I become Indiana's first openly gay lawmaker. Ladies and gentlemen, we just made history and no one can take that from us. Every marginalized group — people of color, women, Muslims, Jewish Hoosiers, seniors, LGBTQ+ Hoosiers, just to name a few — you now have a voice in the Indiana General Assembly. And I only intend to amplify it."

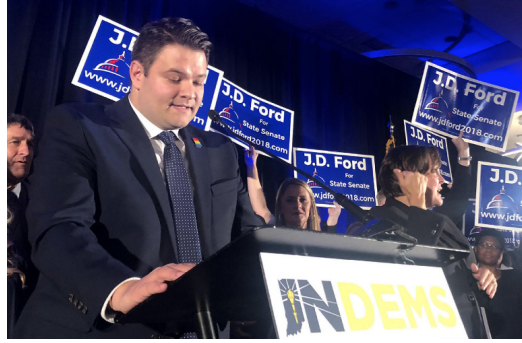
Senate Republicans easily cruised to victory in SD38 where Sen. Jon Ford turned back Democrat Chris Gambill 56-44%. "It's exciting to know that my constituents want to give me a second term to continue the work that I've been doing and I look forward to getting busy," Ford told the Tribune-Star. "We put together a solid plan [for the campaign]," he said. "We stuck to that plan and executed it. I think people wanted me to continue to do the work I've been doing for the Wabash Valley and it came through."

In the open SD45, Republican Chris Garten defeated Jeffersonville Councilman John Perkins, 62-34%. "We had a great strategy in place early on and I think we executed it with perfection," Garten told the News & Tribune. "The thing that's most humbling about this entire experience is that I believe our campaign inspired voters to come out and support us. That's critical in any election, for any office. As a veteran, that's important to me."

Sen. Ron Grooms was defeating Democrat Anna Murray 54-45%. In the open SD26, Madison County Councilman Mike Gaskill was defeating Anderson Fire Chief Dave Cravens, 57-39% with 90% reporting. In another open seat, Republican Linda Rogers downed Democrat Ed Liptrap 64-36%.

Sen. Jim Merritt defeated Democrat Derek Camp 52-47% (though absentees are still being counted), setting up a probable challenge to Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett, who has not announced whether he will seek a second term.

Leadership survived challenges in both chambers. Senate Minority Leader Tim Lanane de-



Senator-elect J.D. Ford was the lone bright spot for Indiana Democrats Tuesday night its Election Night bash at the Hyatt Regency.

feated Republican Zaki Ali 52-44%, while House Speaker Brian Bosma turned back Democrat Poonam Gill, 56-43%. "It was a hard-fought campaign," Lanane said. "Zaki put in a great effort. It was definitely a tough race. We had local candidates that I thought could win. The Republican Party got their base out."

In other House races, Rep. Dale Devon was turning back a challenge from Dr. Donald Westerhausen, 51-49%. State Rep. Cindy Kirchofer was leading John Barnes 52-47% with absentees still coming in. Democrat Tonya Pfaff won an open seat in HD43, defeating Republican Darrell Felling. Republican Ryan Lauer won the open HD59, defeating Dale Nowlin 57-41%.

House Dems switch Goodin with GiaQuinta

House Democrats replaced Rep. Terry Goodin as minority leader with Rep. Phil GiaQuinta. It came after the caucus picked up just three seats on Tuesday. If Democrats pick up HD4 held by State Rep. Ed Soliday, they could break the GOP super majority. GiaQuinta had challenged Goodin for the post after Scott Pelath stepped down last winter.

Bosma elected to 6th speaker term

Indiana House Republicans reelected Speaker Brian C. Bosma to his historic sixth term at the helm. "This session, House Republicans are focused on fueling Indiana's economic momentum and delivering another structurally balanced state budget while funding our state's critical priorities," Bosma said. "I look forward to working alongside strong leaders in the House and Senate, and Governor Holcomb as we keep our state moving in the right direction." State Rep. Greg Steuerwald (R-Avon) was elected Majority Caucus chair, his first term in the position, and State Rep. Matt Lehman (R-Berne) was reelected to serve as majority floor leader. ❖

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The decimation of Indiana Democrats

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – It was October 1984 and Democratic gubernatorial nominee Wayne Townsend dropped by the Elkhart Truth editorial board to make his pitch for his challenge to Gov. Robert Orr. Along for the ride was a young, handsome Evan Bayh.



Fellow reporter Phil Schermerhorn looked at Bayh and asked, "Evan, what are you running for?" The rest is history.

After managing his father's losing U.S. Senate race in 1980, Bayh got his law degree from the University of Virginia, then he and IU classmate Joe Hogsett systematically plotted a takeover of the Indiana Democratic Party. The senator's son would win the 1986 secretary of state race, defeat Sen. Frank O'Bannon and then place him on the ticket for a 1988 gubernatorial run, defeat Lt. Gov. John Mutz for governor, and that commenced a four-cycle, Second Floor winning streak that would finally end at the brainpan of one Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr. 16 years later.

Today, with the defeat of U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly and tiny Democratic gains against the GOP super-majorities in the Indiana General Assembly, the party is abjectly irrelevant. Mike Braun's upset has rendered Indiana a one-party state.

Unlike 1984, when Evan Bayh was the savvy young heir-apparent, there is no such figure on the horizon. His twin sons, Beau and Nick, have just mustered into the Marine Corps and Army from Indiana, so it would be at least three cycles before they would have a chance to move back, trade their Pacer and ISU t-shirts worn during the father's final (and losing) 2016 Senate campaign to establish residency, find a trade and build a political base.

Back in the Democratic desert days of the 1980s, there were ambitious Sens. Townsend and O'Bannon. Today, there is none. In the House, there is ousted Minority Leader Terry Goodin, the only Democrat representing a rural district. And, really, no one else who has hinted at running for governor.

House Democrats jettisoned Goodin Wednesday less than a year after taking the helm from Scott Pelath, selected State Rep. Phil GiaQuinta. "I am pleased that our caucus was able to pick up seats in Tuesday's election, but I feel that we can do more to ensure that all Hoosiers are given a voice in their state government," he said. "We have

a growing number of diverse voices in the House Democratic Caucus, and I intend to use their skills to provide a vision of how government can work for the people of Indiana. We will begin to articulate that vision in the 2019 legislative session. We need to have a fairly aggressive agenda that will benefit Hoosiers. Once we are through session, it begins anew with recruiting solid candidates. We had some great people run but ran out of funds to get them over the line."

The rising star mayor, South Bend's Pete Buttigieg, wants to leap frog into the 2020 presidential race and, perhaps, a shot at Vice President Mike Pence if he rounded out a Democratic ticket.

Indiana Democrats have a decent mayoral bench behind Buttigieg. That would include Hammond's Thomas McDermott, Kokomo's Greg Goodnight, Fort Wayne's Tom Henry and, of course, Joe Hogsett. But beyond Richard Lugar, Indianapolis mayors don't do well statewide, as Bill Hudnut discovered in his 1990 secretary of state loss to Hogsett and Stephen Goldsmith learned in his 1996 loss to Lt. Gov. O'Bannon.

Then there is 2016 LG nominee Christina Hale, who had been eyeing an open gubernatorial seat in 2024, assuming Gov. Eric Holcomb wins reelection in two years. She told HPI earlier this fall she would reassess after this



Democratic Lt. Gov. nominee Christina Hale addresses a 2016 campaign rally as John Gregg, Sen. Donnelly, Evan Bayh and Mayor Buttigieg look on. (HPI Photo)

midterm, but amidst the Donnelly wreckage and the three-seat gain in the General Assembly, there is only a ripple to ride, not a wave.

McDermott told HPI on Wednesday morning that he is being urged to challenge Attorney General Curtis Hill in 2020, and would consider a gubernatorial run. If Donnelly opted to challenge Gov. Holcomb, which some Democrats are now pondering, McDermott would back him.

"Running for statewide office takes a year or a year and a half of your life," McDermott said. "If you don't have a fair chance, do you want to give up a year of your life? What did John Gregg and Christina Hale do wrong in 2016? Nothing. Circumstances in Washington, which are beyond your control, can doom you."

That was in reference to Donald Trump nominating Gov. Mike Pence for vice president, salvaging him from an uphill reelection bid against Gregg, who had learned from his 2012 run and had put together a credible campaign in

2016 that was crushed by the Trump/Pence wave.

"If I were to run statewide, I would be down the middle," said the three-term Hammond mayor, who is a Navy veteran and a Notre Dame graduate. "Our party focuses on too many extreme left issues. It alienates union workers. I see Democrats winning in Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois and we're getting beat. That tells me we're doing something wrong. We've got to appeal to Republicans. If we don't, we alienate 50% of the voters."

Hale said she thinks voter turnout was the problem. "Democrats didn't do as well as we should have... we have more people engaged than we have in recent years, but we still have far too many that are willing to sit on the sidelines," she told the IBJ. "More than anything, you gotta get out and vote."

Hale said the polls made people feel like Donnelly wasn't in trouble. "I think we made a critical error in listening to this polling. So many people sat on the bench and sat this one out. If we continue to do the same thing and expect a different result, that's crazy. I think that we have reached a point of significant low self-esteem as a party. There are many people that are going to want to refresh the way we do business."

In 2011, Bayh declined to seek a third, non-consecutive term for governor, citing the GOP super-majorities

and a lack of party support in either chamber. The irony there is had Bayh opted for that race in 2012, as opposed to pushing aside Baron Hill for the U.S. Senate race where he ended up in the Mitch McConnell/Todd Young buzz saw, it might be Gov. Bayh on this very day. When Bayh was governor, he had long coattails, but that was before river country flipped Republican.

Two-time nominee John Gregg has been the most conspicuous Democrat acting like a prospective candidate, appearing on Twitter with party candidates across the state. Hale has done the J-J Dinner circuit, speaks for Democrats in the media, while McDermott showed up for SD31 nominee Derek Camp in his unsuccessful challenge to Sen. Jim Merritt, but there has been no systematic Rotary Club, VFW or J-J circuit riding that would capture the imagination of Democrats searching for another Bayh – or Moses.

The 2020 gubernatorial race is not a topic familiar names are conspicuously addressing. The hospital suites at the IDEA convention at French Lick last August were few and far between. At this point, there is no Bayh-like heir. The boo-yahs are reserved for young Nick and Beau on their respective military bases.

Welcome to Indiana, a one-party state until further notice. ❖

Chyung, Beck pull off House upsets

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

MERRILLVILLE – There were those in the 15th Indiana House District who were beginning to think Hal Slager would represent the district for as long as he wanted. After all, Slager had won three elections against the best that Lake County Democrats had to offer.



Well, that was all before a young man named Chris Chyung, a Democrat, decided to make his first bid for office. Chyung, 25, and a host of young volunteers worked relentlessly as they knocked on 35,000 doors across the district that largely encompasses Schererville, Dyer and St. John. It

resulted in an 86-vote Chyung victory.

Chyung worked as a financial analyst for a real estate firm in Chicago before starting his own company more than a year ago. He campaigned on issues such as a woman's right to choose, tightening gun laws and his refusal to take corporate donations. He ran ads on cable TV while Slager chose not to do so. Slager, who is a retired



certified public accountant, was a member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Chyung's victory may send a message to Lake County's aging Democratic Party that youth is needed if the party is to remain dominant.

It wasn't just Chyung who won in an upset for state representative.

In the 19th District,

Lisa Beck made her first run for office and stunned Julie Olthoff, a three-term representative from Crown Point. Beck's victory was by 504 votes. Beck is an attorney working for the Lake County prosecutor's office.

Beck ran on securing higher wages for Hoosiers, equal pay for women, better funded public schools and tools to combat the opioid epidemic. Beck won despite being smeared by TV ads sponsored by Olthoff. ❖

Rich James has been writing about politics and government for 40 years. He is retired from the Post-Tribune, a newspaper born in Gary.

Indiana realigns its political stars to red

By CRAIG DUNN

INDIANAPOLIS – As much as I'd like to hear just one more Mike Braun or Joe Donnelly attack ad, a part of me is relieved that it is all over. The election results are in and Hoosiers soundly repudiated Donnelly and will send political newcomer, Mike Braun, to Washington, D.C. This serves to realign the political stars and return Indiana to its solid Red State status.



Prior to this U.S. Senate election, I felt very comfortable that Braun would win. My official prediction was a 3% plus win for Braun. My reason for this confidence was that after serving as Indiana senator for six years, Donnelly rarely showed up in

excess of 43% in the pre-election polls. My general rule for incumbent politicians is that if you can't get to 48% in the polls before the election, don't count on the undecideds breaking your way.

Did you really believe that after months and months of expensive political ads that 9% of the voters were truly undecided? I didn't. People lie to pollsters; it is a fact of life. My general rule is that 60% of undecideds tend to break for the challenger.

In addition, I never expected the Libertarian candidate to garner 7% of the vote when the curtains closed. While voters may flirt with a Libertarian candidate, they intuitively know that the Libertarian has no chance of winning. Generally speaking, people leaning Libertarian are more likely to vote Republican when the chips are down.

Put all this information into a blender, push the high speed button and watch Braun pour out the winner.

As a voter, I can truly say that I have no idea what legislation Mike Braun will pursue. Whereas Joe Donnelly was a relatively ineffective senator, we can only hope that Braun will support and introduce legislation to make a real difference for Hoosiers. While he can be trusted to reliably support President Trump's agenda and his judicial nominees, the only thing I truly know about Braun is that he likes blue shirts and he isn't Joe Donnelly.

This begs the question, "Where did the 'blue wave' go?" Personally, I don't think there ever was a blue wave. There may have been a little blue swirl like Tidy Bowl water in a toilet in some existing blue states, but there was nothing approaching a blue wave. Let's compare President Trump's off-year election results in his first term to President Obama's results: Obama lost 63 House seats in 2010! Not even the wildest Democrat analyst on MSNBC could project that kind of a pickup for Democrats in 2018.

I am under no illusions as to the approach that Democrat analysts, politicians and media personalities will take with what appears to be a mixed bag of results. They will focus on the loss of the House as a repudiation of Donald Trump. They will also come up with a zillion reasons why the significant Republican pickups in the U.S. Senate were due to a variety of circumstances unrelated to the president.

Make no mistake about it, the Democrats' takeover of the House of Representatives is a pyrrhic victory. Democrats will be unable to accomplish any of their socialist agenda other than using the power of committee leadership to hound and dog President Trump. Ask Newt Gingrich how successful that strategy worked in the next election – it was a disaster. The American people don't like that kind of continual witch hunt.

The real winner of the 2018 elections were the Republicans. The Senate is where most of the power resides. While the Senate may not be able to move legislation any more effectively than the House, the important difference is the power a Republican Senate has to approve judges at all levels and to approve treaties. President Trump will be able to continue his foreign policy, get his trade policies approved and get non-activist judges confirmed. That's a pretty good night.

While I'm writing this at 11 p.m. on election night and many races have yet to be called, here is my initial summary of the winners and losers in the 2018 election.

Winners

- Mike Braun pulled off what the pundits thought would be an upset and beat a Democrat senator with a unique ability to support ultra-liberal legislation and the ultra-liberal party leadership.

- Indiana Republican and Democrat incumbent congressional representatives all held their seats. Kudos to Jackie Walorski for finally nailing down the 2nd CD.

- Republicans in the Indiana House and Senate. Although there was a loss here and there, Indiana Republicans firmly control the Indiana General Assembly.

- Speaker Brian Bosma fought off a late challenge which only emerged as a result of suspect claims made by a former intern. His place is secure.

- Sen. Jim Merritt got a big win which should put him in an excellent position to launch an Indianapolis mayoral bid in 2019.

- Fiscal responsibility. An Indiana constitutional referendum mandating balanced budgets was passed making it increasingly more difficult for future legislatures to spill the red ink.

- Democrat mad dogs who are licking their chops to use House committees to investigate and torture President Trump for the next two years. Be very careful what you wish.

- West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin's vote for Brett Kavanaugh saved his bacon. Most likely to jump to the GOP.

- Florida Republicans. Big victories in both the governor and U.S. Senate races bode well for 2020.

Losers

- Indiana Democrats. The Hoosier State gets redder with each election.
- State Senator Mike Delph. I'm not sure how sad Republican leadership will be to see him go.
- Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. His grand strategy could not save several red state Democrat senators.
- Democrat pundits. Predicted a blue wave that never materialized.
- Democrat celebrities. Predicted a blue wave that never materialized.
- Mainstream media. Predicted a blue wave that never materialized.
- George Soros. Spent incredible amounts of his money with little to show for it.
- Whoever counts Florida votes. The election results got to 95% counted by 9 p.m. and never progressed beyond that for two hours. It seems that the same lame-brain counties in Florida can't get it right election after

election. Let's hope it improves by 2020.

In summary, welcome back to the world of gridlock. We elect Democrat congressmen and then give huge wins to Republicans in the Senate. In this bizarre country, we elected Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Chris Coons as extreme left-leaning senators and the same voters in those states elected Republican governors. Go figure. I almost forgot the most important winner in the 2018 election: The American people were big winners. Perhaps President Trump will go down in history for finally being able to get Republicans and Democrats off their rears and to the polls. An active and engaged electorate is absolutely vital to our republic.

What am I going to do tomorrow? Get the popcorn popped and watch the circus which will develop in the U. S. House of Representatives and in what will surely be an interesting (and disturbing) kickoff to the 2020 race for the White House. Can't wait to see what the Democrat presidential candidates want to give away for free and how much it will cost me. ❖

Dunn is the former 4th CD and Howard County Republican chairman.

Punting to 2020

By JOSHUA CLAYBOURN

EVANSVILLE – If you wondered what it felt like at the exhaustive conclusion of a First World War offensive, having moved just six inches closer to Berlin at the cost of four months and tens of thousands dead, Tuesday's elec-



tion results probably felt somewhat like that. The key differences are of course that no one is dead, we live in relative comfort, the war actually did end, and you will never make it to Berlin.

Following the highly anticipated 2018 midterms, neither Republicans nor Democrats perceive much incentive to adjust their approach, victory and defeat having been almost perfectly apportioned to validate the most powerful forces within any institution, those militating toward the status quo.

On the one hand, Hoosier Republicans managed to hold onto their congressional seats and kept their super majorities in the state legislature, despite some of the strongest challenges from Democrats in years. Meanwhile the national GOP took small gains in favorable Senate races (including Indiana with Senator-elect Mike Braun) and fended off high-profile governor challenges.

On the other hand, Hoosier Democrats did make a couple of gains in Indiana House and Senate seats, most notably in well-educated suburban areas such as

J.D. Ford's district. Even when Republicans like Speaker Brian Bosma and Sen. Jim Merritt won, they did so with a smaller margin than before. And national Democrats re-took the House of Representatives with at least 34 new seats as of this writing. With a solid majority we can expect subpoenas to rain down on the Trump administration like a torrential downpour.

Many Hoosier Democrats will nevertheless view Tuesday's results as a defeat, particularly because of Joe Donnelly's high-profile loss. One lesson is that Republicans will not vote against their own interests or ideology (taxes, judges, guns, etc.) because of President Trump's character flaws. Democrats will need to offer Republicans more to cleave their partisan default.

Another lesson may be to market (and truly believe) the Democratic ideology as applicable to everyone everywhere. Older rural white voters once formed the backbone of the Democratic base. But today the party performs worst among this large group. Without engaging in more identity politics – which turns off vast swaths of society – the message may need to be more universal in applying to all occupations, genders and races.

Rather than equal outcomes as preached by Bernie Sanders, Hoosier Democrats could focus on equal opportunities. That message supports a broad range of policies including strong public schools, vibrant regional hubs of cultural amenities, and sensible social safety nets.

Hoosier Democrats remain a potent force and Hoosier Republicans would be wise not to underestimate that potential. Nothing was resolved Tuesday.

Trumpism was not rejected by the nation; and

neither was the general Democratic temptation to transform themselves into the leftward version of Trumpism. Decisions on where American society goes from here were punted to 2020.

So we can see the same battles we've grown weary of waging occurring all over again, starting in earnest in just a few short months. Fundraising for the

2020 contests begins now, and formal announcements of candidacies will begin in about six months.

The Iowa caucuses are just over 14 months away.



Joshua Claybourn is an attorney and author in Evansville.

And now for something completely different ... as Sessions exits

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – President Trump conducted a sprawling 90 minute presser Wednesday afternoon, basking in his his victories, even though he lost the House.

"The election's over," Trump said. "Now everybody is in love." Well, everyone except CNN's Jim Acosta and NBC's Peter Alexander who the president assailed and then revoked the former's credentials.



President Trump talked of a "a beautiful bipartisan-type situation" as i Nancy Pelosi was the new Kim Jong-Un. "Now we have a much easier path because the Democrats will come to us with a plan for infrastructure, a plan for health care, a plan for whatever they're looking at, and we'll negotiate," Trump said, adding, "From a dealmaking standpoint, we are all much better off the way it turned out" than if the GOP House majority had held.

When pressed on potential Democratic House investigations, Trump suggested that if those were to pop up, he would respond with a "warlike posture."

Asked if there were any cabinet shakeups in the works with Attorney General Jeff Sessions sitting on a speculation bubble, Trump deflected.

Less than two hours later, Trump tweeted: We are pleased to announce that Matthew G. Whitaker, Chief of Staff to Attorney General Jeff Sessions at the Department of Justice, will become our new Acting Attorney General of the United States. He will serve our Country well...."

And with that, the country that turned out in record election numbers to partially reaffirm Trumpism (particularly here in Indiana), while a coming Democratic House will serve as a check and a balance, lurched into a new era.

President Trump suggested he wanted Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation to continue, or in his words, to "let it go on." But then he said, "I could fire

everybody right now, but I don't want to stop it because politically I don't like stopping it." Then he said, "It's a disgrace. It should never have been started, because there is no crime."

Whittaker's ascension immediately led to rampant speculation that Saturday Night Massacre II was just around the corner. Appearing on CNN in July 2017 when he became Sessions's chief of staff, Whittaker suggested that Trump could starve the Mueller probe. "So I could see



a scenario where Jeff Sessions is replaced with a recess appointment," Whitaker said, "and that attorney general doesn't fire Bob Mueller, but he just reduces his budget to so low that his investigation grinds to almost a halt." As for Deputy A.G. Rod Rosenstein, Whitaker said that

Trump should "really try to get Rod to maybe even cut the budget of Bob Mueller and do something a little more stage crafty than the blunt instrument of firing the attorney general and trying to replace him."

Ahhh, stage crafty.

"The President is absolutely correct," Whitaker said after Trump recoiled at the idea of Mueller investigating the family finances and the family-run Trump Organization. Since then, Trump attorney/fixer Michael Cohen and CFO Allen Howard Weisselberg have turned state's evidence. "Mueller has come up to a red line in the Russia 2016 election-meddling investigation that he is dangerously close to crossing," Whittaker suggested.

Trump should not expect all Republicans to go along with a defanging of Mueller. "I have supported the Mueller investigation from the beginning because we need answers about Russia's attempts to influence our elections," U.S. Rep. Jim Banks told HPI Wednesday. "I believe Mueller's efforts should continue without political interference, but after over a year of investigation and millions of taxpayer dollars spent, I am hopeful that he will provide a report to the American people soon."

Mueller was lying low during the election sequence. But you've got to think the former FBI director had some contingency plans in place in case the president decided to go proactive on the biggest threat he faces, like sending his investigation report and information to individual states where Trump has no pardon powers.

Perhaps the special counsel's most serious "stage crafty" days are just around the corner. ❖

Climate change response

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – The joy of the Internet is serendipity, the act of finding something of interest you were not looking for. It is the same joy we find in the public library or a book store wandering the stacks.



Recently, I found a list of the "Prettiest Towns in Every State", presumably published by Architectural Digest. Since it was on the Internet, I could not be sure it was published by AD, a magazine that describes itself as "the international design authority."

My suspicions were raised when I read that the prettiest town in Indiana was ... wait for it... Porter in Porter County of Northwest Indiana. Porter is OK and popular with those who like the ribs and ambiance at Wagner's. But prettiest town in Indiana? Not by a long short.

Yet, this got me thinking about the long battle for clean air and water in Northwest Indiana, which led me to dwell on the battle over climate change.

Whenever we talk about climate change, our focus is on the costs of preventing or repairing the damages associated with that change. How can we protect ourselves, our homes, businesses, and communities? What will preventive measures cost? How much will it cost to restore properties and lives from damage caused by floods, drought, storms, and other abnormalities caused by climate change?

That's not how we might think if we were rationally attached to the past. A tornado or hurricane hits a town and we want to go back and rebuild what we had. Instead it is worth thinking about the benefits of climate change. How can we prosper from the environment in which we will be living and the opportunities it presents?

One impediment to forward thinking is our land tenure laws. We own slices of land. It may be that our homes were leveled, but we still own the land. So let's get the insurance settlement, roll up our sleeves and rebuild. Only this time, we'll make some improvements that would have reduced damages the last time.

We should, however, allow ourselves

to rethink the possibilities. If there is a tendency with a changing climate for frequent, heavy downpours, how could we benefit from an excess of water? Particularly if other regions are plagued by drought, could we find a market for our excess inventory of water?

If average temperatures are rising, what crops can we plant to increase revenues? After a tornado, could we give each landowner shares in a new corporation that would rebuild downtown in accord with today's technologies and what we've learned from the past two centuries of urban life?

Our present policies with regard to the climate are pugnacious and reactionary. Where are the imaginative entrepreneurs who make the proverbial lemonade from lemons? ❖



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Democrats gain 34 House seats

By **LARRY J. SABATO**
and **KYLE KONDIK**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – It took a lot of Krazy Glue, but we think we pieced the Crystal Ball back together, reassembling after 2016 shattered us and just about every other prediction group.

As of this writing, early Wednesday afternoon, and with many uncalled House races remaining, the real-time seat projections from both the New York Times and FiveThirtyEight were suggesting that the Democrats would win a 229-206 majority in the House, for a net gain of 34 seats, exactly the seat change we picked in our final selections.

Democrats built their new majority in part by persuading voters in many Republican-held districts carried by Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election to elect Democratic House members. Of the 25 Clinton-won GOP districts, Democrats have won at least 14 and very likely will win several more. But Democrats also will win a similar number of districts won by Donald Trump, including upsets against Reps. Dan Donovan (R, NY-11) on Staten Island and Steve Russell (R, OK-5) in Oklahoma City. Another surprising Democratic win came in Charleston after Rep. Mark Sanford (R, SC-1) lost his primary. But for the most part, the seats the Democrats flipped were ones that we projected to flip.

If indeed the final tally in the House is 229 Democrats and 206 Republicans, that sets up another competitive battle for the House in 2020, when Republicans (under this scenario) would need to net a dozen seats to win back the majority. A good thing for Democrats is that many of the suburban seats they picked up in this election – CO-6, MN-3, VA-10, and others — probably will be relatively easy to hold with Donald Trump on the ballot, and the Democrats did not max out their potential seat gains. Meanwhile, Republicans will focus on unseating several Trump-district Democratic incumbents they were unable to credibly challenge this year and clawing back some of their losses in less Clinton-friendly suburban areas as they plot their own path to restore their shattered majority.

We spent the whole cycle arguing that the lopsided Senate map, one of the worst that any party has had to defend in the history of Senate popular elections, made the Republicans considerable favor-

ites to hold the upper chamber and potentially even add seats, and that’s what happened. While Arizona remains uncalled (and Florida probably is headed to a recount, although the GOP appears to be in the driver’s seat), it seems like the GOP could be headed for a three-seat net gain. If Republicans do get to three, it would give them 54 Senate seats, meaning Democrats would need to win at least four seats to flip the Senate in 2020, depending on which side wins the presidency. As we noted prior to the election in a lookahead to the 2020 Senate map, it will be hard for Democrats to scrape together such a gain next time. That’s particularly because Tuesday night’s results, where three dark-red state Democrats in Indiana, Missouri, and North Dakota were wiped out and two others in Montana and West Virginia only won narrowly, are a very bad sign for the lone remaining Democrat in a heavily GOP state, Sen. Doug Jones (D-AL), who will face the voters in November 2020. (A million things can happen before 2020 – we get it.)

A couple of supposedly close Senate races that the Crystal Ball never rated as Toss-ups, New Jersey (D) and Tennessee (R), ended up not being close. Meanwhile, we warned readers on Monday to watch out for a more impressive result than expected from Beto O’Rourke (D) in Texas, and he turned in a strong showing, losing by about three points. His performance had to have helped the Democrats net two House seats and contributed to other Democrats giving the GOP a scare in several more. Texas may not yet be reaching swing state status, but the dormant Democratic Party there is regenerating in the Trump era.

There will be one more Senate race, a Nov. 27 runoff between Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R) and former Clinton administration Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy (D) following Tuesday night’s all-party election. The combined two-party vote in the first round of voting was approximately 58% Republican and 42% Democratic; our Likely Republican rating there remains operative.

Meanwhile, Democrats appeared to net seven governorships, an impressive tally although not quite as big as Democrats would have hoped. Still, flipping Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin gave the Democrats some marquee victories. Republicans are heartened to have held two big prizes, Florida and Ohio, although they also apparently found themselves on the wrong end of yet another very close gubernatorial election in Connecticut for the third consecutive election. ❖



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

Tim Swarens, IndyStar: Mike Braun has proven he's a pro at defying expectations. Before this year, Braun, who had never run for an office higher than the Indiana General Assembly, was largely unknown among voters outside his home town of Jasper. Yet, when pitted against two incumbent U.S. House members in the Republican Senate primary in May, Braun won handily. On Tuesday, he did it again. The mild-mannered businessman from small-town Indiana, in defeating incumbent U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly, pulled out a high-profile victory with enormous national implications. The president rewarded Braun's loyalty by campaigning for the challenger early and often. Trump visited Indiana five times in total between May and November, and in the final push before Election Day, dropped in on Air Force One three times in nine days. In backing Braun, voters in Indiana signaled that they want a senator who promises to consistently back the president. Braun gets credit for the win. But give President Trump a strong assist. Braun and Republicans charged Donnelly with being more in sync with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer than with regular Hoosiers. That accusation served two purposes: It put Donnelly on the defensive and it tied him to a party that on the national level moved further to the left in this election cycle. As much as Braun promoted his support of Trump, it also became clear during the campaign that he was largely a mainstream Republican, in the mold of Hoosier senators such as Dan Coats and Todd Young. In Indiana, a generic Republican has a built-in numerical edge over even a moderate Democrat such as Donnelly. And Braun's mainstream tendencies helped to make him a safe choice for some moderate voters, a bloc that Donnelly needed to win in big numbers. ❖



Ronald Klain, Washington Post: Democrats have done it: After eight years in the minority, and after two years of looking on in frustration as President Trump has tried to rip away health-care coverage, rip apart consumer and environmental safeguards, and rip down civil rights protections, Democrats will control the House starting in January. What now? Let's start with where the new majority should not start: investigations, accusatory hearings or impeachment proceedings. However tempting it might be for freshly empowered congressional Columboes, not a single subpoena should fly in the first 100 days. Not, of course, because there is a shortage of things to investigate — just the opposite. The Trump administration has been the most corrupt since Ulysses S. Grant was in the White House. The administration has flouted the constitutional limit on taking money from foreigners and flagrantly disregarded the rule of law. The transgressions merit serious inquiry and long overdue accountability. Voters chose a Democratic House, in part, to impose missing checks on Trump's excesses and to get to the bottom of the many questions raised in the past two years. Nonetheless, a Democratic majority charging out of the gate with inves-

tigative hearings would be making a mistake, for a number of reasons. First, a bill to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 and restore Trump-repealed rules protecting overtime pay. Democrats should show their support for hard-working people who are doing everything right and still not earning enough to live on. During the 2016 campaign, Trump promised to support a minimum-wage increase; on the eve of the 2018 election, his chief economic adviser proposed abolishing the law altogether. Democrats should find out where the president and the Trump-dominated Senate really stand. Second, legislation to strengthen the Affordable Care Act, expand its coverage and patch up the gaps that the Trump administration has punched in it. Third, a bill to restore the Voting Rights Act and reverse Republican voter-suppression efforts. The cause of democracy should not be carried by Democrats alone, but that is what it has come to. Fourth, a simple, non-porked-up infrastructure bill, with funding for bridges and roads, airports and mass transit, clean-energy projects and new schools. Avoid the complexity and exotica that — while good policy — ultimately made the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act bad politics. And finally, a clean bill, free of extraneous issues, that grants legal status to the immigrant children known as "dreamers." ❖

Eric Pfeiffer, Hoosier Ag Today: The electorate has spoken. Republicans retain control of the Senate while the Democrats will now control the House. What does all of this mean for Indiana agriculture? In one of the most watched races around the nation, Republican Mike Braun defeated Democrat incumbent Joe Donnelly for his senate seat. Donnelly also served on the Senate Ag Committee. Braun said back in July that he currently manages a lot of farm acres and deals with farmers on a regular basis. He feels like he could be a voice for Indiana on the Senate Ag Committee. "I feel real good about understanding the issues, having a deep context of experience, and have said I'd love to be on the ag committee. That's one area where I think I could walk on and probably do as good a job, if not better, than Joe Donnelly because I'm going to understand it from the context of a deep experience." More questions surround the farm bill that remains caught up in conference committee with SNAP work requirements being the major issue to resolve. House Republican Jim Banks from Indiana's 3rd district said, "This is one of those scratch my head that moments in the Congress where I don't understand why it's so complicated or difficult at this point. In fact, it is disappointing to me that we did not get this done before the election." Banks spoke with Hoosier Ag Today prior to election day. He added, "The worst thing that can happen is for a farm bill to be punted to the next Congress where it's uncertain which party might control and that might lead to different priorities in a farm bill next year. So, I'm still optimistic that something will be completed and voted on in the lame duck." ❖

FBI called in to Porter ballot count

VALPARAISO – The Porter County Board of Commissioners has asked the FBI to investigate potential violations of the law in the wake of problems that continue to delay the local results of Tuesday’s general election (Kasarda, [NWI Times](#)). The commissioners referred to “scores of alleged violations of Indiana Election Law submitted by poll workers, voters and the public to the Commissioners,” according to a prepared statement. The target of those allegations was not made known nor were any further details released. Martin, who could not be reached for comment Wednesday, said Tuesday of poll workers, “We had a lot of people quit on us at the last minute.” The county commissioners said the ballot count, which did not get underway until Wednesday morning, or more than 15 hours after the first polling places closed, likely will not be completed and released Wednesday. The commissioners earlier attempted to defend the integrity of the vote count in the wake of polling places opening late, absentee ballots not being delivered to polling sites as required by law and concerns about the ballot room being breached overnight Tuesday into Wednesday. “As ordered by the Commissioners, all ballots were protected at all times since they were delivered last night in a room guarded by the Porter County Sheriff’s Department,” the commissioners said in their statement. “To assure the integrity of the vote count, the Commissioners have also ordered the Sheriff’s Department to secure all areas where votes are being counted. The election office in the courthouse has also been secured by Sheriff’s deputies.”



Trump asks Pence to return as veep

WASHINGTON – Speaking at a Wednesday afternoon news conference in the White House, President Donald Trump responded to a question about his 2020 presidential ticket by spontaneously

asking Vice President Mike Pence to be his running mate (Indianapolis Star). After mentioning the impending 2020 presidential campaign, Mark Meredith, a White House correspondent for Nexstar Broadcasting, asked President Trump a simple yet direct question: “Will the vice president be your running mate in 2020?” The president demurred at first, saying, “Well, I haven’t asked him, but I hope so.” Trump paused, found the Hoosier and former Indiana governor who served as his running mate in 2016, and asked him a question on the spot. “Mike, will you be my running mate?” Pence nodded.

Democrats recover 300 legislative seats

WASHINGTON – After years of trying, Democrats expanded their influence in state capitols on Tuesday, flipping more than 300 state legislative seats while also claiming a majority of the nation’s attorney general offices ([Washington Post](#)). The Democratic gains mark a significant turnaround for a party that had been losing clout in state legislatures for nearly a decade, allowing Republicans in many states to loosen restrictions on firearms, push through new voter-identification laws and weaken environmental regulations. Democrats had also ceded enormous power to Republicans to redraw congressional boundaries.

St. Joe needs to count 22k ballots

SOUTH BEND – NewsCenter 16 learned that more than 22,000 absentee ballots still needed to be counted and were not initially included in the final (WNDU-TV). The election board said its new system for absentee ballots does not pair well with the older systems at county precincts. The board said the precincts contain voting systems that are between 15 and 18 years old and operate on a

completely different software. The more than 22,000 votes are now counted, and the election board has since released those unofficial results. The election board said it has tried to fix the dueling system issue in the past. St. Joseph County Board President Rafael Morton confirmed the system issue and the need for update software. He cited a county property tax cap and costly software as primary barriers. Morton said it would cost nearly \$2 million to implement the new software across all county precincts.

280 municipalities to get \$100M

INDIANAPOLIS – Governor Eric Holcomb says more than 280 Indiana cities, towns and counties received a combined \$100 million through the Next Level Roads: Community Crossings Initiative (Ober, Inside Indiana Business). He joined Indiana Department of Transportation Commissioner Joe McGuinness to talk about the program, which they say has awarded nearly \$400 million in state matching funds over three years for local road projects. The governor will be in Vernon today to present checks to Community Crossings recipients.

Bad card slowed Tippecanoe vote

DALLAS — A novice election employee inserted a card from a vote machine to tally the results on it (Wilkins, Lafayette Journal & Courier). But the election employee ejected the card before the machine counted its votes, erasing all of the information on the card, Tippecanoe County Clerk Christa Coffey said about 12:15 a.m. Wednesday. Fortunately, the card did not erase all of its information. This launched a mad dash to the Dayton Town Hall to find the machine, which they