

# 'July Surprise'

## Moves Make Huge Impact on Indiana Politics



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Many elections throughout American history have been characterized by an “October surprise,” a last-minute development that changes the dynamics of the campaign, resulting in an unexpected outcome.

These events can be as unanticipated as a natural disaster or carefully strategized; miraculous in yielding a sudden victory or disastrous in bringing defeat; small and otherwise undetectable or massive in scope and size. When the change occurs a full four months early, however, it is truly a surprise.

One week in July, nearly every race in Indiana politics changed. The timing was auspicious enough, occurring just before the deadline for candidate changes for the November races. Such changes, if any, are often small and unremarkable. It is a period when campaigns are experiencing a lull between the primaries and conventions and the water cooler talk revolves around barbecues, not ballots.

But in the span of five days, from July 11 to July 15, an unprecedented game of political musical chairs changed the spread of multiple races, resulting in new matchups, old rivalries and a renewed sense of competition that was anything but boring.

On Monday, July 11, Baron Hill abruptly announced he was ending his bid for the Senate. The one-time congressman was unopposed in the Democratic primary and set to compete against Republican favorite Todd Young. Within the span of a few hours, Evan Bayh, former senator and governor, raised the stakes by declaring his bid for the Senate, bringing with him a \$9 million plus war chest and substantial name recognition.

The following day, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump traveled to Westfield. The rally was far from routine – in a twist borrowed from “The Celebrity Apprentice,” Trump was in the final stages of selecting his running mate. Originally a dark horse in the race, Gov. Mike Pence outshined other VP hopefuls with a rousing speech that energized the crowd and a conservative record that attracted the party faithful.

A plane issue forced Trump to remain in the state another day and fly his finalists into Indianapolis – quickly eclipsing the Tuesday night audition. By Thursday morning, rumors were swirling that Trump had told Pence, “You’re hired!”

The state was restless with anticipation, and not simply because of Pence. His loyal supporters swooned at the idea of him joining the presidential ticket, while his enflamed opposition cheered his presumed absence from the gubernatorial ticket and the possibilities that vacancy would allow. Trump needed to make a decision quickly, but Pence needed an offer even faster. Indiana’s deadline to change names on the general election ballot loomed at noon Friday, July 15, and

Pence could not run simultaneously for federal and state offices. While Trump debated and Pence waited, speculation captivated the Hoosier state.

The possible change excited Republican leadership, who saw the vacancy as an opportunity. To be considered, interested persons already running for other offices in November had to meet the same Friday noon deadline to remove their names from the ballot. The congenial music in the game of political musical chairs suddenly sped up to a more threatening tempo.

Trump’s initial announcement slated for 11 a.m. Friday troubled observers, who noted the seemingly coincidental timing left only a single hour dividing Pence’s probable withdrawal from any other interested candidate’s declaration of his or her intentions. When a tragic terrorist attack occurred in France and the announcement was changed to Saturday, the timing made clear what the candidates would not: a decision would be made (by noon Friday) before an announcement.

Topping off a whirlwind week, Pence filed to remove his name from the ballot late Friday morning, and almost immediately, Lt. Gov. Eric Holcomb (the eventual selection of the Republican central committee as its gubernatorial candidate) and U.S. Reps. Todd Rokita and Susan Brooks followed suit. Within the span of five days, the Senate race, the gubernatorial race and others changed dramatically.

The week’s events changed three races directly but influenced the entire Indiana ballot as well. With the new political matchups yielding more competition and generating a reinvigorated interest, Indiana politics once again transcended the usual afterthought status typically ascribed to it. The May primaries in the state ended the long and contentious Republican presidential race with Trump’s victory and the suspension of the Ted Cruz and John Kasich campaigns. At the same time, Bernie Sanders’ victory reaffirmed the viability of his movement and forced the Democrats to consider concessions to create unity.

Many assumed the focus on Indiana would be short-lived, but if May was unusual, July proved to be downright unbelievable. Attracting attention for the major races can help the down-ballot ones, as voters are more interested and more likely to participate with such excitement. Democracy necessitates participation, and if the first half of this year is any indication, Indiana may see a surge of recognition and participation in the second half, both of which the Hoosier state is truly deserving.

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