
CONGRESS

Bowlby to run against Rep. Miller

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SPRINGFIELD — When Judy Bowlby speaks, it can be hard to tell at first whether she is a Democrat or Republican. And in some ways, that is the point.

“I consider myself an American first,” Bowlby told the Herald & Review in an interview in which she eschewed party labels.

“We have the far right, then we have the far left,” she said. “And what I find is most of the people are in the middle. They are of a moderate viewpoint, they are middle class and I really don’t see someone sticking up for the middle class and the moderates. And I think that’s sad.”



Miller

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Miller

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Seeking to give voice to those in the political middle, the self-described moderate Bowlby last week launched her campaign for Congress in Illinois’ 15th Congressional District, which is held by incumbent Rep. Mary Miller, R-Hindsboro, who is seeking reelection. Bowlby is running as a Republican.

The 15th is a sprawling district that covers most of the rural areas and small towns of Central Illinois, stretching from the Missouri and Iowa borders all the way to the Indiana state line. It is one of the most conservative districts in the state, with President Donald Trump carrying it with 70% of the vote in 2024.

Miller has been one of Trump’s most faithful elected disciples, standing by him through his second impeachment, a criminal trial that resulted in his conviction and, eventually, his return to power in January. She is also a member of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus.

For a district that, at least on paper, is one of the most conservative in the country, the 2026 campaign has been unusually robust.

Three Democrats — Paul Davis of Collinsville, Randy Raley



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Judy Bowlby, a Republican candidate for Congress in Illinois’ 15th Congressional District.

of Highland and Jennifer Todd of Edwardsville — have announced campaigns in the district. And in August, Ryan Tebrugge, a state employee and small business owner from Springfield, launched a Republican primary bid of his own.

Bowlby, 70, who now lives in unincorporated Springfield, was raised by her aunt and uncle on a farm near Cerro Gordo. She graduated with degrees in clinical psychology from Eastern Illinois University and worked for three decades as lobbyist in the phar-

maceutical and dental industries.

One of the highlights of Bowlby’s career, she said, was expanding access to the Pharmaceutical Assistance Program, an optional, state-level benefit program for middle- to lower-income seniors and disabled people that helps pay for medications used in the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease, arthritis, glaucoma and other ailments. She worked with Muhammad Ali to get treatment for Parkinson’s disease added to the list, she said.

“It was during that time that I actually had a chance to work with

both Republicans and Democrats, and I was very successful in negotiating compromises on policy (and) on legislation,” Bowlby said. “I learned early on that if you want to get things done for the people, you have to work with both parties.”

Bowlby started attending events and rallies of both political parties in recent years “as an observer.” She said many of the issues that came up were the same: seniors worried about their Medicaid and Social Security benefits, young people concerned about affording housing and finding jobs, and farmers anxious about the impact of tariffs on their markets, among others.

Bowlby said that there are “a lot of weaknesses” in the current representation of the district and that Miller “not does not have a proven good record.”

Like the other candidates seeking to unseat Miller, Bowlby said that the incumbent has neglected the needs of the district, pointing to her refusal to make congressionally-directed spending requests, colloquially known as “earmarks,” for needed infrastructure improvements.

Bowlby said that she can do a “better job,” arguing that she has “more experience than the current representative” in passing legisla-

tion and working on policy.

“Some people would say, ‘Well, maybe you start off with a council position and then you go to a county position and then you go to a state,’” Bowlby said. “And maybe if I was 20-years-old and I didn’t have any experience, I might start that way. But my background and my experience, I believe qualifies me to do this job.”

With almost no name recognition and a significant fundraising disadvantage (Miller had more than \$700,000 in her campaign account as of July), Bowlby acknowledged that “this is like a David and Goliath story from the Bible.”

“I am definitely David in this race,” she said.

“I need help, I’m not going to I’m not going to deny that,” Bowlby said. “But I went into this not only for the hope of getting on the ticket and winning, but I went into it with (the hope of) sending a message that I feel is important and that others take notice — even others in office take notice because something really, really has to change.”

The petition filing period for the March primary election is in five weeks.

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