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EDITORIALS

Tribune endorsements for Congress in 13th, 14th, 15th, 17th districts

The Tribune Editorial Board is endorsing candidates on both the Democratic and Republican sides of contested primary races for the U.S. Congress throughout Illinois. This is Part Four.

13th District

Before Illinois' new political maps came out in 2021, District 13 was represented by a Republican — Rodney Davis — who held the seat for a decade until the new map cut him out of District 13. Now, the district has a Democratic tilt. It's a mix of rural areas and college towns, making its politics diverse, and Democrats who want to win here must remember this is a somewhat competitive district.

Incumbent Nikki Budzinski is running against Dylan Blaha, 31, in the Democratic primary. Blaha, an army veteran, is running a progressive campaign well to the left of his opponent.

Budzinski is the more pragmatic Democrat. She has shown a willingness to work across the aisle during her tenure in Washington, which goes a long way with this board and, we imagine, with her constituents. We appreciate, for example, her bipartisan efforts to increase access to apprenticeships and skills training.

We agree with Blaha on the importance of the balance of power in our government and his skepticism of executive overreach. But he seems to mistake government expansion for reform, assuming bigger systems will work better simply because they are, well, bigger.

Budzinski, 48, is endorsed in the Democratic primary. Republican challengers in this district face the same difficulty statewide that Republicans face in general, namely, the need to appeal to the base to win primaries and the need to appeal to moderates to win the general. It's a tall order, but such is the reality.

Republican Joshua Loyd, a 28-year-old West Point graduate, is vying for another chance to do that after losing to Budzinski in 2024. To earn a rematch, he'll have to defeat Jeff Wilson, a Republican running on a populist Republican platform.

Wilson, 61, is a Navy veteran and serves on the Champaign County Board, which will give him name recognition among voters. While he is campaigning on a promise of fiscal restraint, which we like, he has clearly aligned himself with Trump's agenda, casting doubt on his ability to operate as an independent-minded representative. Loyd presents a more commonsense approach to a wide range of issues while also maintaining support for principles of limited government and free enterprise. He received our endorsement in 2024, and we continue to view him as the best choice today.

Loyd is endorsed in the Republican primary.

14th District

Incumbent U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood, who is running for reelection without a Democratic endorsement in this primary season, will face off in the 14th District against either Gary Vician, 71, or James Marter, 63, in the November general elec-



U.S. Rep. Nikki Budzinski, 13th, speaks during a hearing of the House Agriculture Committee about the impact of economic policies on farm country on Feb. 11, 2025, on Capitol Hill in Washington. **BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

tion. Whoever gets the Republican nomination has an uphill battle ahead. Marter lost to Underwood in 2024.

This district, which stretches from Lake County west to McHenry County and south into Kane and Kendall counties, includes a potpourri of communities — suburban, ex-urban and rural — and political leanings.

Vician's campaign platform looks good on its face — including a stated commitment to cut taxes and a desire to create a thriving economy. He also lists public service on his résumé, noting that he served as Naperville Township supervisor from 2009-13. Despite multiple attempts to contact him, however, we never reached him, and are left with a lot of unanswered questions about his candidacy. Marter is a former delegate for Donald Trump and has portrayed himself as an unapologetic hardliner who aligns closely with the president on a wide range of issues and has said he has "zero concern for bipartisanship," which does not sit well with us.

The Tribune is not endorsing in this Republican primary race.

15th District

Republican U.S. Rep. Mary Miller has held her seat in Illinois' 15th District since 2021. District 15 is the largest district — geographically — in the state, and covers much of central and downstate Illinois, bisected awkwardly by District 13, stretching across to the eastern and western borders so that it touches Indiana, Iowa and Missouri. It is less ethnically diverse than other parts of the state, is home to an economy that relies heavily on agriculture and has a strong conservative tilt. While District 15 is a safe bet for Republicans, it's also a bellwether we'll be watching to see how the president fares in conservative parts of the state.

Miller ran unopposed in 2024. Now, she is facing primary challenges in Judy Bowlyb, 70, and Ryan Tebrugg, 36.

Bowlyb clearly understands the district she hopes to represent, with an emphasis

on agriculture and a focus on kitchen table economic issues, and worked for decades in health care and government affairs. What really stood out to us is Bowlyb's deep desire to build bridges as a means of restoring trust in democracy and faith in institutions. We found her approach, tone and authentic demeanor refreshing and much-needed.

Where Miller walks in lockstep with Trump, Bowlyb is more independent-minded and moderate. Tebrugg, a business owner and former law enforcement officer, supports fiscal responsibility and cutting waste, and offered thoughtful opinions on immigration reform. Like Bowlyb, he seems to sense the need to cool partisan tensions. We believe Bowlyb is best positioned to take on that challenge and has the experience needed to make a difference in Washington.

Bowlyb is endorsed in the Republican primary. Democrats in District 15 necessarily have to be more moderate to compete in the general election, and four — Paul Davis, Kyle Nudo, Randy Raley and Jennifer Todd — are vying to run against a polarizing incumbent.

Davis, 58, a Collinsville veterinarian, describes himself as "fiscally conservative and socially liberal." He told us his point of distinction is his emphasis on finding middle ground, being willing to work across the aisle and coming up with ways to solve nonpartisan issues. His rejection of extreme, divisive and disconnected politics surely will resonate with not just District 15 voters but many Americans elsewhere. He grasps the importance of agriculture to his district. On health care, he is an advocate of Medicare for All, with the ultimate goal of a single-payer system in the U.S. Like every other Democratic candidate in this primary, he supports a tax on unrealized gains, but he also clearly stated his openness to spending cuts and reform. In this field, that sets him apart.

Todd, 56, is a nurse, a single mom, child of a military veteran and a lifelong Illinoisan. Her campaign seems to be rooted in her personal story, and we have no doubt of the sincerity of her motivations. Many of her

ideas sound very much like her Democratic peers in the northern part of the state.

Raley, 69, a longtime on-air broadcaster, understands how to make a point, most of which are very progressive in nature. Nudo, 54, is a small-business owner and union man who presents a good command of the everyday issues constituents care about. What gives us pause is that much of his language on spending focuses on tax hikes rather than looking for responsible cuts.

If you live in District 15 and consider yourself a very progressive Democrat, Todd and Raley are your candidates. Nudo comes across as slightly more moderate. But Davis' recognition of the need to address out-of-control spending makes him the most reasonable choice, and he would present the strongest challenge to Miller in the general election.

Davis is endorsed.

17th District

In many ways, endorsement season is an opportunity to marvel at just how ridiculous Illinois' political maps have become.

District 17 is no exception, running in a snaking route throughout north-central Illinois, including Rockford, the Quad Cities, Bloomington and Peoria. This misfit district is represented by U.S. Rep. Eric Sorensen, a Democrat who defeated his Republican opponents in a competitive race in 2022 and then more comfortably in 2024. The Republicans vying to face him in November are Julie Bickelhaupt, 50, and Dillan Vancil, 33.

Both Republican primary candidates express an understanding of the challenges small businesses are facing. Both candidates are pro-life but acknowledge that it's up to the states to decide rules on abortion access. Both are Second Amendment advocates. Both support immigration enforcement. Both are well to the right of this board.

Vancil owns coffee shops in Illinois and Iowa and employs a healthy number of employees, including many younger workers, and speaks convincingly and with authenticity about the desire to improve affordability — the buzzword of the year — for regular Americans. We appreciate his commitment to lowering the tax burden and would hope that would be accompanied by a commitment not to do so irresponsibly and without any accompanying spending cuts. We also like that he told us he supports "strong, instant background checks for all commercial (gun) sales."

We liked that Bickelhaupt, a seventh-generation farmer, supports school choice, an issue this board has long championed.

Central Illinois is not Chicagoland, and what flies among moderates and conservatives up here isn't the same as the politics elsewhere. We recognize that, and so take with a grain of salt some of our misgivings about these candidates, which, frankly, made us consider not endorsing in this race. If you are looking for a Republican with a small-business perspective, and who could present a coherent challenge to incumbent Eric Sorensen, Vancil is your best shot.

Vancil is endorsed.

ON THIS DAY 56 YEARS AGO A JUDGE TAKES THE 5TH AMENDMENT

A new scandal in the Illinois judicial system has been uncovered, just as the state constitutional convention begins consideration of drastic reforms.

The case involves Circuit Judge Richard A. Napolitano, presiding judge of the Housing court in Chicago. He has been named as an unindicted co-conspirator in indictments for official misconduct and conspiracy returned by the Sangamon county grand jury. Moreover, he has admitted that he invoked the 5th amendment to avoid incriminating himself when called to testify before the grand jury.

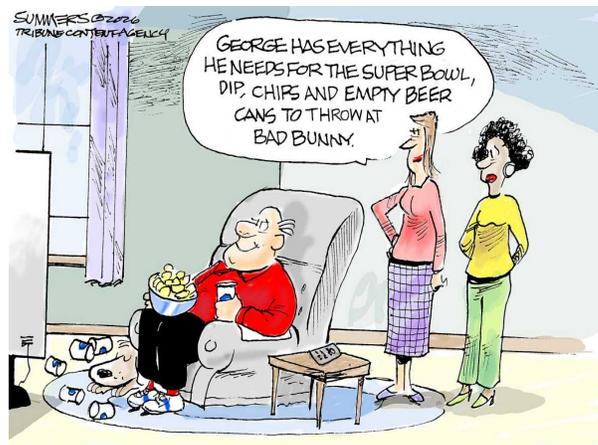
Under the 5th amendment no person may be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself. Nevertheless for a judge to invoke this privilege is shocking unless he intends to resign his office forthwith. It is standard practice for law enforcement agencies to require the resignation of any official or employee who refuses to answer a relevant question put to him by one authorized to ask such a question, on the ground that a truthful answer would tend to incriminate him.

Judge Napolitano's personal bailiff also took the 5th amendment in the Springfield investigation of fraudulent concession contracts at the Illinois state fair. When Sheriff Joseph Woods heard of it yesterday he ordered the bailiff's discharge.

Under the Illinois constitution the chief responsibility for dealing with charges of misconduct by judges is held by the Illinois Courts commission, which is composed of five judges appointed by the Supreme Court. The commission has announced that it will consider the Napolitano case at its next regular meeting, on Feb. 13. The Illinois Courts commission now faces a test of its usefulness. And the constitutional convention has a good illustration of what is likely to happen under the present judicial article, which virtually guarantees lifetime jobs to judges.

Tribune Editorial Board, Feb. 5, 1970

EDITORIAL CARTOON



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