



## Will local Republicans up for election vote for Donald Trump?



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Aug 15, 2016

As they face a historically significant election, Republicans up and down the November ballot are facing a difficult question.

Do you support Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee?

“I’ve never seen this kind of quandary for candidates,” said Franklin & Marshall College government professor Stephen Medvic. “There are times when the top of the ticket is not really popular in your district but this is a unique set of circumstances.”

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According to Medvic, a longtime political observer, Trump’s divisive candidacy and unpopularity within his own party make him a risky candidate to openly support — and a risky one not to support, too.

“It’s something a lot of voters want to know,” Medvic said. “How do you assess this guy? What do you think about his character? How is he going to lead?”

Those still weighing their decision include U.S. Sen. Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania — who is up for re-election in a close race with Democrat Katie McGinty — and other officials still staying quiet.

But the level of risk also significantly depends on the places and places they represent, analysts argue.

“I don't think supporting Trump in Lancaster County will adversely affect a candidate's standing since it is a heavily Republican area,” said Elizabethtown College assistant professor of political science Kyle Kopko.

Kopko said candidates in more competitive areas will have a tougher time. However, “the fact that Republican candidates even need to contemplate this question is significant in and of itself; it demonstrates that there are still serious divisions in the Republican Party regarding Trump's candidacy.”

Dave O'Connell, professor of American politics at Dickinson College, said it's safe to say candidates are even paying attention to polling and fundraising in their specific areas to see whether their constituents are supporting the GOP ticket.

“The risk is upsetting your most fervent activists and voters,” O'Connell said.

## Local GOP candidates supporting Trump?

So, in the conservative stronghold of Lancaster County, what are those officials and candidates saying with less than three months until election day?

For Lancaster city's Republican state House candidate Robert Bigley, he said the question “What do you think of Trump?” makes him cringe.

Bigley, up against 13-term incumbent Democrat Rep. Mike Sturla, said he needs every vote he can get but still can't pretend he supports the GOP presidential nominee.

“Trump is dangerous,” Bigley said in a [recent letter to the editor](#). “He intentionally stirs up fears and prejudices that lie deep in the hearts of his followers and doesn't seem to care about the consequences.”

But Bigley, an active local Republican candidate denouncing Trump, is an outlier.

The two Republicans in the highest-profile local races this year — state Sen. Lloyd Smucker for Congress and former Lancaster County commissioner Scott Martin for state Senate — have said they will support him.

Martin pledged to vote for the eventual GOP nominee before the April primary but did not openly endorse the Trump-Pence ticket until Tuesday. Speaking before [vice presidential nominee Mike Pence's town hall event in Lancaster](#), Martin emphatically said, “Now is the time that we need to elect Donald Trump and Mike Pence.”

Martin, 44, of Conestoga Township, praised Trump for being “an outsider to come in, to tell you the truth, to be blunt” \_ evoking some of the same “outsider” messages that were prevalent in Martin's own three-way primary battle.

Smucker, 52, of West Lampeter Township, is running for the 16th Congressional District seat held by 10-term Republican U.S. Rep. Joe Pitts. His campaign has said he is supporting Trump because he is “better equipped than Hillary Clinton to handle the many pressing issues facing our country.”

## State House candidates up for re-election

Other local officials up for re-election this year have been mostly silent on Trump.

When asked by LNP this week, almost all those who responded said they would support Trump. However, none answered questions about whether they still have concerns about the billionaire who has been slipping in the polls while consistently making controversial statements.

“I didn’t vote for him in the primary but I’ll vote for him in the general election,” said state Rep. Bryan Cutler, of Peach Bottom.

Cutler, the majority whip, is one of Lancaster County’s 11 state House members — all but one of whom are Republican — up for re-election this year. After being elected to 5 two-year terms, he is facing his first general election opponent this fall.

“For me it comes down to the Supreme Court picks,” Cutler said of his decision to support Trump.

Some, such as Rep. David Zimmerman, of East Earl, and Rep. Steven Mentzer, of Lititz, cited Trump’s massive primary win in Pennsylvania as a reason to support him.

“Through grassroots efforts, the American people have clearly shown they want somebody from outside the establishment,” Zimmerman said in an email.

Rep. David Hickernell, of West Donegal, just said he will be supporting all Republican candidates, including Trump.

Rep. Mindy Fee, of Manheim, replied with this: “The last thing America needs is another Clinton presidency.”

None of the state representatives, when asked, said whether or not they would actively campaign for Trump, but one has already begun this week: Rep. Keith Greiner, of Upper Leacock.

Greiner, in helping to introduce Pence on Tuesday, said he is “proud to support the Trump-Pence ticket” while praising Trump for his leadership in picking Pence as his running mate.

Only Rep. Mark Gillen, who represents a small portion of the county in Brecknock Township, did not explicitly say he would support Trump.

“I’ll be supporting and voting for candidates who reflect my position on the sanctity of life, the second amendment and tax policy,” Gillen said without answering whether Trump fits that description.

Gillen added he has not “historically endorsed anyone,” but Trump is “much closer to where I’m at than the Democratic nominee.”

State Reps. Brett Miller, of East Hempfield, did not return a request for comment along with two other state House members with small portions of their districts in Lancaster County: Jim Cox, who represents Adamstown Borough and East Cocalico Township; and John Lawrence, who represents Christiana Borough and Sadsbury Township.

Do you support Donald Trump?

*Lancaster County Republicans running for office or re-election this year on the GOP presidential nominee:*

**Scott Martin, candidate for state Senate, speaking about Trump at the Mike Pence rally in Lancaster:** “If there’s ever a time for an outsider to come in, to tell you the truth, to be blunt. What we need to do — Now is the time that we need to elect Donald Trump and Mike Pence president and vice president of the United States.”

**State Sen. Lloyd Smucker, candidate for the 16th Congressional District seat:** “(Smucker) is supporting the Republican nominee because he knows that person is better equipped than Hillary Clinton to handle the many pressing issues facing our country,” **his campaign manager has said.**

**Robert Bigley, candidate for state House in the district covering Lancaster city:** “(Y)es, I am the 96th District’s Republican candidate for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. And no, I do not support Donald Trump.”

**Rep. Bryan Cutler, Peach Bottom:** “I didn’t vote for him in the primary but I’ll vote for him in the general election ... For me it comes down to the Supreme Court picks.”

**Rep. Keith Greiner, Upper Leacock:** “I plan on supporting the entire Republican ticket in November. I am particularly impressed with Donald Trump’s choice of Mike Pence for Vice-President.”

**Rep. David Hickernell, West Donegal:** “I am supporting all of the Republican candidates on the ballot in November including Donald Trump.”

**Rep. Mindy Fee, Manheim:** “The last thing America needs is another Clinton presidency.”

**Rep. Steven Mentzer, Lititz:** “I support the will of the Republican primary voters and I support the choice of the delegates to the convention.”

**Rep. David Zimmerman, East Earl:** “I will be voting for Donald Trump this fall. Trump won every county in Pennsylvania in the Republican Primary. Through grassroots efforts, the American people have clearly shown they want somebody from outside the establishment.”

**Rep. Mark Gillen, Brecknock Township:** “I’ll be supporting and voting for candidates who reflect my position on the sanctity of life, the second amendment and tax policy.”

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