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March 25th, 2008 by Scott

The GOP AG Field, Post-Steve Carter



Rumors continue to fly about the decision of popular Republican incumbent Attorney General Steve Carter to not seek a third term. Monday came and went, and saw no bombshell scandal headlines in local newspapers explaining Carter's sudden decision, perhaps undermining speculation on the Internet that Carter was leaving to avoid some sort of imminent news of some juicy scandal or impropriety; none has been forthcoming.

In fact, the entire story has all but been buried by a combination of the holiday news cycle, the Democratic presidential campaign presence at Dyngus Day, and some story in Indianapolis involving the departing of Pacers CEO Donnie Walsh.

To say that Carter's departure came as a surprise is an understatement. From what sources indicate, many of Carter's own staff apparently did not know until Sunday afternoon (heck of an Easter present). Murray Clark, the State GOP chairman, was not aware of it during the week and apparently also learned of it on very short notice. The Governor appears to have learned of it in a meeting (or a phone call) with Carter on Saturday.

(Read more after the leap)

Greg Zoeller, whose name has been floated as Carter's replacement (and who, rumor has it, may well be Carter's picked successor), was in Clark County campaigning actively for Steve Carter at their Lincoln Day on Wednesday night (I even conversed with him about vote fraud in Clark County and lawyers from Harrison County).

Some folks in the 9th District bristle at the idea of Zoeller running; they attribute largely to him (rightly or wrongly) Steve Carter's vigorous pursuit of pro-Sodrel automated phone calls in the 2006 election, while simultaneously ignoring pro-Baron Hill automated phone calls to the probable overall detriment of Sodrel's campaign. If the Republican powers-that-be in the 9th District decide to hold a grudge over the phone call litigation in 2006, Zoeller's bid would be in trouble early on and maybe even dead on arrival.

The timing of Carter's departure and the swift emergence of Zoeller's name reminds me of the situation across the Ohio River in Kentucky, where longtime Republican Congressman Ron Lewis withdrew his reelection bid at the last minute to make way for a prepared filing by his chief of staff to become his chosen successor (Mitch McConnell, the godfather of the Kentucky GOP, subsequently beat this notion out of them and the GOP is running a popular state senator for the seat instead).

Even if backed by Steve Carter and pushed hard by the Clark County clique (and if the objections of some in the 9th are overcome), it may not be Zoeller's year. It is difficult to conceive of the Republican convention in Indianapolis nominating two candidates for statewide races from southern Indiana, let alone two people from

the 9th Congressional District, even before you consider those two people are both from Clark County (Tony Bennett, the Governor's pick for Superintendent of Public Instruction, is also from Clark).

For similar reasons of geographic balance, any other candidacy out of southern Indiana is probably out. This effectively precludes other potential candidates from the 9th (such as Floyd County Prosecutor Keith Henderson) and the 8th (such as Gibson County Prosecutor Rob Krieg; the 8th already has State Treasurer Richard Mourdock).

Right now, the situation is exceedingly fluid in terms of names being floated.

Every Republican County Chairman that has a Republican prosecutor with decent campaign skills and decent prospects is going to float their guy (or gal) as a potential candidate for attorney general if asked. Brian Howey, for example, called Allen County GOP Chairman Steve Shine for comment about Carter's decision; it is thus unsurprising that Shine floated to Howey the name of Allen County Prosecutor Karen Richards as a potential candidate.

Marion County Prosecutor Carl Brizzi's name has also been floated, but this seems to be in the same line as the "name every decent or better Republican prosecutor" name-dropping game. I can't see someone as moderate as Carl Brizzi being selected as an AG candidate by a Hoosier GOP convention. And, as Indiana's attorney general is relatively weak in terms of authority (much of it actually being in the hands, interestingly, of the Marion County Prosecutor), one would wonder why Brizzi would want the job. It certainly wouldn't help really him in his apparent ambitions of becoming a congressman or mayor of Indianapolis someday.

Elkhart County Prosecutor Curtis Hill, whose name has been dropped by some on the Internets, is probably also in the "name a prosecutor" parlor game at this point. An African American Republican that can win in an area that is 95% white, he would be an attractive and powerful candidate if there is something beyond the rumors and hypothetical name-dropping.

Todd Rokita's name has been mentioned, and he is term-limited as Secretary of State and retains a decent-sized campaign war chest (in the \$200,000 range). But it is unclear whether he would genuinely be interested in taking on a position that might be seen as a step down. Rokita's people did not return the Star's calls asking about the issue (in contrast to a number of other names that have been floated and are actively being pushed), which would seem to indicate at least some measure of indecision.

And lastly, there is Tom Wheeler, the Chairman of the State Election Commission and attorney at Locke Reynolds. Wheeler has previously expressed intention to run in 2008, but was dissuaded by Carter's intention of seeking a third term. He may no longer be so disinclined. With the Indianapolis big money likely in his corner, he would potentially be a very strong candidate (and, having been basically appointed by Mitch Daniels once before, could become the favored candidate of Mitchies if the Governor deigns to even take a position).

In Wheeler's prior interest, Carter's rebuff of him with a supposed intention to seek reelection, then Carter's sudden announcement to the contrary, and Zoeller's rapid move into candidate mode (despite not seeming the candidate at Clark County on Wednesday night), there is almost an easy picture to be drawn of Steve Carter trying to pick his successor with this maneuver, rather than any other potential scandal or rumor.

If that is indeed the case, the question would be whether or not he can succeed at doing so.

(This post also available at the [Hoosierpundit](#))

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