

Local State Representative testing run for U.S. Senate

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Mike Braun



The race for the United States Senate seat currently held by Democrat Joe Donnelly may be a year away, but already Republicans are lining up and looking at taking a run for the seat. Among those interested is Mike Braun, the Indiana District 63 Representative that covers parts of Daviess, Martin and Dubois County.

"I have not officially declared," said Braun, "But I have been kicking the tires, talking with people and seeing what kind of support I might have. So far, I have received a lot of encouragement to get into the race."

Braun, owner of Meyer Distributing and Meyer Logistics, has spent the last three years in the state house. During that time he has served on the Ways and Means Committee, Transportation and Roads and the Select Committee on Government Reduction. During the last session, he co-sponsored the road funding bill that will put millions of dollars more into road repairs and maintenance and the regional infrastructure bill that would allow areas to put together some of their own road projects.

"When I ran for office, I wanted to work on infrastructure and education, and during the last couple of sessions we have made big changes on those issues," said Braun. "We managed to get significant bills to go through the legislature. What I find now is that a lot of what needs to be worked on is federal issues, like health care."

Braun says some of his desire to take that on comes from his days campaigning in Washington. "When I ran the first time, I did a lot of door-to-door campaigning in Washington," he said. "I found the things that concerned people were most often federal ones rather than state issues."

If the local state representative jumps into the U.S. Senate race, he will most likely be part of a primary run that has already shown signs of being brutal before anyone even formally commits. Congressmen Luke Messer and Todd Rokita are considered the early front-runners. They have similar voting records, but already each is claiming the other is behind negative stories that have surfaced in the Indianapolis media.

The Associated Press reported Messer's wife has received a lucrative consulting fee of more than \$500,000 for part-time work out of the family's home in Virginia. The story has raised questions about Messer's Indiana residency. Residency issues were believed to have been a major issue that led to the defeat of former long-time senators Richard Lugar and Evan Bayh.

Meanwhile, Rokita has been reported to have used campaign funds to pay \$100,000 to a private airplane company that he co-owns.

The internal spats are reportedly turning some Republicans off of both candidates and could open the way for someone else to win the primary. "I have received about 50 calls over the last couple of weeks from people who are encouraging me to run," said Braun. "They are looking for something different. Their arguing has taken my campaign from somewhat plausible to plausible."

Another element that might make a run plausible is campaign funding. Both Rokita and Messer have campaign war chests in excess of \$1.5 million from their runs for the House. Braun says he doesn't have that kind of money right away but believes he can be competitive. "I have a lot of strong contacts in the business world around the state," he said. "I believe I can reach out to them for help, plus financially I am in a position where I could use some of my own money to prime the pump in the beginning."

Braun says he feels the timing may be right for making a run for federal office. "If I am ever going to run for the United States Senate now is the time," he said. "It could be a long time before there is a seat open again without an incumbent Republican. My children are grown and have taken on a lot of the business and my business is in good shape."

Despite his success in local races, Braun realizes that if he does get into the race, he will be facing some experienced politicians who have made careers out of politics and public service. "I hope there is a path for someone different to the Senate," said Braun. "Voters have shown they are willing to support a candidate who is not part of the establishment and I think they will support a candidate with a good background and a good message who can make his case."

Braun says he expects to have a decision on whether he will be a candidate by Aug. 1. "I expect both Messer and Rokita to declare in the next two or three weeks," he said. "If so, then I will need to get in quickly. I want to gather as much input as I can before I make a decision but it is looking positive based on the feedback I have received so far."

Whoever wins the Republican primary is expected to face Democrat Joe Donnelly in the fall. Even though Indiana is a traditionally Republican state that Donald Trump won easily in the last election Braun believes the incumbent will be a challenge to defeat. "Joe Donnelly won't be an easy guy to unseat," said Braun. "I know the President has lost a lot of his popularity since the last election and that could hurt a Republican, but I think the voters have shown they want some outsiders rather than the establishment."

Meyer Distributing – Native soil bears strong growth

Story by: Matt Crane

Photos by: Eric Tretter

You'll never catch Mike Braun checking his cell phone at a tedious business meeting. The CEO of Meyer Distributing doesn't even own one of the attention diverting devices.

It's hard enough imagining a CEO in today's world who isn't connected to his company 24/7. Much less the CEO of a company that has averaged 18 percent yearly growth since 1981 and is currently in the midst of a multimillion dollar expansion.

"Up until about seven or eight years ago, I took all the calls including the three in the morning calls when a truck would break down," he explains. "When I got my executive team put together, that's the first thing I delegated."

His aversion to cell phones and the spectacular growth of his company aside, Braun still takes time to speak with customers he has known since he started working with the original Meyer company, Meyer Body, Inc., in 1981.

Braun's two passions are business and forestry management, but the difference in his demeanor belies the fact that, although he loves business, his heart these days truly belongs in the acres of land he has acquired over the years.

Hard to believe from the massive expansion his company is currently experiencing. A \$23.32 million construction project is on schedule at company headquarters on Cathy Lane and East 25th Street in Jasper. When it is finished Meyer Distributing will have added 266,039 square feet of warehouse space – increasing the overall size to 500,000 sq. ft. – and moved its headquarters across the street to a

building purchased from Stens Corporation in 2012. It will also add over 100 jobs to the region.

Since the turn of the year, expansion across the country continues. The company has created four crossdocks – distribution points designed to quickly serve an assigned region – in four states, and acquired a California distributor to expand into the west coast market. The California expansion makes the company a nationwide contender in the growing third party logistics business carrying freight from the west coast to the east coast.

It's a huge expansion for a company started by Leo Meyer in 1937 as a truck bed manufacturer in Haysville.

The company changed hands in the late 40s or early 50s when Marty Renner purchased it from Meyer.

Renner operated the business until 1959, when Braun's father, Amos, joined Jerry Habig and together they purchased it.

Meanwhile, Braun graduated from Jasper High School in 1972, where he lettered in football, basketball and track. He then attended Wabash College where he graduated summa cum laude with a degree in Economics in 1976. He married Maureen Burger and was accepted into Harvard Business School that same year.

Attending Harvard solidified a few things for Braun. He knew he didn't want to live in a big city.

"In deciding what to do at that time, many of my cohorts were either going into investment banking, management consulting or joining a big corporation," he explained. "I would have been one of

the few that moved back to his hometown and I have never regretted that."

So, after graduating from Harvard with his MBA in 1978, Braun moved back to Jasper and accepted a position with Aristokraft, where he worked for three years. He then transferred to Meyer Body Company in Haysville to work in sales. Unfortunately six months later the economy tanked.

"Interest rates shot to above 20 percent," Braun recalls. "It eliminated almost 70 percent of our business. I left a good job to take the position there and I thought at the time it may have been the dumbest thing I ever did."

(Continued)

dcForward
Dubois County's magazine



Mike Braun



Bedford Motor Service Truck manufactured by Haysville Motor Company



1937 workers – Meyer Body Inc.

Fortunately the company survived through diversification. Two companies were created by expanding into used truck sales and auto parts distribution. These new concerns supported the original company through the first few years of the economic downturn in the early 80s.

By 1986, Braun and a partner, Daryl Rauscher, had purchased the company. Rauscher continued with the original business along with the used-truck sales under the moniker Tri-State Trailer and Truck.

Braun continued to expand the distribution network from their Haysville headquarters until 1998, when company growth necessitated a move to a warehouse in Jasper.

The structured way the business expands has evolved over the years through the interplay of competition and acquisition of other businesses.



One of many trucks used by Meyer Distributing today

In 2004, Meyer Distributing began to purchase and consolidate several other companies. "Luckily we were finished with that process by the time November 2008 hit," Braun explains the company came out of the most recent recession even stronger. "By then we were operating very efficiently. When we looked up in early 2009, we were stronger rather than weaker, which was very different than what a lot of other businesses went through."

The company made it through this trial by fire strong and efficient and has averaged 24 percent growth yearly since 2009.

Braun continues to invest in Jasper. Faced with the decision to expand his warehousing in Dallas — the southwest is a large market for the company — and expanding in Jasper, Braun chose to invest heavily in Jasper.

During the groundbreaking for that expansion Maureen echoed Mike's sentiments about his continued belief in

growing the company in his hometown.

"There were so many times we were unsure the direction to go and how well it would do. But we are so happy to be able to offer jobs and to be able to expand. We chose this community from day one and it's important to us because we wanted to be around family and we love the community. We took risks in that decision and we feel really good with where we have come from. It was not an easy path and there has been a lot of uncertainty and a lot of things that didn't go well. Now we are at a great point," she adds.

Owning a rapidly expanding logistics business in Indiana is a great place to be, according to Braun. Conexus Indiana, an Indiana think tank concentrating on combining advanced manufacturing and logistics (of which Braun is a member), has reported the logistics industry will grow considerably as freight movement across the U.S. is expected to double by 2035.

Indiana's geographic location and abundance of major highways compounds the state's importance to logistics companies. Within a day's drive of Indiana lies 52 percent of the population of the United States and Canada; within two days is 76 percent. This has Indiana poised at a great crossroads for the expansion of logistics-based companies like Meyer Distributing.

Besides location, Braun feels logistics is something relatively immune to the struggle U.S. manufacturers face against foreign competition. "You can't outsource logistics," Braun said. "As the logistics business grows, in my opinion it will be a much bigger driver of commerce in the state than manufacturing."

Braun and his sons, Jason, who is head of IT, and Jeff, chief of operations, agree that the joy of the business is in the competition and growth they

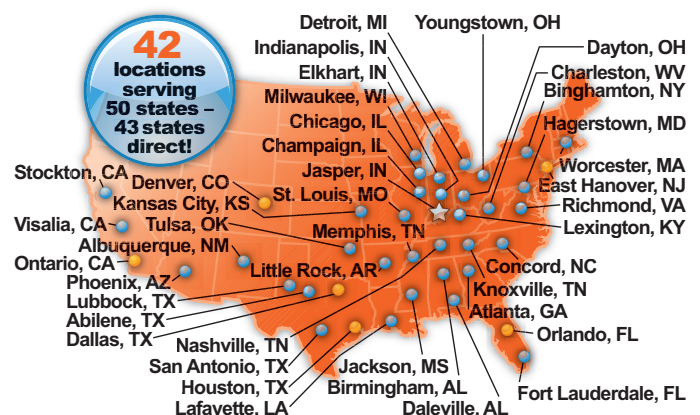


Mike Braun with sons Jeff (L) and Jason (R)

experience daily. Completing the coast-to-coast distribution points in April has them poised to distribute anything. "In ten years we'll be distributing as much of other items or other markets as our own stuff," Braun said. "We like to transport big bulky stuff that has a significant freight factor to it because we have our own fleet. In our skill set it doesn't matter what we distribute, it's more about the system and the process."

The future doesn't worry Braun; he has a few thoughts on expansion and change for companies looking to remain viable. "You need to change before you are forced to change," he said. "You need to look at opportunities that are out of your wheelhouse before you have to. Because when you have to, you hardly ever have the flexibility and opportunity to do it right."

And maybe this is a reflection of the work ethic of Dubois County, but Braun doesn't have an exit strategy from his business. "I'm never going to stop working because I enjoy it too much. Every day is fun and a challenge," he explains. "And through the forestry, I have the perfect escape and it's right out my front door."



★ Corporate Headquarters ● Distribution Center ● Cross Dock

Meyer Distribution Centers throughout the US

Planting for a long term investment

Story by: Matt Crane

Photos by: Eric Tretter

"This is my source of entertainment," Braun says as he walks through the woodland that surrounds his residence.

Like a third grader trapped in school on a warm spring day being released onto the playground, Braun's personality change is invigorating. He becomes almost giddy as he talks about working in the dirt, planting new trees and finding natural treasures throughout his land. "A woodland is just full of things to do," Braun laughs.

Under Braun Family Properties, he has acquired and maintains acres of forestland throughout Martin, Orange, Perry, Crawford and Dubois counties. He's been purchasing this land for his forestry passion since 1987. "My rule is the land has to be within a 60 mile radius," Braun explained. "I started with the 100 acres I bought back in '87 (where he currently lives); that has now expanded to a couple 1000 [acres]."

The land is an investment for Braun. "If you take a woodlot and manage it by



Mike Braun

species and by spacing, it is three times the return you can get on a stock market portfolio with a whole lot less frustration."

He acknowledges the return on his investment in trees and forestry is years and years down the road. He stands by the fact that the payout is experienced through the satisfaction of seeing its growth and development as well as the hard work that is involved.

One experience is the family tree planting ritual that occurs each spring. Mike and his sons plant hundreds of trees on the family's property near Jasper. Conversation is easy going as they move around; Mike picks the site for each tree and meticulously trims back branches from surrounding trees. Jeff and Jason then dig, plant and tamp the saplings, finishing the process with a ribbon to mark the new addition.

Mike returned to build his business and now Jason has returned to continue in the family business and raise his own family. The youngest son, Jeff, lives in Chicago and travels a lot for his job (he

manages new growth for the company) but even he plans on returning to Dubois County to raise his family.

Over Easter weekend this year, Jason and Jeff were joined by Jason's young son as they planted the trees. The three generations moved among the trees — planting, exploring and laughing. Two of those generations know the importance of home and the newest generation will grow to know it as well.



Mike transplanting Virginia Bluebells on his property in Dubois County



Jeff, Jason, Michael and Mike Braun

Mike Braun – Bio

As founder and CEO of Meyer Distributing and owner of Meyer Logistics, Mike Braun has employed thousands of Americans from 65 locations across the United States. Mike's companies serve all 50 states and have locations in 38 states, with Meyer's corporate headquarters located in Jasper, Indiana. Mike Braun has been an entrepreneur and successful business owner for over 30 years and throughout that time has always strived to make his community and state a better place.

Mike graduated from Jasper High School in 1972 where he served as senior class president and lettered in football, basketball and track. Mike went on to graduate from Wabash College where he earned an economics degree, graduated summa cum laude, and served as President of the Student Body. In 1976, Mike married his high school sweetheart Maureen and entered the Harvard Business School where he earned an M.B.A. in 1978.

In May of 1978, while weighing opportunities to work for Wall Street investment banks and other big corporations, Mike decided to take a different path than many of his classmates and moved back to his hometown to start his career. Mike took a position with Aristokraft and in 1979, he co-founded Crystal Farms, Inc. which has expanded over the years to become one of the largest turkey operations in the Midwest. Mike has never regretted his decision to move home and build his national business success from Jasper.

After starting at Meyer Body Company in 1981 and eventually acquiring full ownership, Mike used his foresight and business acumen to transition from the manufacturing sector to the distribution markets, forming Meyer Distributing. Since then, Meyer has grown to be among the industry leaders in auto parts distribution. In 2004, Meyer Distributing began to purchase and consolidate several other companies. Under Mike's leadership, Meyer survived the Great Recession and came out a stronger company, averaging 22 percent growth since 2009.

Mike's recent acquisition of a California distributor has made Meyer a nationwide contender in the third-party logistics business. Throughout the massive expansion of his business Mike has always remained grounded to his roots by anchoring his company in Jasper.

Mike has worked hard to become a nationwide business leader and job creator, but throughout the years he has always looked for ways to give back to his community and serve his fellow Hoosiers. Mike is a dedicated conservationist, avid outdoorsman, and enthusiastic mushroom hunter every spring. Mike manages several tracts of timberland because he believes we should leave the next generation with the same blessings of nature he has enjoyed. Mike has also served as a member of the local School Board and was elected as a State Representative in 2014.

Mike Braun has proven to be a true community leader and successful job creator throughout his career in business. Mike still resides in Jasper and recently celebrated his 40th wedding anniversary with Maureen. Mike and Maureen have four grown children, Jason, Jeff, Ashley and Kristen. Jason, Jeff and Kristen work with him at Meyer. Mike and Maureen are members of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Jasper.