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Luke Messer takes big fundraising lead

Republican from Shelbyville reports raising more than \$400,000 in 2011

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Republican **Luke Messer** is winning the fundraising battle in the race for the GOP nomination for the 6th District seat in the U.S. Congress.

That position is currently held by U.S. Rep. Mike Pence, R-Columbus. But Pence is running for governor this year, leaving his seat congressional seat vacant for the first time in more than a decade.



Luke Messer, a Republican candidate for Congress, speaks in New Castle in January. (C-T File Photo)

The opening has drawn a handful of candidates, and their year-end campaign finance reports for 2011 were due on Tuesday, just months before the May 8 primary election.

According to those reports, contributions to **Messer's** campaign more than doubled those of his main opponents in the GOP primary.

A Shelbyville resident, **Messer** is a former state lawmaker and a former executive director of the Indiana Republican Party.

In addition to out-fundraising his opponents, **Messer** also has more money on hand moving forward in the campaign.

"We are in a great position to win this race, but we must keep building momentum as we enter the final 90 days," **Messer** said in a press release. "It will take a team effort to get this done, and that is happening all across the 6th District. People are tired of business as usual in Washington and are looking for leaders with a record of delivering positive results."

According to his report, **Messer** received \$415,440 in contributions in 2011. Of that, he spent only \$131,276.

Starting 2012, **Messer** reported having \$290,405 on hand.

Political experts consider two of **Messer's** main opponents in the Republican primary race to be Don Bates, a financial adviser from Winchester, and Travis Hankins, a real estate investor from Columbus.

Hankins reported raising \$161,364 in 2011. He spent \$93,313 and had \$68,051 on hand starting 2012, according to his report.

As for Bates, he reported raising \$104,306 in 2011. Bates spent \$76,521 and had \$27,830 on hand to start the year, according to his report.

In a phone interview on Tuesday afternoon, Bates said his campaign wasn't surprised by the finance reports.

"My opponent's campaign is being funded by power brokers in Indianapolis," Bates said of **Messer** and his finance report.

Bates added that he wasn't concerned by the difference in fundraising. He said the reports don't reflect what his campaign is seeing at events in the district.

"We continue to gain momentum," Bates said.

As for other candidates in the 6th District race, Republican John Hatter of Columbus reported raising \$21,410 in 2011. He reportedly spent \$17,672 and had \$3,737 on hand to start 2012.

By Tuesday afternoon, year-end campaign finance reports were not available online for Democrats Brad Bookout and Jim Crone and Republicans Bill Frazier and Joseph S. Van Wye Sr.