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Candidate: 'Better days can be ahead'

Luke Messer visits New Castle over the weekend

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Luke **Messer**, a Republican candidate for U.S. Congress, got some help from two state senators with ties to Henry County this weekend.

State Sen. Doug Eckerty, R-Yorktown, and State Sen. Beverly Gard, R-Greenfield, hosted a meet-and-greet event for **Messer** in New Castle on

Saturday. **Messer**, a Shelby County resident and the former executive director of the Indiana Republican Party, is one of the handful of GOP candidates who hope to replace Mike Pence as 6th District representative in Congress next year.



Luke Messer, a candidate for Congress, speaks in New Castle on Saturday. (C-T photo Craig Mauger)

Pence has decided to run for governor instead of re-election.

Standing in Henry County Republican Party headquarters on Saturday afternoon, Gard, a 24-year veteran of the Indiana Statehouse, said she was delighted when she found out **Messer** was going to run for Congress in 2012.

"There's nobody, in my opinion, who's more qualified than Luke," Gard told a crowd of about 25 people.

In the race for the 6th District nomination, **Messer** will face numerous opponents in the May 8 Republican primary. Among them are former U.S. representative candidate Travis Hankins of Columbus and former U.S. Senate candidate Don Bates of Randolph County.

In the past weeks, Bates, a financial adviser, has touted backing he's received from tea party leaders in the district.

Asked on Saturday if the race for the nomination was shaping up as a competition between Bates' tea party support and **Messer's** more traditional Republican support, **Messer** said in a 19-county district, "Different people have different pockets of support."

"We also have tea party support as well in our campaign," **Messer** said on Saturday. "In a lot of ways, what I believe is very consistent with tea party principles."

Messer said in the end, whoever wins the seat in Congress will have to represent the entire district, and candidates should run a campaign throughout the district, he said.

"So far I think we're the ones doing that," **Messer** added.

During the meet and greet on Saturday, **Messer** spoke for a few minutes and then took questions from the crowd for about 30 minutes.

Messer introduced himself as a Christian and a conservative. He also launched multiple attacks on U.S. President Barack Obama.

"When your neighbor loses his job it's a recession. When you lose your job it's a depression. When Barack Obama loses his job, it's a recovery," **Messer** said with a laugh.

He also said that the nation has "hard choices" to make on budget cuts, including changes for Social Security.

Messer said if the country doesn't change some of its spending habits, the programs "will go away."

"They will go bankrupt. They will go the way of Greece," **Messer** said. "We're going to have to lead on these topics."

Richard Ratcliff, the former chairman of the Henry County Republican Party, asked **Messer** what Republicans could do to beat Obama in the presidential election.

Messer said the party needs a vision that will inspire people.

The candidate also took a question on health care reform. Someone asked what the Republicans should do about Obama's already-approved reform plan.

"We need to repeal Obamacare," **Messer** said.

"It can be done," he added.

In response on Saturday, Todd Hiday, current chairman of the Republican Party here, said he doubts that the plan can be repealed. Hiday said the legislation already has a constituency.

"I think you're exaggerating when you say you can repeal it," Hiday said. In response, **Messer** said he respectfully disagrees.

After about 40 minutes of discussion about budget cuts, health care and education, **Messer** ended on a more positive note on Saturday.

"Better days can be ahead," he told the crowd. "These are not the bleakest days of this country."