INDIANAPOLIS — Women have never held Indiana’s top office, but their streak as the state’s second-in-command appears to be going strong heading into the fall elections.

Indiana is [*one of 18*](https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/levels-office/statewide-elective-executive/history-women-governors) states to never elect a woman as governor, according to the Rutgers Center for American Women in ***Politics***, even as four of the state's past five lieutenant governors have been women. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jennifer McCormick will face an uphill battle against U.S. Sen. Mike Braun, who soundly defeated Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch in this week’s competitive and expensive gubernatorial [*GOP primary*](https://apnews.com/article/nikki-haley-presidential-primary-election-indiana-8b73a23568e054ce33163e2ca23b8fb3).

The day after his [*victory*](https://apnews.com/article/indiana-primary-election-victoria-spartz-mike-braun-df527e7e7a37b158a260813a3c90f7b2), Braun announced state [*Rep. Julie McGuire as his pick for lieutenant governor*](https://apnews.com/article/indiana-mike-braun-running-mate-julie-mcguire-ac5799f77034bc0d6c68b1dfcd8b834e). If party delegates back her, McGuire will become the latest female number two in Indiana.

“Braun is likely to be the next governor, the selection of McGuire kind of continues that legacy," said Laura Merrifield Wilson, a professor of political science at the University of Indianapolis. “Always lieutenant governor — that's a woman. But never a female governor.”

Just two years ago, McGuire [*unseated Republican John Jacob*](https://apnews.com/article/2022-midterm-elections-indiana-indianapolis-gun-politics-374eda77173b4f37ac5ff06443f40252), who [*angered members of his party*](https://apnews.com/article/2022-midterm-elections-indiana-campaigns-presidential-election-2020-877d4d76716da2e862830d9adbd45202) in part by repeatedly pushing a complete ban on abortion. Indiana law only allows abortions in rare and limited circumstances.

Running with a woman on his ticket also gives Braun a “credence of diversity,” Wilson said, as well as partial credibility against possible attacks from McCormick, his Democratic opponent. But it does little to gain him votes in November, Wilson said.

Influential Republicans have started to fall in line behind Braun and his pick, though McGuire faces an unusual lieutenant governor campaign from a conservative pastor from Noblesville ahead of the June 15 GOP convention. Delegates usually go for the gubernatorial nominee’s pick.

A strongly conservative legislator herself, McGuire’s policy record shows a focus on education. Braun, who moved into national ***politics*** in 2018, likely picked McGuire for her recent legislative experience and connections on the floor, Wilson said.

The lieutenant governor holds little constitutional power but is first in the line of succession if the governor cannot perform the duties of the office. The lieutenant governor oversees four state agencies and ceremonially presides over the state Senate.

Kathy Davis was the first woman to hold the post. Democratic Gov. Joe Kernan, who moved from lieutenant governor himself after his predecessor died in office, appointed her in 2003.

Davis was on Kernan’s ticket in 2004 when they lost to Republican Mitch Daniels and his running mate Becky Skillman. Skillman considered a run for governor at the end of Daniels' second term but bowed out citing “minor health concerns” at the time.

“Once I said I’m not doing it, I was so at peace,” Skillman told the [*Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*](https://www.journalgazette.net/local/women-encouraging-others-to-run-for-office/article_9f6b8832-be34-5aa1-a94a-d556344b230f.html) in 2019. “My saddest moment was that I might have let down a lot of women."

Skillman’s exit left a clear path to the gubernatorial nomination for Mike Pence in 2012 alongside Sue Ellspermann. But she resigned before the end of their first term and Pence appointed Eric Holcomb to the position of lieutenant governor. Holcomb succeeded Pence and is completing his second and final term in the governor's office.

Crouch's bid for governor this year is arguably the closest Indiana ever has come to putting a woman in the state's highest office. She was considered the likely runner-up for the entirety of the race thanks to her statewide name recognition and fundraising.

But in a crowded field, Crouch finished 18 points behind Braun, who had similar strengths and the coveted endorsement of former President Donald Trump, who carried the state by 16 points in his 2020 loss to President Joe Biden.

Even as she cast herself as a political outsider, Crouch relied on her decades-long career in public offices including two terms in Holcomb's administration. She rarely invoked her gender in her bid.

Crouch said in a recent interview that she has seen women’s visibility in government fluctuate. She became auditor in 2014 and women held most statewide elected roles for the next eight years.

But she noted there are still meetings where she is the only woman in the room and about a quarter of Indiana's lawmakers are women.

“People would be better served if our government was reflective of our population,” she told The Associated Press before Tuesday's primary.