

# [***Indiana GOP candidates for governor make their pitch to voters at debate in Sen. Braun's absence***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BW3-P6F1-DYMD-64YM-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

INDIANAPOLIS — Five gubernatorial candidates sought to undermine each other’s records during a final debate Tuesday night ahead of Indiana's May 7 GOP primary, but took few shots at the absent U.S. Sen. Mike Braun, who is considered the front-runner of the crowded field.

Braun, who has former President Donald Trump's endorsement, skipped the event and instead attended a vote in Washington on a [*$95 billion foreign aid package*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-ukraine-aid-tiktok-senate-8fe738b17e5c4b2636bc0de11b2620b7/) for U.S. allies including Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan.

On the debate stage, his electoral rivals largely tried to pitch their experience in government as an advantage, not a flaw, and played up popular positions among Republican voters including support for the state’s abortion ban and opposition to federal immigration policies.

Whoever wins will be the favorite in November's general election, as the state reliably elects Republicans. Tuesday’s debate was the last to be televised before the primary vote.

[*Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch*](https://apnews.com/article/2022-midterm-elections-indiana-covid-government-and-politics-91648ba444e3151fb2a601ed58c4a61c) — a familiar name after running twice alongside current Gov. Eric Holcomb, who is barred by term limits from seeking reelection — defended her sweeping proposal to eliminate the state income tax, saying it will be phased in over time and denying she would raise property taxes.

The other candidates called the plan a political gimmick, with former Commerce Secretary [*Brad Chambers*](https://apnews.com/article/indiana-governor-race-brad-chambers-39ecc1e8bdbfe0fcd86cb7d99de82782) saying, “This is a political talking point if there ever was one.”

Crouch ended the most recent fundraising period with $3 million, the most cash on hand of any candidate, but spent only $2.1 million in the first three months of the year. By comparison, Braun has spent over $6 million in 2024.

Chambers’ leadership of the the Indiana Economic Development Corporation put him in opponents’ sights several times during the debate. He defended the quasi-governmental organization’s fostering of a controversial technology hub under construction in central Indiana that proposes to pump water across multiple counties.

Chambers, who has spent $6.7 million on the campaign this year and contributed $8 million to it, was one of the few to take up the opportunity to criticize Braun in his absence, accusing the senator of inaction on the southern border.

[*Eric Doden*](https://apnews.com/article/michael-pence-indiana-business-government-and-politics-6eb6cf0014a2e8a035e89300abd56335), for his part, repeatedly promoted his plan to invest in small towns.

“These are the things we’re going to continue to focus on throughout this campaign, not whether a candidate decides to show up or not,” he told reporters after the debate.

Doden, also a former commerce secretary, spent $5.2 million in the first three months of this year and last reported having about $250,000 of cash on hand.

While the candidates have often attacked Holcomb’s tenure, only a few did so Tuesday. The governor, whose popularity took a hit among conservative voters opposed to restrictions he implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, has not made an endorsement in the primary.

But former Attorney General Curtis Hill attacked Crouch, as Holcomb's lieutenant governor, over mask mandates, saying she deserves blame for backing them too.

Once a rising star in Indiana ***politics***, Hill has struggled to keep up with other contenders’ fundraising. Hill lost the Republican delegation nomination in 2020 following [*allegations that he groped four women*](https://apnews.com/article/indiana-governor-race-curtis-hill-1e20b11ba13e88598d555038617b72ce) in 2018.

Also running is Jamie Reitenour, a political novice who promised Tuesday to appoint the leader of the [*Hamilton County Moms For Liberty*](https://apnews.com/article/moms-for-liberty-carmel-indiana-hamilton-county-437136c699ae3f991d7279836d2998bc) as the state’s secretary of education.

Braun voted no on the foreign aid package, which passed overwhelmingly in the Senate. In a statement earlier in the evening, Braun said he wanted policy on immigration to be included in the package.

“I was looking forward to sharing my vision with Hoosiers at tonight’s debate but Chuck Schumer has called the Senate into session,” the statement said.

His absence at the debate fueled criticism by some opponents that he has put ***politics*** first following a missed vote in the Senate to attend a campaign event.

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