

# Souder, Parra in 3rd

Incumbent and newcomer would offer a clear conservative-liberal choice.

**T**wo Republicans — U.S. Rep. Mark Souder and second-time challenger William Larsen — are running for the nomination of their party this year. There's much we admire in Larsen's dogged focus on what he describes as the looming insolvency of Social Security, but Souder remains a better choice to represent most Republicans in the Third Congressional District.

Souder, who is seeking his sixth term in Congress, began his service in the House as a more conservative candidate. Over time, he's become less fiscally conservative as he's struggled to balance a desire to limit the growth of government with the demands for benefits from constituents and communities in his district. In his fifth House term, the most dramatic example of his drift toward the center on spending was his support for the Medicaid drug benefit, the largest new entitlement program created since the 1960s.



Souder

However, he has remained quite consistently conservative on social issues. A good example of that is his deep involvement in the federal war on drugs, on fronts ranging from Central America to U.S. college campuses.

This combination of bringing home federal spending, while holding a hard line on social issues, probably does represent the interests and desires of core Republican voters in his district.

Larsen is a much more combative and idealistic conservative. He does make more of an effort in this campaign than in 2002 to include other issues, such as defense and federal spending, in his platform. But his distrust of the funding mechanism for Social Security remains the soul of his campaign.

His call to eliminate Social Security is almost certainly futile. A government-funded pension for every elderly American is too thoroughly entrenched in our society. But if his explanations of the frailty of its funding encourages some northeast Indiana residents to save more on their own for retirement, his impact is worthwhile.

**D**emocrats have three choices for a Third District candidate this spring: Maria Parra, Steve Hope and Mark Summers. Parra is by far the best choice among the Democratic candidates.

This is Parra's first run for elected office, and Democrats ought to be encouraged by her campaign. She is intelligent, personable and articulate. She lived and traveled extensively abroad before returning to Fort Wayne, where she grew up, several years ago. And, competing against either Souder or Larsen, she would offer a clearly liberal choice for voters in this district. (That hasn't always been the case. Mike Foster, the Democrat who opposed Souder in 2000, was conservative enough that he later switched party affiliation and became a Republican.)

Parra would concentrate on two national issues: health care and trade reform. She wants to see that every American has access to health care. She hasn't spelled out what mix of private insurance and federal assistance would extend health coverage to the tens of millions of Americans without it. Similarly, she argues that freer trade has not been a panacea for people in poorer countries, and the effect of job losses around here is evident. She says that she would work to see that U.S. trading partners met higher labor and environmental standards.



Parra

Candidate Hope is quite enthusiastic and full of ideas, particularly in the areas of alternative energy and energy conservation. But his enthusiasms sometimes leave him wanting for focus and pull him in contradictory directions, as, for example, when he simultaneously endorses a balanced budget and a massive public-works program, along the lines of the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s.

Summers, also on the Democratic ballot, says he is not campaigning actively.

*By Bob Caylor for the editorial board*