



## **Githens announces candidacy for Monroe County Commissioner**

Jan 14, 2020 - Herald Times

Monroe County Commissioner Penny Githens announced Tuesday that she is seeking to retain her seat.

Githens, a Democrat, currently represents District 3 on the county commissioners. Democrats selected Githens to fill the vacancy after former county commissioner Amanda Barge resigned last spring.

She added while the Monroe Convention Center expansion is getting a lot of attention, the commissioners are currently working on much more. The list includes creating a new crisis diversion center, county parks and trails, increasing treatment options for people with mental health challenges and substance abuse disorders and working with township trustees on fire protection. Githens said this is in addition to the board of commissioners' other responsibilities, such as overseeing county roads, bridges, zoning, the county health department, Youth Services Bureau and more. "It's a big responsibility, but it's also tremendously gratifying to try to make a difference in people's lives," Githens said in a news release.

Githens said over the next four years, the board will tackle space needs. She said as the county remodels or builds new facilities, she is committed to ensuring it is climate neutral.

"That's one of the ways at the local level that we can address climate change, and over the course of several years, it can save money," Githens said. "Plus, we've begun discussions about how to address flooding in certain areas, something that may become an even bigger concern with global warming."

According to the release, Githens has been a long-time advocate for individuals with disabilities and has been an IN\*SOURCE volunteer for 20 years. According to its website, IN\*SOURCE's mission is "to provide parents, families, individuals and service providers in the state of Indiana the information and training necessary to help assure effective educational programs and appropriate

services for individuals with disabilities."

Githens has served on the Bloomington Commission on the Status of Women, the South-Central Indiana Chapter of the Autism Society of America and the Indiana Autism Society. She currently serves on the Steering Committee of the Democratic Women's Caucus.

## **Letters To The Editor:**

### **Letter: Supports Githens for post**

April 27, 2019 - Herald Times

To the editor:

As you may know, there is a vacancy on the Monroe County Board of Commissioners. There will be a Democratic Caucus April 28 to elect a new county commissioner. It is my intention to nominate Penny Githens to fill this vacancy. Penny Githens has experience and talent in many areas that make her particularly qualified to be county commissioner. I have known Penny and her family for a number of years. Each time I speak with Penny, I am impressed with her dedication, organization and thoughtfulness. Penny grew up in Richmond. She was the eldest of four children. She has several advanced degrees and served two years in Peace Corps.

In 1978, Penny married Ed Buffie. Because of professional obligations, they moved to many cities where Penny held various responsible positions, each time learning new skills. In 1992, they returned home to Bloomington. After several years of being an at-home mom, Penny became project director at IU School of Education overseeing a research project. She retired when the project ended.

In 2016 while at IU, Penny ran for Indiana General Assembly. I hope you agree with me that Penny Githens is well qualified to be Monroe County commissioner.

Iris Kiesling  
Bloomington

## **Articles of Interest and Press Releases**

### **Women candidates hope to see more representation in the Statehouse this year**

#### **April 12, 2019 - Indiana Daily Student**

When MeChelle Callen was younger, she would go to her grandma's house after school. She would grab a seat at her kitchen table and talk about everything, from what was going on in her life to what was happening in the country and around the world.

Callen, a Democrat from Avon, Indiana, took that idea with her as she worked the last 30 years in human resources and organizational development, where she saw how important it was for everyone to have a seat at the table. Now, she's bringing it to her campaign for the Indiana House of Representatives District 40.

While she campaigns, she carries around a white chair symbolizing a seat at the table. She has supporters sign it and hopes by November, she can bring a chair filled with signatures to the Statehouse.

"People right now need to know that they are valued, that they are valuable, that what each of us brings to the table as Hoosiers helps to move the state forward," Callen said.

Callen joins 74 other women planning to run for the Indiana General Assembly in the May 8 primary election, according to the Indianapolis Star. That's twice the number that ran last year. Currently, women make up 20 percent of the state legislature, with eight seats in the state senate and 22 seats in the Indiana House of Representatives, according to the Center for American

Women and Politics at Rutgers University. However, they make up about 51 percent of the population.

Callen said she got to a point where she felt the country had become so divisive, and she believed the state could do better. She decided to go all-in and run for office.

“There are only so many letters I can write,” Callen said. “There are only so many phone calls I can make to my representative, only so many petitions, so many protests.”

Penny Githens, a Democrat running for state House District 60, said women tend to be better at reaching across the aisle. She added that women care about different issues than men do, such as child care or the gender pay gap.

“We need to at least start to shift the numbers and shift some of the conversations we’re having in terms of the issues that are important to people at the end,” Githens said.

Amy Swain, a Democrat running for state House District 62, agreed. She said women deal with a lot of issues that men do not. They can offer different insights, connections or contacts with other groups of people.

“They will give voice to issues that they deal with on a regular basis,” Swain said.

Other women running in Monroe County are E. Thomasina Marsili, a Democrat running for Indiana House District 46, and current representative, Peggy Mayfield, R-Martinsville.

Githens said many women who are running in Monroe County work together throughout their campaigns. She said they try to help each other during the process because they want to see more women in office.

“This is how women work together in a different way,” Githens said. “We’d continue to work together well.”

Even if women do not have 51 percent of legislative seats after the election, candidates are optimistic about what the increase in the number of women running could mean.

Swain said seeing more women running could inspire other women to run, whether that’s at the state or the township level.

While her first hope for the November election is that the legislature will become more diverse, Callen agreed serving as a role model is just as important, especially for people who are not career politicians.

Callen said for voters, especially college students, a great way to get involved is volunteering for a campaign. Whether it’s in Bloomington or in their hometown, campaigns are always looking for student activists.

“It’s another way to get their voices heard,” Callen said.

It’s important to remember women have made a lot of strides in other fields, such as law school or medical school enrollment, Githens said. Politics should start to make similar strides.

“I think it’s time,” Githens said.

## **Githens replaces Barge on Monroe County Board of Commissioners**

**April 28, 2019 - Herald Times**

Penny Githens will replace Amanda Barge as the new District 3 representative on the Monroe County Board of Commissioners.

A unanimous vote at a caucus of the Monroe County Democrats, held Sunday afternoon in the auditorium of the Monroe County Public Library, elected Githens to the seat. She was the only nominee.

Githens has lived in Monroe County for 27 years. She has bachelor’s degrees in chemistry and math education from Purdue University and a master’s degree in educational psychology

from Indiana University. She has run twice for the District 60 seat in the Indiana House of Representatives, losing each time to Republican state Rep. Peggy Mayfield.

She told the caucus that she cares about “the quality of life in our community,” and wants to work with local leaders to address high-priority concerns.

For her, those concerns include the health of Lake Monroe, the county’s water source; as well as broadband internet access for rural populations and needs in the county corrections facilities. Possible annexation of county land by the city of Bloomington and the expansion of the Monroe Convention Center “are going to need immediate attention,” she said. She also said she plans to do her research to ensure her decisions as commissioner are data-driven.

“I know I can’t do this on my own. I want you all involved,” Githens said in her closing statement.

“I want you calling me, emailing me, pushing me when it’s important to do that.”

The District 3 seat was left open when former commissioner Barge resigned earlier this month, following allegations that Barge had sexually harassed a county contractor. The Monroe County Democratic Party asked her to step down from the board of commissioners because her “alleged actions are incompatible with public office” and the party’s platform.

Barge complied, and resigned April 8. Not everyone in the party was content with the handling of the episode. In a statement she read after Githens took the oath of office, party member Charlotte Zietlow said the Monroe County Democrats had “rushed to judgment” in their actions regarding Barge.

“(Barge) was forced to resign from her position with unbearable and unrelenting pressure from various people in this county, but without ever presenting a case,” Zietlow said. Several people applauded her.

But Sarah Bauerle countered Zietlow’s words, thanking party chair Jennifer Crossley for her leadership in regards to the decision.

“This is not throwing someone in jail. It is important that our leaders are held to a higher level of integrity,” Bauerle said.

Crossley acknowledged that some people had been upset by the decision over the course of the past few weeks but said the day was about filling the seat, not about rehashing past decisions.

“We all need to know that we should respect each other and our opinions, and move on,” she said.

Another speaker attempted to make a statement but was interrupted by a motion to adjourn, and the meeting broke up quickly.

**Comments:**

Joan Hart

Penny will be an admirable addition to the board and will never do anything but make the county proud. You are lucky to have her. She could do any political post in the county and I'd say the same.