

An early look at GOP governor field



Good morning! It seems like a good time to talk about the Republican primary for Governor here in Iowa.

First things first, I believe primary elections are pivotal. The Des Moines Register does not host its political soapbox at the fair unless it is a general election year or the year preceding an Iowa Caucus. That's a mistake.

Republicans do not often participate in the event, largely because they do not have to since it is a general election. Hosting the event in a primary cycle would likely force more participation from Republicans, which would be a good thing.

But, more than that, primary elections are critical. It's like being the head coach of a team but electing not to attend tryouts. You just agree to coach whatever roster someone somewhere throws together.

I have two simple asks of you during this primary cycle — educate yourself and then participate. I hope you'll listen to what I say and read what I write, but don't rely solely on me — or anyone for that matter. Do your own research and come to your own conclusions. Then vote.

It isn't complicated.

Now, everything I am about to say is what I believe will happen or is happening — not necessarily what I want to happen. Do not confuse the two. And, as always, I could even be wrong.

Three Republicans are running for governor for sure — Rep. Eddie Andrews, Brad Sherman and Adam Steen. Two more have exploratory committees — Congressperson Randy Feenstra and Sen. Mike Bousset. Feenstra is definitely running in my opinion. I'm not as convinced on Bousset.

Many of you are already backing either Andrews or Sherman. I like both Eddie and Brad. Both served well in the legislature. Both are conservative. But if we're being honest, both are significant underdogs.

This is coming from a guy who caucused twice for Rick Santorum — so obviously I'm not afraid to support a losing cause. But the reality of the situation is both Eddie and Brad cannot be on the ballot in June if either one wants even a sniff at the nomination. That's

just the reality of where things are now and where the statewide primary electorate is.

Eddie has been incredibly conservative in the legislature considering the district he represents. He does an outstanding job of connecting with people on an individual level. He has positive energy and goes out of his way for people.

While some people are concerned about his wife's role with the NAACP, I am not. I understand the concern, but I've seen Eddie serve as a legislator for six years. He's a committed conservative. He's stood up to leadership. He's taken tough votes. Also, it isn't like the NAACP connection is something that can be hidden.

I get the concern, but knowing Eddie and having watched him serve in the legislature, I have absolutely zero concern about that aspect of his potential candidacy. And the more people try to use it against him, the more it may push people toward supporting him. Especially people who know Eddie.

Brad Sherman is incredibly knowledgeable as it relates to the Constitution. He is also a conservative. He certainly has the intellect for the position, the question is can he connect with voters and provide the energy necessary to win a statewide campaign? I prefer policy over personality and presentation more than anyone — but politics has changed a lot since a certain guy ran for President in 2016. And it's really tough to win a crowded primary without providing entertainment and energy.

Adam Steen just announced his candidacy earlier this week at an event hosted by a church in Pleasant Hill. He has quite the story. Watching his announcement, which can be seen [here](#), he displayed an ability to articulate an unapologetic conservative message with energy and passion.

He discussed being sued by atheists because he refused to allow their event at the Capitol last December. He discussed refusing to allow an all-ages, family-friendly drag show at the Capitol. He discussed handling protests at the Capitol.

Now, he doesn't have a voting record, but he obviously has put out a fire or two. For many conservative voters, they'll want to know more about Adam before committing to voting for him. But his initial announcement proved he belongs in the race.

Congressperson Feenstra hasn't been out and about like the other candidates. Someone told me they are attempting to "limit the candidate's public exposure." When it was Team Feenstra's turn to work the Republican Party of Iowa booth at the State Fair, I was told Feenstra showed up for 30 minutes, most if not everyone he spoke to was "pre-screened," and then he left one staffer and a cardboard cutout of himself to man the booth the rest of the day.

I believe if the primary were held today, Feenstra would probably win with 60-65 percent of the vote. He is going to have plenty of money to campaign with and he'll have an advantage being from NW Iowa, where a number of GOP primary voters are familiar with him.

But I struggle to see him leading at the top of the ticket in a way that inspires Republicans to get out and vote against Rob Sand. Still, I think Feenstra beats Sand by two or three points if the election were tomorrow.

Many people have asked who I support for governor. I'm not backing anyone right now. We have to see who is still hanging around come March and see how each candidate is being received across the state.

I mean, I have my favorites, but we don't even know for certain that the field is set. I feel fairly confident that there are a few good choices in the race. The question is who will emerge as the one best equipped to compete in the general election and excite the base enough to provide coattails for legislative candidates?

There is a lot to figure out between now and next November, but much of it has to get figured out between now and June.

Republicans allowed Sand to win his re-election in 2022 by basically ditching Todd Halbur's candidacy for Auditor due to a lawsuit. Sand won by 0.3 percent of the vote.

If Republicans don't select the right candidate in the primary, they may help Sand earn another victory in another general election.

PO Box 112

Sioux Center, IA 51250

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