

Broadcaster spices up the race

By HOLLY SPANGLER

LONGTIME Peoria farm broadcaster Colleen Callahan hopes to find herself commuting to our nation's capital soon — and not to report on agriculture.

Callahan is the Democratic candidate for the 18th Congressional District seat, a position formerly occupied by Republican Ray LaHood. The district catches 20 counties in the Peoria area.

Having never run for office before, Callahan says she was approached about this race and felt it was the right time for her.

"The thing about this race — I didn't just dip my toe in the water; I went straight for the high dive!" she says. "But I do know how to swim. I'm just learning different strokes."

While the leap from farm broadcaster to congresswoman may seem larger than most, Callahan believes it will simply give her a bigger platform to do what she's sought to do throughout her career: communicate greater understanding about agriculture.

In an environment where 94% of the 435 congressional representatives have no agricultural background, she hopes to bring one more voice that "not only represents agriculture, but lives and breathes it, and has since the moment I was born."

Learning curve

Campaigns are rarely smooth sailing. Callahan admits that her office jokingly calls themselves the Bad News Bears, in reference to their collective lack of political experience. And though her opponent, Republican Aaron Schock, is quite young, he's already a seasoned politician. He was elected to the Peoria-area school board at 19 and, more recently, to the state Legislature in a tough and expensive campaign.

Schock also recently nabbed an endorsement from the Illinois Farm Bureau. The move surprised some, considering Callahan's considerable agriculture history. And Farm Bureau gave her its highest service award just three



SPEAKING UP: In her race for the U.S. Congress, Colleen Callahan says people in agriculture are thrilled that someone's stepped up to represent them. "And it helps that I'm not a politician; I'm not traditional."

Key Points

- Farm broadcaster Colleen Callahan has entered the congressional race.
- Callahan hopes to represent agricultural interests in her district.
- Illinois Farm Bureau endorsement went to her opponent.

years ago. The bureau's Dennis Vercler explains that endorsement decisions are made at the grassroots level by the Activator Committee comprised of folks from each of the counties Callahan is hoping to represent.

"The personal interviews with 19 farm leaders from the 18th district had a major impact on our decision," says Dennis Hughes, Decatur farmer and chairman of the district's Activator Committee. "Aaron Schock has immediate political experience and was more knowledge-

able about the details of issues. He also has in-depth ideas for implementing programs that are more closely aligned with Farm Bureau's farmer-written policies. Experience and ideas, rather than party labels, determined Aaron Schock's Activator endorsement."

For her part, Callahan believes she's in the race for the right reasons. When she was originally debating a run, she recalls saying to her husband, "If we do this, everything changes." And he responded, "You're right. But do you think you can help people?" Callahan answered that yes, she thought she could, and their decision was made.

Regardless of the outcome of the election, Callahan says she'll have no regrets.

"When you ask older people what they regret, it's not what they did but what they didn't do. If I hadn't done this, I would've always wondered."



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Biofuels conference looks at the next step

By JOSH FLINT

THE television, phone, radio and computer: All of these technologies have come a long way from their first iteration.

Tim Lindsey, Illinois Sustainable Technology Center associate director, says biofuels are no different.

"Early versions of technology are lacking in one way or the other," Lindsey notes. Therefore, the Biofuels and Sustainability Conference aims to explore a wide range of issues facing the industry.

According to Lindsey, a conference co-chairman, the two-day event will look at what the industry is doing right and what it could do better.

"Biofuels has been getting a lot of negative press lately," Lindsey adds. "They are looking at specific components without looking at the whole system." For example, he mentions corn as the primary feedstock and water consumption as two favorites.

The conference will be held Oct. 21-22 at the I Hotel and Conference Center in Champaign. Lindsey says the purpose is

to examine the entire biofuels industry and find places for improved sustainability. Plus, they hope to flush out areas where biofuels is doing well.

The registration fee is \$250, which includes program materials, two lunches and receptions. For more information, visit www.istc.illinois.edu/BiofuelsConference. The Web site also features a complete agenda and speaker slate.

After the conference, organizers will take the main discussion points to state delegates on Nov. 13. Lindsey hopes legislators will consider the information when voting on future biofuels issues.

Want to go?

- Oct. 21-22
- \$250 registration
- 1 Hotel in Champaign