

# Ryan, Knilans should plan appearances

Sure, Congressman Paul Ryan of Janesville is busy campaigning for vice president. Yet he's also running for re-election to Congress, and he should carve time to debate his 1st District opponent, Rob Zerban.

Likewise, state Rep. Joe Knilans, seeking re-election in the 44th Assembly District, should have honored his commitment to appear at Tuesday's forum.

If either case is some Republican strategy designed to keep the opponent fighting an uphill battle, it's a disservice to constituents.

Let's take them one at a time.

Ryan has served in Congress for 14 years. Campaign manager Kevin Seifert reasons that constituents know Ryan well. Ryan, however, has been running 1st District campaign commercials. If he found time to create those, he arguably could find time for a debate.

No, Joe Biden didn't debate his congressional challenger in 2008, but Ryan shouldn't use that as an excuse. Yes, Ryan's life has been frantic since Mitt Romney tapped him for the GOP ticket. Ryan's family remains in Janesville, and he has made it home repeatedly. He could plan a debate around one such stop.

Zerban on Wednesday delivered to Ryan's Janesville office petitions with more than 50,000 signatures requesting a debate. No doubt, most signers are Democrats, and most aren't state residents. Yet leaders of five local organizations also sent a letter to Ryan requesting a debate. Among them are United Auto Workers Local 95 in Janesville and Common Cause in Wisconsin, a nonpartisan group that promotes good government.

A debate between Ryan and Zerban, a small-business man and former Kenosha County Board member, would promote good, open government.

Romney is trailing in polls. Should voters re-elect President Obama, Ryan hopes voters help him retain his seat in Congress. Though Zerban might be the best congressional foe Ryan has faced since first being elected, perhaps Ryan looks at polls suggesting he's leading and figures why take the time? Yet supporters helped launch Ryan onto this national stage; he owes it to them now to show he hasn't forgotten them and to explain how he would continue to serve the 1st District's needs should his bid with Romney fail.

The situation with Knilans should trouble voters even more. He agreed to take part Aug. 28 but backed out just days before Tuesday's forum that was to be sponsored by the Janesville League of Women Voters, Forward Janesville and JATV.

Voters could understand if a family emergency arose. But that wasn't the case. Knilans didn't respond to a message that The Gazette left on his cellphone; instead, campaign manager Tyler Wenzlaff called and said only a "campaign-related event" forced Knilans to withdraw. Wenzlaff refused to specify what event. Asked where it was, he said he'd have to check Knilans' schedule and call back. He never did.

Sure, Knilans has four other head-to-head meetings with Democratic challenger Deb Kolste, but all have much smaller profiles. If voters are left to wonder whether Knilans just ducked this appearance, the Republican has only himself to blame.

Wenzlaff said Knilans would like to reschedule. Let's see it.

Nov. 6 is fast approaching, and without quick action to schedule these appearances, Ryan and Knilans are foregoing chances to win over undecided voters.