



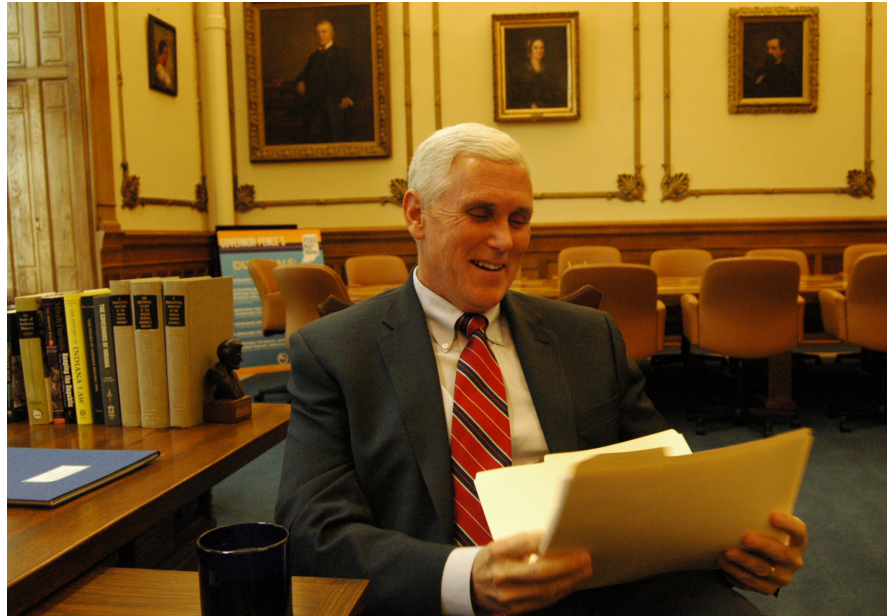
The ups, downs of Gov. Pence's legacy

Governor's economic numbers were robust, but social issues tripped him up

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – In politics, first and last impressions are impactful. Through that prism we view the four-year term of Gov. Mike Pence, who arrived on the Hoosier political scene 29 years ago as an aggressive and ambitious partisan. He left in a similar mode, achieving a lifelong dream to serve in the White House. But his departure essentially occurred in July. While he accepted a paycheck from Indiana taxpayers through December, his national ambitions left a festering stew in his wake back home.

Unlike undefeated Govs. Doc Bowen, Robert Orr, Frank O'Bannon and Mitch Daniels, his political career began with two congressional losses. He transformed himself from an economic conservative to a social warrior, augmented by his statewide radio and TV shows of the 1990s, positioning himself for a 12-year congressional career that com-



Gov. Mike Pence during an interview with Howey Politics Indiana in 2014. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

menced in 2000 in a district tailored for a Republican. His governorship stands out as the only one to attain office with less than 50% of the vote in more than half a

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Pence in Daniels' shadow

By **JOSHUA CLAYBOURN**

EVANSVILLE – I remember the moment when Mike Pence's challenge crystallized for me. In 2012, as he campaigned to succeed Mitch Daniels as governor, Pence traveled the state setting up listening sessions with small business owners, and his campaign team asked me to set one up in Evansville.



He opened the discussion with an admission that Daniels already addressed most of the low-hanging fruit to improve Indiana's business environment, but he asked what he could do to further improve state government. As folks around the table offered comments, everyone had plenty of constructive



“This Russian connection nonsense is merely an attempt to cover-up the many mistakes made by Hillary Clinton's campaign.”

- President Trump reacting to story his campaign had constant contact with Russians



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(and harsh) criticism for the national government, but they each struggled to identify concerns with Indiana. In short, thanks to the preceding eight years of Mitch Daniels' leadership, Indiana was working well – really well, in fact – and Pence would have to work hard to get out from beneath his shadow.

Pence's place in history as governor, literally and figuratively, will forever be viewed next to Mitch Daniels. The Daniels tenure was defined by grand, measurable vision. He knew what he wanted and pushed and pulled the legislature to get there. Daniels embodied the role of the executive. Pence, by contrast, spent his entire political career as a legislator in Washington without much of a splash. During his 12 years in the House, he introduced 90 pieces of legislation, an average of about 15 pieces per session, and none became law.

Unyoked by the forceful drive of Daniels and viewing Pence as one of their equals, Indiana House Speaker Brian Bosma and Senate President David Long exerted more independence. As a result, the Indiana legislature often treated Pence's agenda as no more important than their own.

Pence seemed willing to submit to a more assertive state legislature. As he unveiled his 2014 agenda with few details, Pence told Howey Politics, "I want to give legislators the broadest possible range to develop how they think this might work best giving consideration to all of the interests involved. Articulate a vision that we think reflects the priorities of the people of Indiana. Articulate policies that we believe will advance their priorities. And suggest ways those policies can be formulated, but to work in a collaborative way with members of the General Assembly and

the leadership of both chambers."

It was an attitude Pence took with most of his agenda each year. One could conclude he approached his tenure with collaboration, modesty, and humility. Yet a less charitable assessment would view it as reactionary and timid.

Legislative leaders certainly felt they could push back at Pence. In 2013, he proposed a dramatic 10%



Gov. Mike Pence poses for a selfie with former Gov. Mitch Daniels on inauguration day in January 2013.

income tax cut. But Bosma and Long, along with Senate Appropriations Chairman Luke Kenley and Ways and Means Chairman Tim Brown, quickly reshaped it to their own liking as a multi-year phased-in 5% reduction. Pence once again submitted it to them, telling WISH-TV, "I say without hesitation I think the final product was better than what I first proposed."

Occasionally his unwillingness or inability to control the legislature brought unwanted controversy. Although Pence was certainly a social conservative who always asserted he was a "Christian, conservative, and Republican, in that order," he actually wanted to focus more on jobs and schools.

Daniels kept the legislature focused on his agenda by ensuring that controversial, unwanted bills never made it out of committee or never got introduced in the first place. With Pence, however, socially conservative legislators felt far more liberty

to push controversial legislation restricting abortions and, most famously, promoting religious freedom in the form of RFRA. Pence never sought out these controversies, nor did he necessarily encourage their passage. But he also did little to stop them from brewing or moving forward.

Pence wanted a Hoosier legacy of accomplishments with the economy, budget, and education, and on those fronts he accomplished plenty. He began the process of a balanced budget amendment to the state's constitution, continued to build on the state's record surplus, and saw all of the major economic metrics improve or remain steady.

On education, Pence supported sizable reforms in funding to pre-schools, voucher programs, and charter schools. In short, he sought and achieved more school choice, one of his primary goals. Nevertheless, to the extent his reelection as governor was in jeopardy, some of

it was due to frequent clashes with Supt. Glenda Ritz and public school supporters over school oversight and standardized testing.

As Indiana's governor, Mike Pence signed 687 bills into law. Pence no doubt left his mark on Indiana, but he could never quite escape the Daniels shadow. His tenure will likely be remembered more for the bookends on either side of it, a long shadow cast by his predecessor Mitch Daniels and a whirlwind presidential campaign plucking Pence up as vice president before he could run again.

In an odd twist of fate, Mike Pence now has an easier time making an impact on national policy than he did on his own Hoosier state. His political aspirations and focus began in Washington, D.C., and they will now in all likelihood keep him there. ❖

Claybourn is a Republican attorney from Evansville.

Pence legacy, from page 1

century, for its three-and-a-half-year duration, though the record books will put it at a full four years, and the fact that he withdrew from a second nomination after Donald Trump nominated him for the vice presidency.

The Pence legacy will be bookended by two key cornerstones: The economy thrived during his tenure, with the state reaching record employment while the jobless rate declined by more than 4%. But his own reelection prospects were compromised by social issues he didn't seek; unlike strong governors of the past, he failed to stop some of the most divisive issues before reaching his threshold. On others, such as a constitutional marriage amendment, he floated above the fray, trying to straddle a progressive Hoosier corporate community while not alienating his base.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act would never have seen the light of day in the administration of his predecessor, Gov. Daniels. It would have been stopped short of a committee hearing in the General Assembly, particularly as he weighed a presidential race or a potentially tough reelection rematch. Gov. Pence and his team didn't establish the command and control structure of strong governors like Daniels, Orr and Doc Bowen. Nor did he and his team earn the fear of legislators or the respect of state bureaucracy.

And the final impressions of Gov. Pence will enter the playbook for future governors. Following the 2016 General Assembly session, Pence essentially checked out as a full-time governor. There were no media avails following sine die. A heroin epidemic raged across the state with hundreds of overdoses and Pence was silent. More than 1,000 East Chicago Hoosiers were uprooted from their

homes due to a lead contamination crisis, and the Pence administration mustered \$100,000, but no visit or empathy. He did, however, visit Republican Greentown, where lead was found in the town's pipes. The I-69 Section 5 road project stalled, and Pence was silent.

He made a significant miscalculation when he underestimated Donald Trump's powerful rhetoric that held a major swath of the Republican Party in a persistent trance. He endorsed Sen. Ted Cruz, only to watch Trump maul him in the Republican primary. His endorsement of Cruz



was so mealy mouthed that Trump poked fun at him. But when dozens of other Republicans passed on the veepstakes, Pence anted up. He was locked in a dead heat with Democrat John Gregg, his favorables in the WTHR/Howey Politics Indiana poll were upside down, and the four polls we conducted in 2016 revealed Pence as one of the most polarizing political figures in modern Indiana history.

In October, his fav/unfavs stood at a tepid



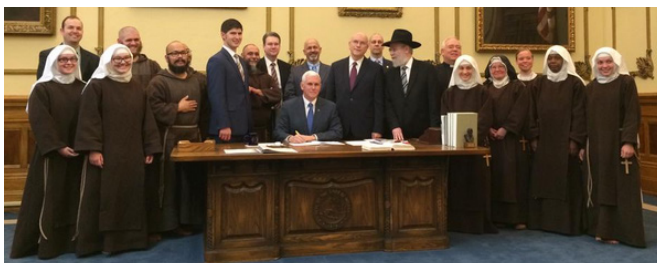
Gov. Pence talks with Bishop Tobin after he announced his Syrian refugee ban. At right, he enters the Indiana State Library during the RFRA controversy. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

47/45%, but his stature increased to 50/44% in November as he spent the last few weeks standing up for Trump’s character. In the April WTHR/Howey Politics Poll – the last one conducted with Pence poised for the gubernatorial nomination – Pence was upside down with Hoosier voters. His approval standing at 44% with 41% disapproving, terrible numbers for an incumbent governor. With female voters, Pence trailed Gregg 52-41%, and independent women voters 54-40, following a trend from September 2012 when he led Gregg among women by 13% in a Howey DePauw Poll, before losing the gender in the general election by 5%. This comes after Pence dropped Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann from the ticket, replacing her with Lt. Gov. Eric Holcomb.

A stepping stone dogged by controversy

The worst-kept secret was that the Pence governorship was designed to burnish his national resume, giving him four years of “executive experience.”

But the RFRA issue of March 2015 seemed to derail his national ambitions. Signing the legislation in what is now known as the “last supper photo,” leaked out from a private signing ceremony, Gov. Pence found himself in a national and state social media firestorm. Pence failed to effectively defend the law. “Some of the media coverage has been shameful and reckless,” Pence said. “This new law in Indiana, the same one that 30 other states have, does not discriminate against anyone.”



Pence insisted that the RFRA was only a necessary legal response to the Supreme Court Hobby Lobby case from the year before. After the firestorm built, the law was

not created to be “a license to discriminate or right to deny services to gays, lesbians or anyone else in this state,” he said. “And it certainly wasn’t my intent. But I can appreciate that that’s become the perception.”

While Gov. Pence had aimed his economic development establishment at luring high tech industries, many of them recruit gay employees. It exposed the fissures in the Indiana Republican Party, between the economic strand and Pence’s social conservatives. Under intense pressure from the NCAA, corporate Indiana and Republican legislative leaders, Pence acquiesced to a “fix,” rolling back some of the RFRA provisions. “We will fix this and we will move forward. That’s what Hoosiers do,” he declared.

While the corporate community, Democrats and the LGBT community called for an expansion of civil rights to cover sexual orientation, Pence refused to join the discussion and did not push for legislation. “I think that’s a separate issue,” Pence said. “It’s not my position; I’m not advocating for it.”

When Howey Politics Indiana polled his standing in late April 2015, Pence’s favorable/unfavorables stood at 35/38%, his job approval fell to 45% approve and 46% disapprove (down from 60% earlier in the year), and he found himself in close head-to-heads with three potential Democratic gubernatorial challengers, polling well below 50%.

As 2015 closed, Pence was presiding over an economy with a 4.4% jobless rate while asphalt was pouring into roadbeds at a furious pace. But Pence found himself confronted by Catholic Charities as he attempted to stop the resettlement of a Syrian refugee family that had been carefully vetted over the previous 18 months. It was Pence’s reaction to the Paris ISIS terror attack, where one of the perpetrators held a fake Syrian passport. He joined some 25 Republican governors in the immediate hours after the attack, calling

for a Syrian refugee ban. It put Pence on a collision with Bishop Joseph Tobin.

"I listened to the governor's concerns regarding security and prayerfully considered his request that we defer from welcoming them until Congress had approved new legislation regarding immigrants and refugees," Tobin said in a statement. "I informed the governor prior to the family's arrival that I had asked the staff of Catholic Charities to receive this husband, wife and their two small children as planned."

This was followed by a perplexing press conference where Pence defended his "ban" that in reality never had any teeth, no statutory origin or judicial precedent. The facts about this Syrian family and the one that detoured to Connecticut just after he announced his "ban" had left Syria well before ISIS formed and metastasized, and had gone through a two-year vetting process. It came as the New York Times reported that of the 780,000 refugees legally entering the U.S. since Sept. 11, 2001, none of them had been caught or even linked to a domestic terror attack. When reporters pressed him, Pence said his administration wouldn't deny state benefits to resettled refugees. So the ban amounted to political theater.

When it was struck down by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, Judge Richard Posner issued a scathing rebuke. "The governor of Indiana believes, though without evidence, that some of these persons were sent to Syria by ISIS to engage in terrorism and now wish to infiltrate the United States in order to commit terrorist acts here," Posner wrote. "No evidence of this belief has been presented, however; it is nightmare speculation."

When Trump proposed a complete ban on Muslims entering the country, Pence called it "offensive and unconstitutional." It would become another issue where once on the national stage, Pence would morph.

Medicaid and HIP 2.0

As a presidential campaign loomed, Pence had his greatest policy achievement in the winter of 2015 when he convinced the Centers for Medicaid/Medicare Services to grant his version of Medicaid expansion. It was something he had spent more than a year lobbying President Obama and HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell for, including once on the tarmac of the Evansville airport with the president.

"We've got to be about solutions that are state-



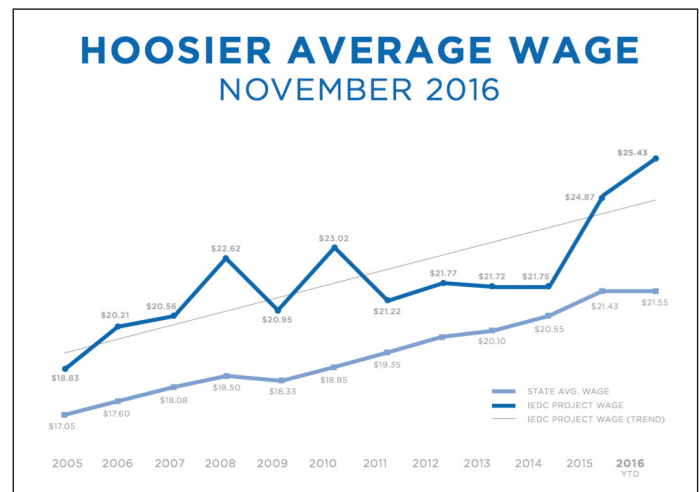
Gov. Pence unveils his HIP 2.0 in the winter of 2015 after lobbying President Obama on the tarmac of the Evansville Airport in late 2014. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

based," Pence said. HIP 2.0 was to be his Exhibit A. "I'm urging Congressional leaders and Republican governors to look to our reforms," Pence continued. "It will be an open question. I believe what Congress should do is give the states an alternative to the state exchanges. Take the tax credits and create more choices in the market place. It's a flexibility thing."

Since CMS approved the Pence waiver in 2015, enrollment has gone from 193,573 in 2015 to 359,612 in 2016 and a projected 457,739 in fiscal year 2020. It lowered emergency room use by 7%, prompted 60% of its recipients to receive preventive care, while 96% are satisfied with their coverage and 93% make the \$8 to \$25 monthly contributions on time, and 98% would enroll again. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1,489,805 people in Indiana are covered by Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program, including

782,960 children and 133,444 seniors and people with disabilities covered by both Medicaid and Medicare. An estimated 224,000 Hoosiers have health insurance today because Indiana expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act.

Asked in 2015 if HIP 2.0 was his top policy achievement to date, Pence (who has not responded to most interview requests from Howey Politics Indiana and most Indiana media outlets in 2016 and 2017) puts it in the context of his administration's 2012 campaign "Roadmap" which promised two planks on jobs and investment, two on education, one on workforce development and the final, "improving the health and well-being of Hoosiers."



"When I look at what we've done, I would say it's a significant advancement for the health and wellbeing of Hoosiers," Pence explained.

Pence and the economy

Since the 1980s when Gov. Robert Orr made a concerted effort to open up the Pacific Rim to investment, one of the most critical measuring sticks for an Indiana governor is job creation, morphing from an early 20th Century model of education, roads and public safety. On this front, Pence can claim legitimate success. In four years, the Indiana Economic Development Corporation counted \$15.49 billion worth of investments in the state. In July 2015, Indiana claimed its employment highwater mark with 2.61 million Hoosiers in the workforce. Between 2012 and 2014, according to the IEDC, more than 125 foreign companies announced plans to grow or locate in Indiana, pledging to invest \$4.6 billion in Indiana and create 13,300 new jobs.

Commerce Secretary Victor Smith observed, "Gov. Pence started on day one by freezing new burdensome regulations, which increase the cost of doing business and stifle job creation. During his first legislative session, he led the charge for the largest tax cut in Indiana history and followed that up in 2014 with a new tax cut giving Indiana one of the lowest corporate tax rates in the country.

"In 2015, Gov. Pence directed Indiana's early payout of our federal unemployment insurance loan, saving Hoosier businesses an additional \$327 million in taxes. Plus, throughout his time in office, Gov. Pence worked to invest more than \$800 million in new money for Indiana roads and bridges, securing Indiana's status as the Crossroads of America."

Smith added, "More Hoosiers are working now than ever before in Indiana's 200-year history and our



economy is the envy of the nation. Our unemployment rate has dropped from 8.4% to 4.2% and stands at its lowest point in 15 years. Our state has added 168,000 more Hoosier jobs since Gov. Pence took office."

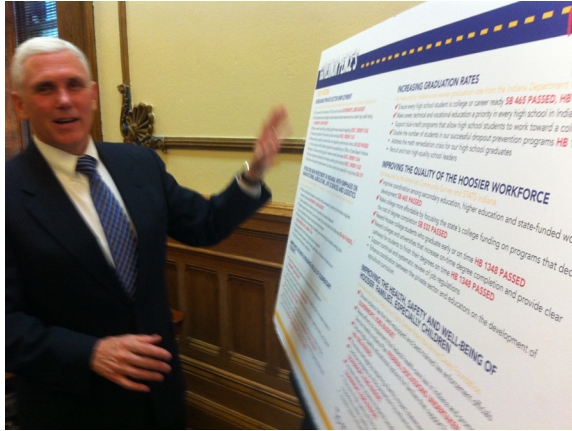
According to the IEDC, the state wage average increased from \$17.05 an hour in 2005 to \$20.10 in 2013, and \$21.55 in 2016. John Thompson, chairman and CEO of Thompson Distribution Company and member of the IEDC Board of Directors, observed that the average wage of IEDC projects was \$25.43/hour, which is 20% higher than the state's average wage of \$21.21/hour. "We are seeing growth in new industries like aviation and aerospace, life sciences and technology that traditionally offer high-skilled, high-wage jobs, while jobs committed to the IEDC continue to boast wages above the state average," Thompson said.

Other economic telltales include the Regional Cities Initiative that spread \$120 million worth of projects funded by a tax amnesty program to three regions of the state. "Through the Regional Cities Initiative, Gov. Pence powered Indiana communities a financial incentive to collaborate as regions to invest in quality-of-place projects using public-private partnerships, transforming communities into places where people are excited to live, work and play," Smith said. "In turn, this will attract and retain the talent companies need to continue to grow. Today, the Regional Cities Initiative is wildly popular and a major success."

Even with the success of that program, Pence found himself sideways with legislative GOP leaders when he expanded it from two to three \$40 million regions. As we've often witnessed during the Pence governorship, decisions were made through a strictly political prism. That would be \$40 million of potential 2016 ribbon cuttings during a tough reelection battle.

On the cusp of his vice presidential nomination in

June 2016, Pence unveiled a \$1 billion investment proposal for the next decade to advance innovation and entrepreneurship in Indiana. "As a state, we have worked diligently to establish a pro-growth business climate in Indiana and our efforts are being recognized across the nation," Pence said at the 2016 Innovation Showcase in Indianapolis at Dallara in Speedway. "We cut costs, lowered taxes and reduced regulations to allow job creators to invest in what matters most, in their businesses and in their employees. Indiana is ranked first in the Midwest for business and first in the nation for small business regulations."



Pence and education

Another hallmark of Pence's term was his stance on education. He would claim record investment for education in his two biennial budgets. But he sparred constantly with Democrat Supt. Glenda Ritz, formed and then scrapped a year later a parallel agency (Center for Education and Career Innovation) to the Indiana Department of Education. The result, as described in the press was a process "so convoluted it seems impossible to know who's responsible for what and whom to hold accountable for student outcomes."

"With years of forward-thinking leadership in entrepreneurship and startup creation, Indiana is already recognized as a startup-friendly state," said Dan Hasler, president and chief entrepreneurial officer for the Purdue Research Foundation.

"These welcomed new initiatives will propel Indiana to the next level of economic development and job creation. Indiana has the potential for so much more," Hasler said.

After the demise of CECI, he pushed for the State Board of Education to appoint a chair, instead of the elected superintendent. "It's time to take politics out of education in Indiana, or at least out of the State Board of Education and allow that body to get back to the business of focusing on implementing the policies that the people of Indiana have embraced and enacted, and seeing them faithfully through to their completion," he said in a statement that many saw as overtly political.

The fighting became so intense that Speaker Brian Bosma and Senate President David Long threatened to intervene. While his successor, Gov. Eric Holcomb, has

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moved to make the superintendent an appointed position, Pence refused to take that step.

In 2014, Pence became the first governor in the nation to rescind Common Core, replacing it with what his education opponents and Chamber President Kevin Brinegar would call "Common Core Lite." Pence explained, "I believe when we reach the end of this process there are going to be many other states around the country that will take a hard look at the way Indiana has taken a step back, designed our own standards, and done it in a way where we drew on educators, we drew on citizens and parents, and developed standards that meet the needs of our people." The state had spent more than \$120 million on the Common Core standards, and no one could put a price tag on the amount of money the state has spent on student assessment programs since 2011, though some believe it could be as high as \$250 million.

The Common Core rescinding became one of his key talking points as he prepared for a 2016 presidential run.

Pence's other key policy legacy was the expansion of vouchers and charter schools. By the time he left office, more than 30,000 students were using state vouchers. Pence also pushed the legislature to remove a \$4,800-per-year cap on tuition benefits for children in elementary and middle school.

Beyond his sparring with Supt. Ritz, the other big controversy was Pence's rejection of \$80 million in federal pre-K funds in 2015, a move that confounded everyone from Ritz to legislative Republican leaders. Pence's rationale was that the state didn't want to be rushed into a program and the federal funds would have too many "strings attached."

But Gov. Pence in 2014 pushed a \$15 million program that gave scholarships of up to \$6,800 for children in low-income families in five urban counties to attend pre-school programs. It initially included about 2,500 pupils. "It's safe to say that had it not been for his strong leadership, we wouldn't have had the pilot preschool program



Gov. Pence chats with Supt. Glenda Ritz the day before he blindsided her with the CECL announcement.



we have now," David Harris, the founder of the Mind Trust, told the New York Times.

Pence also signed legislation that scrapped the ISTEP testing program, but left office with no credible replacement, leaving the Indiana General Assembly to grapple fitfully with what comes next.

Pence and abortion

Throughout his political career, Pence has been a tireless advocate for right-to-life issues. After signing a half dozen or so anti-abortion bills, Pence can take credit for helping to lower the state's abortion rate. It was already in sharp decline during the Daniels administration, where abortions declined from 10,686 in 2005 to 8,808 in 2012. During the Pence era, abortions declined further, from 8,179 in 2013, to 8,118 in 2014 and 7,957 in 2015.

Pence stoked controversy in 2016 when he signed House Enrolled Act 1337, which precludes abortions for the reason of fetal abnormalities. "Throughout my public career, I have stood for the sanctity of life. HEA1337 is a comprehensive pro-life measure that affirms the value of all human life, which is why I signed it into law today," Pence said. "I believe that a society can be judged by how it deals with its most vulnerable – the aged, the infirm, the disabled and the unborn. HEA1337 will ensure the dignified final treatment of the unborn and prohibits abortions that are based only on the unborn child's sex, race, color, national origin, ancestry, or disability, including Down syndrome."

Betty Cockrum, who heads Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky, condemned the bill. "It is clear the governor is more comfortable practicing medicine without a license than behaving as a responsible lawyer, as he picks and chooses which constitutional rights are appropriate."

Epilogue

From Pence's career perspective, his governorship was a political success. He's vice president of the United States. Both he and President Trump heralded his Indiana record numerous times over the past nine months. With the Trump presidency commencing in chaotic fashion, there is widespread speculation that Pence might have a good chance of becoming the 46th president within the next four years.

During his governorship, it seemed that most major initiatives were developed and executed through the prism of a future presidential bid. In 2013, it was an income tax cut that Bosma and Long pared back, fearing they would be left holding the bag. In 2014, it was rescinding Common Core, which became a staple in his national speeches. In 2015, RFRA was to be his calling card for social conservatives looking for someone to back in the 2016 presidential primaries. That one blew up in his face.

From a Hoosier perspective, the economy grew under Pence, but so did widespread frustration that vast

segments of the population and the Republican constituency were being left behind in the American dream. Donald Trump exploited that issue, even if it collided with the legacy Pence sought to portray.

Pence's missteps on social issues and poor staff work placed him in a more tenuous political position than he should have been.

Pence always seemed tormented about his social advocacy and the political realities. He evaded interview requests from Howey Politics Indiana during his 2012 gubernatorial campaign, then during a visit to our office three days before his inauguration in January 2013, pled for a "do over." By 2016, he was in the same mode, refusing to reconcile his rhetoric and legacy with topical questioning.

Yet, travel with Gov. Pence several times over the past four years found him easily mixing and bantering with his constituents. I remember asking Indiana Republican Chairman Jeff Cardwell after an October 2014 swing through Southern Indiana why the governor's media op-



Gov. Mike Pence greets diners in Madison in October 2014. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

eration didn't allow more such coverage. "Let Pence be Pence," I said.

There was no good answer to that, other than an inherent paranoia within the tight Pence inner circle that the media was out to get him, with it all wrapped in a veneer where he claimed to revere press freedoms (including a bill he vetoed in the Indiana General Assembly last spring that was overridden this week). Pence was reluctant to allow himself to be held accountable for his actions.

This is a political figure that tightly grasped a small set of talking points and was reluctant to expose himself to any effort to pierce that facade. When an interview was granted, the answers

were long, windy and repetitive. There would be fewer questions.

Thus, Gov. Pence stands in a unique corner of Hoosier political history. He survived his governorship, when it could have been a profound source of momentum. He abandoned a reelection bid by taking one of the greatest political risks in modern American history.

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Grateful Pence was governor

By MARK SOUDER

FORT WAYNE – Earlier this week, I went to the license bureau. Back when mastodons roamed our state, (before Mitch Daniels became governor) it was a miserable experience. Generally, now I do it on-line and even on a crowded Tuesday morning it is about like a grocery store on a Saturday.



the wall.

When Mitch took over the state government with radical plans to run it like a business, he quickly became "Ditch Mitch." His popularity dropped to incredibly low levels. The Democrats perceived a bright political future that could recapture Indiana, going back to making it great again. Gov. Daniels brought in people not trained to go slow. They thought "tactful" meant taking people who resisted change and using tacks to pin them on

After suffering through nasty publicity which impacted his strategy somewhere between zero and zero percent, he emerged after eight years as "Saint Mitch." When Mike Pence became governor, he was in a difficult position.

Because Daniels transformed Indiana government did not mean that the unionized teachers and labor movement didn't have the long knives out looking for any sign of Republican weakness. In fact, analysis of Gov. Pence's term inevitably mentions his war on public education. It's as though Dr. Tony Bennett was his creation, and the backlash that elected an accidental superintendent of education was a Pence-caused event.

Regardless of how you view the choice issue, it is irresponsible to imply that it was solely something conceived by Pence. Both men deserve credit. They felt, I believe justly, that our education system needed to be challenged.

And then there's the "Jesus thing." Gov. Mike Pence may never receive a fair review of his time as Indiana governor. So many in the media were obsessed over the religious liberty debate that it has colored all coverage of him. It was a media-generated blip in our state's history. The manufactured crisis was presented as a catastrophic event, which it was not. The voters of Indiana obviously sent Republicans to victory last fall by wide

margins.

Then, to top it off, Mike Pence became the liberal Satan's vice president. This has led to some confusion in media coverage: Is Pence the only thing that stands between America and destruction, or is he part of the effort to ruin us? Or maybe just useful window dressing for the real president, Steve Bannon?

Mike Pence actually has a consistent ideological, legislative, and executive record. But, like the president, our vice president is also a salesman. On radio and other forms of messaging before he became a congressman, he sold conservative ideas. In Congress, he was the top (in position and in skill) Republican messenger in the House.

This led to a common false statement that is treated as a "fact" when it was not: Everything Mike does is part of his goal to become president someday. When he'd say that he was open to the opportunities that God gave him, it has been treated as if it was a deliberate deception. The fact is that Mike believes it as a core foundational fact. Obviously, based upon one's talents and experiences, you can be better prepared when such an opportunity comes or not be prepared, but you enjoy and accept where you are as the possible end position.

I, for example, approached Mike about running for president in 2008. His reasoning as to why he was not going to was sound. In other words, he obviously was thinking about it but not obsessed. Sound reasoning seldom slows down the over-ambitious who convince themselves that they have a chance. Mike saw being governor of Indiana as one of the highest honors a Hoosier could possibly achieve. If he could become president, or vice president, so be it. The obsession didn't drive him.



Even more difficult is to separate when a person's desire to win a position is the primary motivator versus the desire to serve or advocate for a particular point of view. Any politician who denies this tension is, quite frankly, lying.

In politics, it is fairly easy to identify those who seek fame versus those who have a cause. Do they make hard decisions that could put their careers at risk? A second major way is this: Do they explain their positions within the framework of a consistent belief system or does the system alter to fit political opportunities?

I knew Vice President Pence before he was a successful politician. His views have not varied much. He never trimmed his sails to adjust to winds from different directions. He didn't bail out on his views on moral issues, on how a government should work, the importance of balanced budgets, or issues of safety.

As an executive – whether you agree with him or not – he took years of advocating more purist conservative ideas and his legislative history of general conservative

principle advocacy and then applied his ideas to divisive issues including education and health care. His education views certainly represent a conservative approach. His adaptation of health care within a flawed Obamacare system is likely to become a national model.

I expect that commentators who opposed him for election in the first place will continue to remain opposed to him. I expect that others who hoped he'd actually become an ambitious politician seeking higher office by trimming his sails to the prevailing winds will find his term as governor lacking.

However, like the majority of Hoosier voters, I found that Mike Pence, like Mitch Daniels, took risks in order to advance his vision of how our state should be

governed.

It has also resulted in the mixed blessing of being the current vice president of the United States. If he becomes president, Mike Pence will be grateful. And if the vice presidency is the highest level of government he achieves, Mike Pence will be grateful for the opportunities that he has had to both advocate his views and to be an example, however imperfect, for his faith in Jesus Christ.

And he will also be thankful that he was governor of Indiana, and so am I. ❖

Souder is a former Republican congressman from Indiana.

Pence was a true champion for life

By **CURT SMITH**

INDIANAPOLIS – One of the fun things about considering Mike Pence's Indiana legacy is that the story is still unfolding. His elevation to the national stage after Chapter One in the U.S. House and Chapter Two as Indiana governor merely foreshadows more as Chapter Three emerges.

That qualifier influences my view of Pence's greatest contribution to the social conservative agenda in the Hoosier State: Namely, he showed one can champion such issues – life, traditional marriage, religious liberty among others – and achieve political success.

Pence certainly has a host of concrete accomplishments social conservatives relish, even as a single-term governor. He signed groundbreaking, pro-life legislation (HEA 1337), he championed adoption (including signing HEA 1222 creating the state's first adoption tax credit) and signed an expungement law allowing certain felony convictions to be erased from one's public history. He fought hard for additional tax cuts when legislators were skeptical, winning the accelerated phasing out of all inheritance taxes and other reductions.

He also articulated a very important standard for legislators to heed when the Indiana General Assembly considered a sexual-orientation, gender-identity (SOGI) rights law last year. Pence said he would not sign a bill unless it provided solid protections for the faithful "at work, worship and service."

That phrase did more to derail the SOGI train running through the Statehouse than any other development, and was a nice recovery from the setback we call the

Religious Freedom Restoration Act. I've written at length elsewhere about the RFRA fight, the so-called "fix," and why the Indiana Family Institute filed a legal challenge to the fix (a suit which has prevailed in its first two rounds, including one before the Indiana Court of Appeals). So I'll forgo detailed treatment here, but I believe Pence did what he honestly and sincerely thought was best for Indiana. He did so at personal and political cost, I hasten to add.

Which brings me back to my primary point. Pence championed these matters among others as a happy warrior in the Hubert Humphrey model. That led to many victories, some setbacks, and the elevation of Indiana's favorite son to the second most powerful position in the free world. During the national campaign, he did not flinch or dilute his prior positions. At his inaugural press conference with now-President Donald Trump, Pence repeated his frequent mantra that he is a "Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order."

In his sole debate against Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine, Pence also detailed his pro-life positions and described the horrors of the partial-birth abortion procedure like no national candidate I can recall. Not even Ronald Reagan tops that feat.

That, to me, is Pence's enduring contribution to Indiana and increasingly the nation's public discourse. He speaks eloquently, passionately and yet compassionately for a child-centered culture, where the next generation is better off than the prior generation, because, as he would say, that's just the Hoosier way. ❖

Curt Smith is president of the Indiana Family Institute and author of "Deicide: How Eliminating the Deity Is Destroying America."



Vice President Pence's long, long game

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Vice President Mike Pence has always taken the so-called “long view” when it comes to his career. After losing two congressional races in the late 1980s, he settled into a think tank and broadcasting career, then went to Congress in 2012.



In 2011, he mulled a presidential bid for the following year, then focused on becoming Indiana's 50th governor. There was the potential for a 2016 White House campaign. Some believe that his signing of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act knocked him out, but others say he knew the crowded field left him only a slender path to the nomination. The clearer

path was to get on the presidential ticket, and from May through July 2016, he executed a savvy strategy, wooing Donald Trump when dozens of other Republicans took a pass. When the veep nomination flickered on July 14, he boarded a charter jet and retrieved the prize.

When mainstream Republicans questioned the Trump credentials, Pence exhorted them to come home in the campaign homestretch, playing a significant role in notching one of the biggest upsets in U.S. presidential history.

On Jan. 20, he became Vice President Pence.

We have been carefully monitoring Vice President Mike Pence's standing in the Trump White House over the past 26 days. It's been a fascinating exercise, since President Trump has a long history of playing top aides and associates off against each other. Trump Inc. is a clan enterprise, not a Fortune 500 company. The sons, daughters and in-laws wield the clout, not a board of directors. Those outside the family need that extra savvy, the correct width

of necktie, the right colored suit, and an enhanced level of loyalty. If you can't pass that muster, you're fired. Pence could try to roll back federal LGBT protections, but daughter Ivanka crimped that.

Trump probably can't fire a vice president, but then again we hadn't fathomed Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann resigning a year ago after her own fallout with Gov. Pence.

At this writing, Vice President Pence is ensconced in the Trump Twilight Zone. The brutal realities of being in this warren became apparent over the weekend when the press pried out an unruly fact, that the national security adviser had lied to Pence. He had been talking to the Russian ambassador about rolling back Obama era sanctions. The vice president went on Face the Nation and perpetrated a lie about Flynn's discussions with the Russian ambassador. Pence was out of the loop for 15 days. His press guy, Marc Lotter, acknowledged Pence had “incomplete information.” In the era of alternative facts, most of us that call it a “lie.”

Top Pence aides tell the national media he felt “blindsided” and “frustrated.”

Since then, it's gotten even more peculiar. There's that 2015 photo of Flynn dining with President Putin, a year before the Kremlin intervened in the U.S. presidential race. There are now CNN and New York Times reports that the Trump campaign was in consistent contact with the Kremlin. It puts a whole new light on Trump's Octo-



Ousted national security adviser Michael Flynn dining with Russian President Putin in 2015, a year before the Kremlin sought to tip the 2016 U.S. presidential election. At left, Vice President Pence with Flynn before Pence realized Flynn had lied to him about Russian contacts.

ber 2016 tweet: “Boy, I love reading those WikiLeaks.”

Bill Kristol, the Weekly Standard editor and former aide to Vice President Quayle, played the new parlor game. Is Pence already toast in Trump World? A nice middle class guy with a handsome family, who really isn't prepared to wheel and deal with the big boys? “Does

this episode strengthen Pence or weaken Pence?" Kristol said, posing that question to the Washington Post. "That's what everybody is trying to figure out. Pence is trying to play a long game, keeping his head down and keeping his powder dry, assuming some of the more flamboyant types will blow up or blow out and he will be there as a trusted counselor a year or so from now. The long game can mislead you. If you end up keeping your powder dry and never using it, you end up being just another guy in the White House."

MSNBC's Joe Scarborough observed this morning, "I can tell you every senator and congressman on Capitol Hill would rather have Mike Pence as president than Donald Trump."

And the Wall Street Journal's Dan Henninger writes today, "Unless Team Trump gets back to the basics of the 2016 election, 1974 could return ... A president's blood is in the water and another White House staff can only look out the windows as the sharks arrive."

Ahhh, yes, the long game. Pence has played the long game before and has done it well. It took him only a few years after entering Congress in 2001 to find himself in conference leadership. He challenged John Boehner for the speakership, lost, and ended up in the No. 3 position. He stared down Mitch Daniels in 2011 when both pondered the 2012 presidential race, and ended up with a clear path to the gubernatorial nomination.

The challenge for Vice President Pence today is this is not a George Bush White House. The Trump outfit is a mix of Network, Mad Max, Alice in Wonderland and Rod Serling's Twilight Zone. It's like playing chess on mushrooms or acid. There's no precedent, no logical org chart. This is President Wingin' It. There is method and madness, though no apparent method to the madness that most of the rest of us can figure out.

And there have been an array of vice presidents – from our own Thomas Riley Marshall, to John Nance Garner, to Henry Wallace to Richard Nixon – who either fell out of favor with the president or were belittled and ignored. It can be a tough game. Manipulative presidents



Gov. Mike Pence in his Indiana Statehouse office with former governor and Vice President Thomas Riley Marshall on the wall behind him. Vice President Marshall fell out of favor with President Woodrow Wilson. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

like the Roosevelts view vice presidents as either collateral assets or political flotsam.

A White House source described Pence in the wake of the Flynn fiasco as "a very forgiving man." In Trump World, that is probably not an asset.

So we'll all watch to see what President Trump thinks of Vice President Pence on Monday, no, Tuesday, no, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. When Saturday comes around, will it be who's that stupid clown in the bathroom mirror (yes, I'm quoting a Kurt Vile song here). A neutered vice president in Trump World is not an unfathomable stretch.

But in the Pence long, long, long game – hanging in there, talking inevitable the insults and barbs, keeping his head out of the line of circular fire – could have the ultimate historical payoff. Will the Trump White House become so scandal-ridden that if Democrats take control of Congress in 2018, the impeachment proceedings go on the fast track? Will Trump grow tired of the inert Congress, his foreign

hotels getting bombed, his family accessory lines getting kicked out of loser chains like Sears and Kmart, and say in 2018, "Hey, f— this. I'm outta here."

In that long game, the end result is President Pence, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Even after a couple of years of abuse, Mike Pence would be in control. ❖

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Rep. Smith scuttles vote on redistricting

By **THOMAS CURRY**

INDIANAPOLIS – In front of a packed House chamber, House Elections and Appointments Committee Chair Milo Smith (R-Columbus) denied a vote on redistricting reform Wednesday. Multiple members of the committee moved to vote on the measure but Chairman Smith said that “there is still work to be done and voices heard” and that he “doesn’t know at this time” if the bill will get another hearing.



The clock is moving on redistricting reform with the 2020 census approaching, as well as next week’s session halfway mark. This was the first and only hearing on the bill scheduled for this session and was attended by scores of Hoosier citizens showing support for it, including the League of Woman Voters, Common Cause and even garnered support from Quakers.

This year, redistricting reform manifests as House Bill 1014 sponsored by Rep. Jerry Torr (R-Carmel) and includes co-sponsor Speaker Brian Bosma (R-Indianapolis). HB 1014 calls for creating an apolitical commission to oversee redistricting reform by drawing the districts. The House and Senate would then vote up or down on the drawn districts in an effort to satisfy the constitutional requirement of the legislature deciding the districts. Rep. Torr’s bill would let a nine person panel, made up of judges and university presidents, draw up the lines. Members would be chosen by the chief justice of the Supreme Court and the court would retain original jurisdiction in removing members. Torr and supporters of the bill believe that the bill would “create fairer districts that better represent Indiana.”

Supporters of the bill also claim that it would increase voter participation, with a representative of Common Cause Indiana testifying before the committee that “competition is good for business and sports; it should be good for government.”

But skeptics of the bill, like Chairman Milo Smith, argue that the bill would do little to stop problems of gerrymandering. “I don’t know how drawing the lines in a way that splits neighborhoods to create equal numbers in both parties is any better than the current system” Smith said in a phone interview with HPI Tuesday. “We should let neighborhoods be neighborhoods.”

Smith also raised the question of what happens if the commission’s drawn lines get voted down twice, as HB

1014 only gives the commission two chances at approval. Rep. Torr admitted that it was a flaw in the bill and that if the commission was voted down twice “the commission would likely fold and the legislature would draw them anyway.”

Others questioned how a commission could truly be apolitical in a extremely political role. A few members of the Elections Committee also questioned how the Constitutional requirement is met but Rep. Torr cited support from two previous Supreme Court Justices.

After the hearing, Chairman Smith told members of the media that he felt the overwhelming public attendance in support of the bill was from “one groups organization and that I feel there are many in opposition of the bill.”

Earlier in the week, Speaker Bosma told HPI that he wasn’t sure how HB 1014 would move this session. “We are trying to figure out that bill and others as we approach the halfway mark of this session. Obviously we are focused on the major road plan and a few others of our priority bills.” Bosma continued that “not everyone in our caucus agrees on this particular measure so we are trying to see if it can get through committee and then through the floor.”

In previous years, measures to reform redistricting have died in the Senate even after passing the House. Speaker Bosma commentated that “the Senate has not had a great deal of the affinity for the concept” in their discussions this session.

On speculation of redistricting being a focus of future sessions, both Chairman Smith and Speaker Bosma were shaky on committing to the issue down the line. Bosma said that he is “focused on road funding, education and tackling the drug epidemic” and that those are his priorities currently. Smith added that “we will just have to see” how the measure does this year in order to see for future years.

Ultimately, failure to launch on redistricting reform is not a surprise. With Republicans maintaining a super-majority in both chambers as well as a majority of statehouses being Republican across the country there is little incentive for lawmakers. Many legislators feel its “not broke so why fix it?” which Bosma said “will take some time” to get over. Add in the potential problems of implementation, a denied committee vote on the bill relatively late in session, the far ahead forethought needed to pass reforms and it becomes clear that redistricting reform is a long way off for Indiana.



House Elections Chairman Milo Smith wouldn’t take a redistricting vote on Wednesday. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

House budget in line with Holcomb

Mostly in line with Gov. Eric Holcomb’s priority, House Ways and Means Chairman Tim Brown released the GOP’s proposed budget on Wednesday. The plan differs only slightly from Gov. Holcomb’s revealed budget in January, showing a unified Statehouse as the 2017 session moves closer to the half-way mark.

HB1001 is described by Chairman Brown to “focus on fiscal integrity, strengthen commitment to education, improve Indiana’s workforce and support public safety.”

A noticeable exclusion however, is any talks of road funding. Creating a long-term infrastructure plan has dominated conversation at the Statehouse and it was a campaign promise by Holcomb. Currently, HB1002 would carry that out through increasing the gasoline tax by 10 cents a gallon and includes a host of other fees on drivers. Concerning the separate discussion on the budget and road funding, Chairman Brown said, “That’s something they may decide to do in the Senate,” and also noted that HB1001 is open to amendment this week.

Gov. Holcomb reacted to the House proposal, telling HPI, “Overall, this is a good-looking budget, and I commend Speaker Bosma and Chairman Brown for their hard work to ensure Indiana’s next budget is honestly balanced and maintains healthy reserves. I’m also happy to see that it provides support for key priorities of my Next Level legislative agenda, including economic development, transportation, education, drug addiction prevention and treatment, and government service. I’m encouraged and looking forward to the work ahead as we progress through this long legislative session.”

Last week state legislators attempted to ease the burden on taxpayers by shifting all of the money generated from sales tax on gasoline to road funding. Previously, that money had gone toward maintaining and increasing the state’s general fund, but the shift in funds appeared to leave a significant hole in the budget.

The Indiana Financial Policy Institute released a scathing analysis of this shift, with author John Stafford saying that shifting the sales tax on gasoline would leave holes of “\$305 million in FY 2018 and \$299 million in FY 2019” in the general fund. Stafford warns of the long term effects of this. “If those revenues are redirected to dedicated highway functions as proposed, the revenues available to support the FY 2018 and FY 2019 budgets become \$15.18 billion and \$15.78 billion respectively. The net result then is a projected budget deficit of \$267 million in FY 2018 and of \$129 million in FY 2019.”

This would create a budget “freeze” causing modest to severe cuts in the governor’s budget. To counteract that, HB1001 calls for increasing the tax on cigarettes by \$1 a pack. This would make up most of the money lost, with Chairman Brown saying, “I’ll let you draw conclusions as to why some decisions were made.” Brown estimated that somewhere in the ballpark of \$250 million would be raised this way.

This effort, among others, would allow the state’s general fund to continue to increase by FY 2019. However, in years

past an increase on the cigarette tax has been met with serious resistance in the Senate. Ultimately, Brown said that he had no idea how that discussion will go in the Senate.

One of the main focuses of the budget remains K-12 education. Gov. Holcomb had pledged a \$280 million increase in education funding and the house budget is only slightly off at a \$273 million increase for education by FY 2019. HB1001 includes doubling the state’s investment in pre-K pilot programs from \$10 million to \$20 million, an initiative that the governor called for. There is some dissent that doubling the investment is not enough, but Statehouse leadership, Chairman Brown and Gov. Holcomb all advised caution in investing too much before there are known results.

Another legislative priority from the governor’s office has been improving and preparing Indiana’s workforce for 21st Century jobs. The proposed budget would pledge \$250,000 to Gov. Holcomb to develop a comprehensive workforce development plan to address the state’s needs. It also appropriates money to entrepreneurship programs and establishes the Next Level Trust Fund, for which Gov. Holcomb wants \$500 million, and invests in developing companies. Holcomb has said that these programs are key to “taking Indiana to the next level and making us competitive worldwide.”

To combat Indiana’s opioid epidemic, \$185 million is pledged over the biennium for corrections programs focused on rehab, something on which Gov. Holcomb has differed with his predecessor. “This is what the governor asked for” in regard to tackling the epidemic,” Brown said. How exactly this funding would be divided remains to be seen.

State Sen. Jim Merritt told HPI earlier in the session that they expect their plan to cost somewhere between \$5 and \$10 million, but that he wasn’t sure where



the money would come from. There are also initiatives in the House that require funding creating a total estimate of \$15 million needed to combat the epidemic this year. The budget also appropriates \$5 million to support the new executive drug czar position and its initiatives.

While many of the governor's plans are included in the budget, there are a few noticeable exclusions. Gov. Holcomb had called for encouraging more direct flights to Indianapolis, but Chairman Brown said there were other priorities to look at first.

There is also less money pledged to improving the South Shore commuter line than Holcomb laid out in his plan. Chairman Brown said that they came to funding decisions by "looking at our priorities and going from there."

More funding for suburban schools

Suburban schools, English-learners and virtual schools would fare well under the Indiana House's 2017 budget plan, while Indianapolis Public Schools and other urban districts would see drops in state support (Cavazos, Chalkbeat). In the Republican-crafted two-year budget draft, presented to the House Ways and Means Committee today, Indiana schools are projected to get an extra \$273 million to support student learning, a 2.8 percent increase overall. Basic per-student funding that all districts get would also increase to \$5,323 in 2019, up 4.6 percent from the \$5,088 they received in 2017.

Gary schools bailout passes Senate

A bill that would temporarily shift financial control for the Gary Community School Corp. away from its school board in exchange for assistance with some outstanding loans received wide support Monday when it passed the state Senate (Colias, Post-Tribune). Under the proposed legislation sponsored by Senate Appropriations Chairman Luke Kenley, R-Noblesville, and Sen. Eddie Melton, D-Merrillville, it would restructure who is responsible for the district's finances for up to five years through July 1, 2022. It passed the Senate 49 to 0. It now heads to the House for consideration. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Tim Brown, R-Crawfordsville, and co-sponsored by Rep. Charlie Brown, D-Gary, and Rep. Vernon Smith, D-Gary. "We have had conversations about what it could do for us here in Gary," said school board president Rosie Washington. "I think as a board we are very supportive of what it can do."

Abortion reversal bill OK'd by House panel

An Indiana House panel has narrowly endorsed a measure that would require directing women to information about potentially stopping drug-induced abortions midway through and continuing with the pregnancy (Associated Press). The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has said the so-called abortion reversal is not scientifically proven to work. But House Bill 1128 sponsor Republican Rep. Ron Bacon (R-Chandler) contends the proposal gives a pregnant woman a chance to change

her mind and try to save the baby. The House Public Policy Committee voted 7-6 on Wednesday to send the measure to the full House. Members amended the bill to have the information provided state that "no scientifically validated medical study" confirms that an abortion may be "reversed." Opponents who argue the procedure hasn't been sufficiently vetted say providing the information is irresponsible.

House panel OKs addiction services

The House Committee on Public Health passed legislation co-authored by State Rep. Cindy Ziemke (R-Batesville) to broaden mental health and addiction treatment options in Indiana, a news release stated (Howey Politics Indiana). According to a recent report, three in 10 new mothers who gave birth at a hospital in Indiana last year tested positive for illegal drugs. House Bill 1006 would include neonatal abstinence syndrome as a factor for determining if a child is in need of services. These children would be able to receive medication-assisted treatment, which uses a combination of medicine and behavioral therapy to treat addiction. In addition, the Family and Social Services Administration would require certified recovery residences in our state to provide housing and assistance to chronic addicts.

Voter registration bill advances

Efforts by State Representative Clyde Kersey (D-Terre Haute) to improve voter turnout across Indiana received a small boost from the House Elections and Apportionment Committee, according to information provided by the Indiana Democratic House Caucus (Howey Politics Indiana). dCommittee members approved a modified version of House Bill 1178 that will enable Hoosiers to register to vote when they obtain or renew their driver's license, permit or identification card at their local license branch. The current version of the bill as amended by Elections Committee Chairman Milo Smith (R-Columbus) requires Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) employees to ask Hoosiers if they want to be registered to vote when they come to the branch to transact business.

Terre Haute casino bill fails

Legislation to allow a satellite casino failed on tie vote by the Indiana Senate Public Policy Committee (Taylor, Terre Haute Tribune-Star). The vote on the bill was 5-5 with supporters praising the innovative legislation that would have allowed Rising Star casino to split its gaming positions and move half of them to Terre Haute. Chairman Ron Alting, R-Lafayette, said, "I haven't seen enough facts to say that this is good public policy for the state." State Sen. Jon Ford (R-Terre Haute) reacted, saying, "I'm disappointed that Senate Bill 354 didn't make it out of committee today because I believe this legislation would have a positive impact on the Terre Haute community. I'm glad we started this conversation." ❖

NRSC takes aim at Sen. Donnelly

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – The National Republican Senatorial Committee already has a TV ad aimed at Sen. Joe Donnelly, starting early in efforts to defeat the Indiana Democrat when he runs for reelection in 2018. And President Trump invites Donnelly to lunch at the White House. Conflict in approach? Not at all.



Both the Senate GOP strategists and Trump seek to strap Donnelly in a political hot seat in the battle over confirmation of Neil Gorsuch, the president's nominee for the Supreme

Court. Both seek to put pressure on Democratic senators facing reelection contests in states where Trump won big last fall. Trump carried Indiana by 20 percent. As Trump would say: That's huge.

Both know some Democratic senators are needed now for the 60 votes for confirmation. They want to avoid embarrassment of changing the rules to invoke the "nuclear option" for confirmation by a bare majority. Republicans control 52 seats in the 100-member chamber.

So, what if Donnelly votes to confirm Gorsuch? Would Republicans refrain from an all-out attack to defeat Donnelly in 2018? Refraining from using millions of dollars already committed to attack Donnelly is as likely as Trump tweeting that Saturday Night Live really is very funny.

Donnelly knows this. He wasn't invited to a fancy lunch at the White House because Trump thinks he's a great guy who deserves a second term. Donnelly was invited, along with three other Democratic senators from red states where Trump won big – huge – because the president wants their votes to confirm Gorsuch and to pass some other items on his legislative agenda. Trump seeks both to court and to threaten them.

Court them? Sure. Trump, like other presidents, seeks in the grandeur of the White House to convince members of Congress to go along with their cordial host to help their president, their country.

Threaten them? Sure. Trump

doesn't need to tweet it. They get the message: All those voters who supported him in 2016 could take it out in 2018 on senators opposing him now on the Gorsuch nomination.

How Donnelly votes on confirmation won't matter in terms of how strongly the Republican Senatorial Committee and supporting PACs attack him. His decision, however, could have effect on voters who look beyond alternative facts in the 30-second TV attacks.

Predict? We could if we knew how popular Trump will be in November of 2018. Will all those Hoosier supporters from 2016 still be with him, storming to the polls to punish anyone on the ballot who hadn't in their view joined to make America great again? Or will many of them instead fear that they put a madman in the White House and welcome members of Congress who opposed him?

We could predict if we knew whether there will be in 2018 an energized Democratic base, storming to the polls to reward anyone on the ballot who opposed Trump. Will some of them refuse to support a Democrat who failed to oppose Trump at every opportunity? Will many of them again stay home instead of voting?

We could theorize if we knew what will happen to Obamacare. Will voters who deplored Obamacare but liked provisions of the Affordable Care Act realize that ACA is Obamacare? Will Republicans repealing ACA provide nothing or something good? Will Donnelly's vote for ACA be a plus or a minus?

Gorsuch will be confirmed. One way or the other, with enough Democrats joining for 60 votes or through the "nuclear option." The election determined that. Much more was at stake than whether Trump once grabbed too much or Hillary Clinton once emailed too much.

Should Democrats retaliate against the way Republicans wouldn't even give a hearing to an impeccably credentialed liberal justice by all refusing to vote for an impeccably credentialed conservative justice? If so, for how long? Whatever they do, there will be no invitations for lunch at the White House at election time. ❖



U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly meets with U.S. Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch on Tuesday.

Colwell has covered Indiana politics over five decades for the South Bend Tribune.

The sweet and sour of our institutions

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – In a world offering little comfort to small towns, joy came this past week to Crothersville, IN. Located just off I-65, south of Seymour, north of Austin, Crothersville now is the proud home of the Tigers, 2017 winners of a girls’ basketball Class A sectional championship.



For 103 years, this Jackson County town of 1,600 waited for a sectional championship trophy. Now, only 41 years since the first girls’ team began playing Indiana’s game, that trophy is displayed at the high school on N. Preston Street.

From that site of joy, it is only 176 miles north on I-65 to South College Avenue in Rensselaer, Jasper County, where a very different mood prevails. St. Joseph’s College will suspend operations after graduation ceremonies this semester. Continuing students are being offered opportunities at several other Indiana higher education venues.

The college is closing. Its buildings will be on caretaker status pending resolution by the board of trustees of the future direction for the institution. Next fall Rensselaer will not welcome approximately 1,000 students and the 200 faculty and staff who serve them.

College education has become increasingly expensive, not just for parents and students, but for the institutions themselves. Not all colleges have the financial backing, the endowments and generous friends, to survive. Some analysts contend the college bubble is bursting and this event in an example of overinvestment in education. Enrollments and the numbers of institutions show a decline.

Others see only a bump in the road caused by the Great Recession plus the readjustment of expectations as the marginal return to college investment declines. Yes, over time, as the number of students seeking higher education rises, the gains are still there, but not as great as before. Adjustments in the market by suppliers (colleges) and consumers (students) are to be expected.

For Rensselaer, how is this (temporary?) closing of St. Joseph’s different from a manufacturing plant closing? There’s no Asian or Mexican competition involved, no trade pact to be cursed, no evil force to be feared. Without a tornado or a flood, Rensselaer cannot apply for emergency federal aid.

Yet there will be fewer pizzas sold in Rensselaer next year. Some housing off-campus will go unrented and some will be sold off. The number of visiting parents and

students will drop to zero and few alumni will show up to reminisce. Residents of Rensselaer will find something missing, something the presence of the college provided beyond business and young strangers. Some ineffable connection between tradition and the future will be absent.

Indiana has not mastered the decline and vacancy in our lives when a tire plant closes in this town, an auto supplier is shuttered over there, a food processing operation ceases down the road. How are we to adjust to the closing of an institution that has defined our community for over 100 years?

Is anyone prepared to help? ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist, writer, and speaker who may be reached at mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com.

Holcomb says Regional Cities funding 20 projects so far

INDIANAPOLIS – Governor Eric Holcomb says a little more than a year after Regional Cities Initiative funding was announced, more than 20 projects have been



approved and more than one-third of the state’s \$126 million has been disbursed (Ober, Inside Indiana Business). He says, as Millennials continue to choose where they want to live before where they want to work, Regional Cities is an “important tool in our economic toolbox.”

In all, the three regions selected for funding are working on more than \$2 billion in projects aimed at improving livability, connectivity and culture. Michiana Partnership Chief Executive Officer Regina Emberton and East Central Indiana Regional Partnership CEO Mindy Kenworthy tell Inside INdiana Business the funding brings opportunities and challenges.

The Regional Cities Initiative is being funded through a state tax amnesty program that wrapped up in late 2015 and raised more than originally projected. The effort aims to encourage counties, cities and towns to collaborate on quality of life initiatives, making the regions more competitive for talent on a global scale. ❖

Matt Tully, IndyStar: We all want our political leaders to do the right thing. But in truth, that's not as easy as it sounds because what is considered right is a subjective thing and its definition veers wildly between election cycles and among different sets of voters. To quote an old TV show theme song, "What might be right for you may not be right for some." But it seems to me that there are a couple of sure-fire ways for a politician to determine what is right. The first is to simply ask: What is the most decent way of handling this situation? The second is to think about how decisions made today will look years or even decades from now, long after the next election has passed. Holcomb granted a long-overdue pardon to Keith Cooper, a 49-year-old man who spent a decade in prison after being wrongfully convicted — according to witnesses, DNA evidence, the prosecution, and the state parole board — for a 1996 armed robbery in Elkhart. Second, Holcomb declared an emergency disaster and asked for federal assistance for East Chicago, where a housing complex contaminated with lead has threatened residents and led to understandable fears and frustration. Talk about doing the right thing. And talk about offering yet more evidence that the state now has a governor who is putting good policy first and is not being driven by a Pence-like ideology that, in these particular cases, I cannot comprehend. As Holcomb announced the East Chicago declaration, he said, "What I want to do is make sure we get this right." Time and again in his first month in office, he has made decisions that show he is intent on doing just that. ❖



Ross Douthat, New York Times: The peak of Donald Trump's presidency, so far and perhaps forever, happened before he became the president. It was the deal he struck with Carrier, the Indiana air-conditioning company, to keep a factory open and jobs in the United States. No moment was so triumphantly Trumpian; nothing has gone as well for him since. Was the Carrier deal sound economic policy, a sober and restrained use of the presidency's powers? Not precisely. But it featured Trump following through on his most basic campaign promise: the pledge, delivered in rallies across the country's stagnant reaches, that he would focus on good-paying jobs for people both parties seemed to have forgotten. It was the message that helped win him the Midwest, and with it the Electoral College. It was the message that Steve Bannon spent the transition boasting would lead to a realignment that would shock conservative ideologues as much as liberals. And it's a message that's basically disappeared — and with it, the president's brief uptick in popularity — during Trump's stumbling, staggering, infighting first few weeks in office. As a result, right now his presidency is in danger of being very swiftly Carterized — ending up so unpopular, ineffectual and fractious that even with Congress controlled by its own party, it can't get anything of sub-

stance done. The more the Trump White House remains mired in its own melodramas, the more plausible it becomes that the Trump-era House and Senate set a record for risk avoidance and legislative inactivity. ❖

Michael Gerson, Washington Post: In early January, House Speaker Paul Ryan met on the issue of tax reform with a delegation from the president-elect. Attending were future chief strategist and senior counselor Stephen K. Bannon, future chief of staff Reince Priebus, future senior adviser Jared Kushner, future counselor Kellyanne Conway and future senior policy adviser Stephen Miller. As the meeting began, Ryan pointedly asked, "Who's in charge?" Silence. It is still the right question. Former officials with deep knowledge of the presidency describe Donald Trump's White House staff as top-heavy, with five or six power centers and little vertical structure. "The desire to be a big shot is overrunning any sense of team," says one experienced Republican. "This will cause terrible dysfunction, distraction, disloyalty and leaks." Trump has run a family business but never a large organization. Nor has he seen such an organization as an employee. "Trump," says another former official, "is ill-suited to appreciate the importance of a coherent chain of command and decision-making process. On the contrary, his instincts run instead toward multiple mini power centers, which rewards competing aggressively for Trump's favor." This seems to be the dynamic unfolding on the weekend political talk shows. These have traditionally been venues for an administration to communicate with media and political elites (whose religion dedicates Sunday morning to the gods of policy, scandal and pith). But Trump surrogates are clearly appealing to a different audience: an audience of one, who may well tweet them a nice pat on the back. The goal — as Miller demonstrated over the weekend — is not to persuade or even explain. It is to confidently repeat Trump's most absurd or unsubstantiated claims from the previous week/ ❖

Mike Warren, Weekly Standard: We have not yet reached the end of the Mike Flynn story. The former national security advisor's abrupt resignation on Monday night might have been the end of his story, as far as the American people are concerned, had his downfall been personal or isolated. But the factors that cut Flynn's White House tenure short are complex and intermingled with so many other issues. Congress will be conducting hearings and investigations over what, exactly, Flynn spoke about with the Russian ambassador. The FBI's own investigation, which included interviews with Flynn in the first days of the Trump administration, could yield more answers to questions we don't even know about yet. The leaks from intelligence and administration personnel that helped shed light on Flynn's misdirection will rightly prompt new scrutiny of a politicized culture in the intelligence community. ❖

Trump camp talked to Russians daily

WASHINGTON — High-level advisers close to then-presidential nominee Donald Trump were in constant communication during the campaign with Russians known to US intelligence, multiple current and former intelligence, law enforcement and administration officials tell CNN. President-elect Trump and then-President Barack Obama were both briefed on details of the extensive communications between suspected Russian operatives and people associated with the Trump campaign and the Trump business, according to US officials familiar with the matter. Both the frequency of the communications during early summer and the proximity to Trump of those involved "raised a red flag" with US intelligence and law enforcement, according to these officials. The communications were intercepted during routine intelligence collection targeting Russian officials and other Russian nationals known to US intelligence. Among several senior Trump advisers regularly communicating with Russian nationals were then-campaign chairman Paul Manafort and then-adviser Michael Flynn. Officials emphasized that communications between campaign staff and representatives of foreign governments are not unusual. However, these communications stood out to investigators due to the frequency and the level of the Trump advisers involved. "This Russian connection non-sense is merely an attempt to cover-up the many mistakes made in Hillary Clinton's losing campaign," Trump tweeted.

Verma up for confirmation today

WASHINGTON — The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services nominee is up for her confirmation hearing this morning, just

in time for Democrats to unload on her about the Obamacare rule (Nather, Axios). Verma will get a lot more questions than that, of course — CMS is the main agency that implements the law, and she'll have a big hand in the Trump administration's efforts to start phasing it out. Republicans will also ask her about Medicare and Medicaid, as well as her views on Medicare payment reform and delivery system reform. Her Indiana consulting firm worked on the design of the state's Medicaid reform plan under then-Gov. Mike Pence, but she also worked for one of Indiana's biggest Medicaid vendor, as the Indianapolis Star reported in 2014 and the Associated Press investigated this week. (The AP notes that she's promised to sell her consulting firm within 90 days of her confirmation.)



FBI arrests Muncie bldg commissioner

MUNCIE — After a months-long FBI investigation into allegations of wrongdoing in Muncie city government, the city's building commissioner has been arrested and charged with wire fraud, theft and money laundering (Roysdon, Muncie Star Press). Craig Nichols was arrested Wednesday morning and the U.S. Attorney's office released details of the charges against him late Wednesday afternoon. Nichols, 38, appeared in federal court Wednesday in Indianapolis. He is charged with 16 counts of wire fraud, one count of theft of government funds and 16 counts of money laundering. "Nichols has served as Muncie's building commissioner since 2012, exercising authority over permitting, inspections and code enforcement for the city," the office of U.S. Attorney Josh Minkler said. "The indictment alleges that Nichols abused his position of trust by using sham bidding practices and submitting fraudulent invoices to steer work to his companies, and then bill Muncie more than \$376,000 for work his company either never performed or

performed at inflated prices."

Andrew endorses Buttigieg for DNC

SOUTH BEND — South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg has the backing of three former chairs of the Democratic National Committee, the most of any candidate seeking to lead the party (Groppe, IndyStar). Joe Andrew, the last Hoosier to head the DNC in 1999-2000, endorsed Buttigieg on Wednesday, as did David Wilhelm, who chaired the DNC in 1993-94. Buttigieg previously was endorsed by Steve Grossman, DNC chair in 1997-98.

Young, Donnelly react to Flynn

INDIANAPOLIS - U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly called for a broadened investigation in the wake of the resignation of Gen. Michael Flynn as national security adviser (Bangert, Lafayette Journal & Courier): "General Flynn's resignation is a powerful reminder that Congress must - for the sake of our national security - conduct a robust and thorough investigation into Russia's attempts to influence our elections and also possibly our government. No one knows what such an investigation would reveal, but that should not keep Congress from asking every last question that deserves an answer." U.S. Sen. Todd Young reacted, saying, "The Intelligence Committee chairman began an investigation into these issues in December, and I believe that investigation should have access to any persons or resources necessary to review the matter."

Puzder withdraws Labor nomination

WASHINGTON — Andrew Puzder, President Trump's choice to serve as the next labor secretary, withdrew his nomination on Wednesday amid growing resistance from Republicans and Democrats in the Senate (Washington Post).