

# Indiana journalism's thin gray line

As newspapers recede, epidemics grow, when will there be a reckoning?

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

SPEEDWAY – There we were, seated in Claude & Annie's Bar, four unlikely souls in a world about to be transformed in ways no one could have predicted. I

remember that journalist Harrison J. Ullmann, attorney Peter Rusthoven and yours truly were drinking beer. Talk show host Mike Pence was having a Coke.



We had just completed a taping of "The Mike Pence Show" in January, 1997, at a TV studio near the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Like any small business, I struggled in those early years after The Howey Political



Report began publishing in 1994. Pence was gearing up his radio and TV shows. I had gone through a divorce, had custody of my two sons and needed health coverage. The internet was just revving up after it was founded 30 years ago this past week, its founder Tim Berners-Lee now call-

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## Hate, GOP and LGBT

By **CRAIG DUNN**

KOKOMO – You can massage your message in caucus all you want, but it will never change the fact that the real reason that the list of proposed hate crimes was stripped out of Senate Bill 12 was because one of those hate crimes enumerated was against the LGBTQ community.

Many in the fundamentalist Christian community in Indiana believe passionately that any recognition of the existence of the LGBTQ community is tantamount to governmental acceptance of a lifestyle that they find to be abhorrent, unnatural and against the commandments of the Holy Bible. In addition, these people believe this is just another sinister



**“How does he become the biggest cheerleader for the porn star presidency? Is it that he stopped believing in scripture when he started believing in Donald Trump?”**

*- South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg on Vice President Pence at the CNN town hall*



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piece of legislation that will continue to chip away at their cherished beliefs and ultimately be used to impair their religious freedoms.

**How do I know this?** I read their views on a daily basis. Over the last few years, I have built a tidy sum of Facebook friends who represent a fairly wide spread of political beliefs. Many of the people who I consider to be close friends share the belief that SB12, which originally contained a list of groups protected by the legislation, will be turned against the community of Biblically faithful. Yes, these are the same people who had a conniption fit over the RFRA legislation. I respect their views, but I certainly don't agree with them.

Opponents of hate crimes legislation are quick to tell you that there are already laws on the books that protect everyone, not just a few listed groups. They will also tell you that judges may take hate into consideration when they consider sentencing. Both of these are true, but they are disingenuous at best and fail to recognize the realities of our modern criminal justice system that rarely sees criminal offenses go to trial. Instead, crimes are bargained down to lower offenses and the judges may not get to apply any additional considerations.

The fact is that there are some crimes that are exclusively motivated by hate and they need to be dealt with as such.

**As I drive around** this great state, I frequently see rail cars, overpasses and abandoned buildings with graffiti spray-painted on them. Each of these acts of vandalism is a crime. However, you simply cannot say that spray-painting an overpass is the moral equivalent of painting a swastika on a synagogue. Defacing a synagogue is a heinous act and must be treated by our laws as such.

If I haul some fallen limbs

over into my next door neighbor's front yard and light them on fire, I have certainly broken existing laws. If that wood happens to be a cross and if my neighbors happen to be black, then I believe that it is a far different crime and worthy of its own consideration.

There is a difference between assault committed against a random victim and assault committed against someone solely because of their race,



nationality or sexual orientation. I know, the physical act of the crime is the same, but there is a significant differentiation that should be spelled out in statute.

**The opponents of** hate crimes legislation spend lots of time and energy parsing words and legalese to defend their position. Most of these opponents fail to express the true underlying reason for their opposition. This reluctance extends into the bowels of the General Assembly. The truth looks very ugly when the thin veneer of legalese is stripped away. I believe that the average opponent of hate crimes legislation would be just fine with a list that included crimes against someone committed solely because of race, religion, nationality or gender. The elephant in the room is the adamant stance of the religious right against recognition of the LGBTQ



community as a unique class of people. Simply put, this is RFRA 2.0 and the cast of characters and usual suspects is the same.

Gov. Eric Holcomb has bravely gone where many fear to tread. A significant element in the Republican Party is completely and vehemently against hate crimes legislation. This is a battle that Gov. Holcomb does not have to fight. His sky-high job approval ratings and personal popularity give him a virtual lock on a second term in 2020. Why in this world would the governor spend political capital on an issue that is far more popular in the Democrat Party than among his political base?

**The answer is simple.** Great leaders lead whether it is popular or not. Doing the right thing is never the wrong thing to do. Gov. Holcomb knows and embraces the fact that he is governor of everyone in the state and, as such, must lead his people in the proper direction, whether or not they want to go there.

Indiana is one of only a handful of states that does not have hate crimes legislation on the books. Even Texas, that rock-solid Bible Belt bastion of believers, has hate crimes legislation that lists the protected groups. No one would accuse Texas of slipping into some trap set by the godless, liberal army of Satan that won't rest until each of our children has been grabbed and forced into government-promoted homosexuality. No, the good ole boys and gals in the Lone Star State still cling to their Bibles and recognize what's right is right and what's wrong just ain't Texan.

If the Hoosier State is to be recognized as the best state in our country to locate a business, work, raise

a family and pursue life, liberty and happiness, we simply must shed the political manacles which bind us to petrifying sameness. It is not enough in these highly competitive economic times to point to a great tax structure in an effort to attract good employers. Businesses are looking for the moral equivalent of a Happy Meal. They want the burger, fries, shake and the toy in the box. They demand it and they will get it from someone. If we truly want to recruit great corporations to our state, we will need to recognize the realities of the world we live in. This is not a masked attack on conservative Christian values or just another step in a degenerative progression into the abyss. It is merely what is good and what is right.

I don't normally look to the Indiana legislature for examples of courage or leadership. Many key legislators spend their careers being spooked by political shadows real and imaginary. Individually, the overwhelming number of Republican legislators know what is right. They are good people, people of honor and integrity.

**Unfortunately, our political** system rewards those who make the most noise and the noise of opposition is definitely louder than the noise of change. In time, I believe that my grandchildren will study Indiana government and read about the heroes of change within the Republican Party who put people above politics. Gov. Holcomb is one of those heroes. Here's hoping that other heroes will step forward out of the shadows of the insecure and into the light of the morally brave. ❖

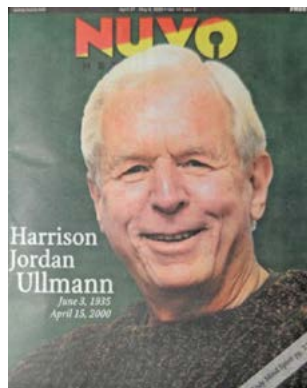
**Dunn is the former Howard County Republican chairman.**

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ing it an "uncontrollable monster."

The conservative wing of this gathering, Pence and Rusthoven, were urging the liberal Ullmann to hire this writer, ostensibly as a "conservative" voice in the leftward alternative NUVO Newsweekly. Ullmann heeded their advice, commencing a three-year run that had me writing about everything from neighborhoods seeking to purge crack dealers, Mayor Goldsmith's drug interdiction roadblocks that almost upended the 4th Amendment in the U.S. Supreme Court, to lethal assaults inside the Marion County lockup. Ullmann was transfixed by lead in the soil poisoning our children, Goldsmith's phantom voting address, and the Meridian Street police riot that helped elect Gov. Frank O'Bannon.

The journalism at NUVO could be impactful. Peo-



ple didn't know the full extent of the police riot until NUVO published, verbatim, what the profane cops were yelling at women as their mob moved down the street.

With homicides surging to record levels, we once asked Prosecutor Scott Newman what he needed, and his answer was to get the Southern District attorney to begin prosecuting gun crimes with federal penalties. Meeting with Sen. Richard Lugar in an airport hotel room, Ullmann pressed him on the billions of dollars spent on desegregation busing in Indianapolis. Lugar called it a "train wreck" and not too long thereafter federal Judge S. Hugh Dillin began lifting his busing mandate.

## Glory days

These were the glory days of not only alternative press, but perhaps the apex of the newspaper industry on its 20th Century financial platform. The Indianapolis Star and News battled each other vociferously. The two papers probably had a combined 25 reporters, editors and photographers manning their Statehouse press shacks. There were other rivalries, such as the Hammond Times and the Gary Post-Tribune. Families owned an array of Hoosier newspapers, from the Pulliams in Indy, to the Nixons from

Michigan City, Peru and an array of cities like Wabash and Frankfort. The Dille family had Federated Media in Elkhart, the Schurz family owned the South Bend Tribune and Bloomington Herald-Times and a half dozen other papers, Fort Wayne Newspapers had the Journal Gazette and News-Sentinel, there was Home News in Columbus and the DePrez family in Shelbyville.

These family businesses had developed since the Great Depression, some combining the Democratic paper with the Republican to create the local fact-checker and arbitrator while working as the conscience of their communities. There were journalists like Al Spiers of the Michigan City News-Dispatch who watched illegal gambling and prostitution take hold following World War II, found a law-and-order Democrat sheriff candidate, and helped get him elected. By the early 1960s, Michigan City was an "All-American City."

The families began to sell their newspapers after many of the founders had passed away. Corporations like Gannett and Paxson came in, and leveraged lucrative real estate deals while cutting into muscle and bone on the news staffs. The pricey Pulliam Square condo complex rises on the site of the old Star-News Building while the IndyStar has been downgraded to a mallpaper.

In the pre-internet era, a 35% profit margin was the norm. If you wanted to sell something or hire someone, you did it through the newspaper classified section. At the Peru Daily Tribune in a town of 14,000, about 80 journalists and printers made a living wage. Last time I checked in about five years ago, there was a sole reporter at the Tribune, just a handful of employees in the building on West Third Street, and the town has shrunk to 11,000 population, while meth and heroin had set in.

### When everything changed

The internet changed everything.

The Indianapolis News disappeared in 1999 after Gannett purchased Central Newspapers. NUVO folded as a print publication this past week. What's occurred in the intervening two decades has been a decimation of local newsrooms. Only a fraction of the editors and reporters in Indianapolis are working today, with centuries of professional journalism relegated to the sidelines. The 20th Century economic model collapsed. They posted their content on line for free, then failed to see the threat from Monster.com, Craig's List and Match.com who took over the classifieds. They later tried to erect pay walls, regaining only a fraction of their audiences.

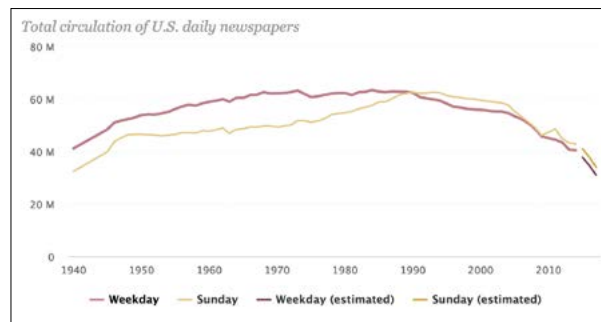
According to Pew Research, the estimated total U.S. daily newspaper circulation (print and digital combined) in 2017 was 31 million for weekday and 34 million

for Sunday, down 11% and 10%, respectively, from the previous year. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics, 39,210 people worked as reporters, editors, photographers, or film and video editors in the newspaper industry in 2017. That is down 15% from 2014 and 45% from 2004. Median wage for editors in 2017 was about \$49,000, while for reporters the figure was about \$34,000.

### 1,400 newspapers close

Associated Press writers David A. Lieb and David Bauder reported this week that 1,400 cities and towns across the U.S. lost a newspaper over the past 15 years, according to data compiled by the University of North

Carolina. "Blame revenue siphoned by online competition, cost-cutting ownership, a death spiral in quality, sheer disinterest among readers or reasons peculiar to given locales for that development," AP reported. "While national outlets worry about a president who calls the press an enemy of the people, many Americans no longer have someone watching the city council for them, chronicling



the soccer exploits of their children, or reporting on the kindly neighbor who died of cancer. Local journalism is dying in plain sight."

Local law enforcement actually misses robust police blotter reporting, often having to try and swat down social media rumor-mongering with no local press to lend credence. CBS "Sunday Morning" reported this past weekend that scores of small, rural communities across the nation are also losing their local hospitals, while many have been ravaged by opioid and meth epidemics. In a bygone era, local journalism would have revealed the early signs.

Five of the 10 largest media companies are owned by hedge funds or other investors with several unrelated holdings, and GateHouse, which just bought the Schurz newspapers in Indiana, is among them. Digital First Media which is targeting Gannett, and Gatehouse follow a strategy of aggressive cost-cutting without making significant investments in newsrooms, Penelope Muse Abernathy, a University of North Carolina professor who studies news industry trends, told AP.

Publications like the Wall Street Journal, Indiana Legislative Insight and Howey Politics Indiana, which maintained content pay walls, survived. The New York Times and Washington Post gave up their content for free, then reestablished pay walls and appear to be thriving, in part as a reaction to President Trump.

In March 2010, NUVO published its 20th anniversary edition. I wrote a tribute to Ullmann, who died on April 15, 2000: "Ullmann's concern about the future of journalism has, in retrospect, been justified. He became a tiny shareholder in Central Newspapers just to learn

about the inner working of the Indianapolis Star-News. He predicted years before it happened that the News would close and Gannett would likely buy the Star. Family-owned journalism, Ullmann believed, was on the precipice back then, with every obituary published a subscriber never to return. His insurgent 'White River Gazette' didn't get off the ground before his cancer struck, but yielded the 'Indianapolis Eye' and a half million investment as a web magazine that was little too ahead of its time.

"Those trend lines have been devastatingly on target a decade beyond Harrison Ullmann's passing. He saw a day when print reporters would carry video gear and TV guys would post written copy on websites; where Kindle and the iPad would spare the lives of billions of trees. And where the folks with 'big hair' on the evening news would gradually fade into the warrens of splayed technology moving from home pages to YouTube, Facebook and beyond."

### Finding reliable news

Former Supreme Court Chief Justice Randall Shepard observed the media carnage in a recent IBJ column: "The disintegration of American newspapers is

proceeding at a pace that's breathtaking and disheartening. We need to start talking about where we can find reliable news. The trend is plain for all to see. Most visible in the state's capital have been the layoffs at The Indianapolis Star and the shrinkage of the papers that arrive on the doorstep. Shrinking the news staff has been a regular part of Gannett's management since it bought The Star from the Pulliam family in 2000. Departures in recent weeks – some from buyouts, some from layoffs – have included such stars as Tim Swarens, Will Higgins, Greg Weaver and Gary Varvel. And the paper shrank with elimination of valuable columnists such as Ball State University's Michael Hicks.

"Lest one wonder about the remaining readership, the prominence of ads for hearing aids and walk-in bathtubs tells you a lot," Shepard continues. "The current Gannett suitor, hedge-fund vehicle Digital First, has a reputation for fervent cost-cutting. It's hard to imagine what's left. This is hardly an Indy phenomenon. Gannett properties like the Courier & Press in Evansville and the Star Press in Muncie have depleted to the point where their editions feature much copy traded with each other, and of course, less news about events happening in the

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## The long battle

It's been a long battle. Will Higgins, who was sidelined by the IndyStar late last year, wrote in NUVO's 20th anniversary edition about the paper's early "situation dire" when he was editor there, to the point where he had to let go 13 of 26 news employees. "The newspaper industry is in flux at the moment," Higgins wrote in 2010. "But it's nothing compared to the stress of the early NUVO days. A brand new industry came our way – the phone sex pioneers, with their 1-900 numbers, cheesy entrepreneurs who preyed on the lonely, the sex-starved. They needed a place to advertise. We had a brief internal debate – very brief, actually – and took their money. "And we survived," Higgins wrote. "Then we started to thrive. A sense of confidence came over us. We would publish next week, and the next and the next. Now NUVO is a given. I'm proud of my role in the struggle. And what a struggle."

A struggle that ended last week, ironically, on the 30th anniversary of the world wide web.

When Howey Politics began publishing in 1994, there were probably 20 to 25 political columnists writing regularly across the state, from Rich James at the Post-Tribune to Dick Robinson at the Terre Haute Tribune-Star and Dale Moss and Mary Dieter with the Louisville Courier-Journal. Those ranks have shrunk to just a handful, myself and Jack Colwell in the South Bend Tribune, Marc Chase of the NWI Times, economist Morton Marcus in about 20 newspapers, Mark Bennett in Terre Haute, John Krull with the Statehouse File, and the IJB Forefront section, which has restored Mary Beth Schneider back to the ranks. HPI publishes James and Michael Hicks, yet another IndyStar refugee. These are the writers who, as they used to say, "know where the bodies are buried." We connect topical events of the day to the 1960s, '70s, '80s, '90s and the '00s.

## The thin gray line

This is the thin gray line. With Matt Tully's passing (and no replacement at the IndyStar mallpaper), as well as Amos Brown at the Indianapolis Recorder (with no prominent voice emerging there), with the end of the IndyStar's daily editorial page, and with newsrooms shrinking to the point where a newspaper in a 200,000 population county no longer has a court reporter or covers trials (think of the news we're not getting just on that front), Indiana is not too far away from losing the link between the past, present and future. In previous eras, young reporters and editors would replenish the ranks. Today, IU folded its journalism program. Current J programs send more graduates into flackdom as opposed to reporting and editing.

Politicians are already moving beyond the press. Pence declared for governor not with a press conference in 2011, but with a Facebook video. His brother, U.S. Rep. Greg Pence, and U.S. Rep. Trey Hollingsworth don't field

media calls.

When you ponder the collapse of the press, imagine how the methamphetamine or opioid crises might have been discovered and mitigated well before the public health data screamed us beginning in 2014? Well before the social costs mount into the tens of billions of dollars. We've gone through a generation of rare public corruption scandal at the Statehouse. But once the Bob Segalls and Rafael Sanchez of the world are sidelined (and what's happened to newspapers is about to happen to local network affiliates), once the watchdogs are put down, it's only a matter of time before corruption and acute political polarization follow.

Shepard asks the inevitable question: What are news consumers to do? He answers, "We can help the larger situation by paying attention to places where the news is actually improving. A stalwart that qualifies as broadcast and digital is Gerry Dick's Inside Indiana Business. The show on public broadcasting works alongside regular web postings. Supporters include law firms, banks and the Indiana Chamber. A formulation is being built by Indiana Public Broadcasting Stations, now led by Mark Newman. IPBS has added news staff to provide coverage offered through 17 stations serving most of the state's markets.

"We're also benefiting from stronger contributions from many broadcasters and Chalkbeat, and by players like Ed Feigenbaum, Brian Howey and Abdul-Hakim Shabbaz," Shepard observes.

## Golden era ends

Jack Colwell, who began reporting for the South Bend Tribune in the early 1960s, told HPI, "There is no going back to the Golden Era of newspaper journalism. Yet, there is desperate need for solid journalism to provide the facts vital for voters in a democracy and to alert the public to ignored crises and wrongdoing."

Colwell asks, "The answer? We search. We still have no answer. The first step is to draw attention to the problem and support real news, whether online, on TV or still in some places on the printed page."

Some talk of establishing not-for-profit journalism foundations, such as The Texas Tribune, the MinnPost in Minnesota and Voice of San Diego.com as a way of keeping a watchdog in place. Morton Marcus wonders about government-funded journalism, mentioning the BBC model and not so much Gov. Pence's "JustIN" state run news agency that some saw as a Fox News lite state propaganda site.

That day at Claude & Annie's came in a bygone era. Pence's boss, President Trump, has relegated much of us to "fake news" and "enemies of the people" while presidential adviser Kellyanne Conway talks of "alternative facts." What we can't fully understand or appreciate is with the watchdog in full retreat, when will there be a day of reckoning and how disruptive will it be? ❖

# Mayor Pete's CNN town hall gains him some traction

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS — Pete Buttigieg is a “one percenter.” No, he’s not a billionaire who received a mother-lode financial break in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. The South Bend mayor is at that threshold in the CNN/Des Moines Register Poll, with another 1% listing him as their second choice.



Essentially, the CNN/Register Poll’s value is that of the earliest 2020 name ID mileposts and not truly indicative of how this

Democratic presidential nomination race will unfold. But on Sunday night, Mayor Pete received an hour of primetime exposure during his CNN Town Hall with host Jake Tapper. The reaction within the Democratic Party was overwhelmingly positive.

David Axelrod, a key political aide to President Obama, tweeted, “I have rarely seen a candidate make better use of televised Town Hall than @PeteButtigieg is on @CNN tonight. Crisp, thoughtful and relatable. He’ll be a little less of a long shot tomorrow.”

The eastern press was in the same camp. MSNBC’s Joe Scarborough, a disavowed Republican, observed, “Mayor Pete is gifted and he’s more than this novelty act and this young candidate. I think he’s going to make some noise.”

“I feel like he’s a real candidate. Every time he opens his mouth, things get better,” said co-host Mika Brezinski. “I’m sort of waiting to see more.” Washington Post reporter and Notre Dame graduate Robert Costa added, “This Buttigieg town hall is worth watching. Polished and thoughtful presentation with clear answers. Underscores military experience. Of course, it’s a big field and he’s a young Midwestern mayor. But he’s using his time on stage effectively here. This is a focused candidate.”

Such fawning doesn’t mean there’s a mayoral juggernaut beginning to roll. It means he will likely get an earnest second look.

Buttigieg had the single biggest fundraising day of his 2020 campaign on Monday, according to an aide to the mayor, receiving a significant boost after a widely heralded performance during a CNN town hall. According to the Buttigieg aide, the mayor raised more than \$600,000 from over 22,200 donations in the 24 hours after the CNN town

hall. The mayor asked donors live on CNN to donate to his committee toward the end of his town hall. “I’m thrilled by the support we’ve received over the last day,” Buttigieg said. “We’re not accepting corporate PAC money and we don’t have the gilded fundraising base that comes with being a more established figure in Washington, so grassroots fundraising will be crucial for this effort.”

How did Buttigieg pull off this admiration?

On Friday in a second foray into New Hampshire, Buttigieg created a buzz by calling for an expanded U.S. Supreme Court and the abolition of the Electoral College.

By the time he took the stage in Austin, Tex., Sunday night, he used those issues and his emerging foil – fellow Hoosier Vice President Mike Pence – to burnish initial impressions for a widening swath of the dysfunctional Democratic family. He also approached gnawing issues such as automation and income inequality with a nuanced, hybrid approach.

**The biggest sparks that will** attract attention from Democratic primary voters were his comments on Pence. It’s a complicated relationship, with the former Indiana governor and the South Bend mayor actually forging a working relationship during the four years when both were Hoosier executives. Pence’s animosity toward an openly gay official never surfaced in that context, as the two had economic development bonds and a mutual affin-



ity for Pence’s Regional Cities initiative.

The mayor was asked about his origins from Pence’s Indiana. Buttigieg answered, “Please don’t judge my state by our former governor. I think those ties are so out of line from where anybody is.” Buttigieg said that Pence “divided our state” with his Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 2015. “It was really a license to discriminate, that’s what it was,” Buttigieg said, adding, the “amazing” reaction was pushback from Democratic and Republican mayors and the conservative business community. “My hope is that same decency can be summoned from communities in both red and blue states.”

**Asked whether Pence** would be better as president than Donald Trump, Buttigieg paused for a pregnant

moment that became fodder for the Monday morning news shows, then said, "Both. Does it have to be? I disagreed with him furiously on things. At least he believes in our institutions and is not corrupt. But how could he allow himself to get on board with this president? How does he become the biggest cheerleader for the porn star presidency? Is it that he stopped believing in scripture when he started believing in Donald Trump?"

That became the opening soundbite of the week. While Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Kristin Gillibrand and Amy Klobuchar were dealing with staffing and ancestral controversies, Buttigieg emerged as the new flavor that might bring about a long, second look. Pence-bashing in Democratic circles is vogue, and Mayor Pete has real world experience there.

**Buttigieg was** asked if he favored the impeachment of President Trump. "I would like to see this president and the style of politics he represents sent off through the electoral process, decisively defeated at the ballot box," Buttigieg responded. He added, "I come from the industrial Midwest and there were a lot of people who voted for him who voted for me and Barack Obama." But he wouldn't rule out pursuing impeachment if high crimes and misdemeanors are evident in the "imminent" Robert Mueller Russia probe.

On CNN and in New Hampshire, Buttigieg made it clear that the 2020 election is more than just a referendum on the current regime. "The 2020 election is about more than just the next four years and defeating Donald Trump," he explained. "It must address the seismic changes our nation is facing – both globally and at home – and ensure every American has the opportunity to succeed."

When a question on Venezuela came up, Navy Lt. Buttigieg pivoted toward his military career and took aim at the White House and National Security Advisor John Bolton over the Middle East. "The situation in Venezuela is highly disturbing. The regime lost its legitimacy," Buttigieg said. "That being said, that doesn't mean we carelessly threaten the use of military force, which it appeared the national security adviser was doing at one point. I don't understand how somebody leading us into the Iraq War is allowed that near the Situation Room to begin with."

**The mayor was asked** about his stance he revealed on Friday in New Hampshire when he called for an end to the Electoral College. "In an American presidential election, the person who gets the most votes should win," he said. "We ought to make sure everybody has the same voice. In Indiana, most years we have no voice at all."

He also called for adding seats to the U.S. Supreme Court, noting, "What we



need to do is stop the Supreme Court from sliding toward being viewed as a nakedly political institution. I'm for us contemplating whatever policy options will allow that to be possible. One of them involves having 15 instead of 9 justices, but I'm not just talking about suppose I get elected as president and daring the next president who might be conservative to throw on a couple more. That's the last thing we want to do. What we need to do is stop every vacancy from becoming this apocalyptic battle that harms the country."

Noting his marriage to his husband, Buttigieg added, "I'm married because of the grace of a single vote on the U.S. Supreme Court."

On the concept of Medicare for all, Buttigieg explained, "The ACA made a great difference, but it hasn't gotten us all the way there. In fact, it's under attack by the current administration. We need to explore Medicare for all." He describes it as making Medicare "available on the exchange as a public option. It will be more efficient and more cost-effective over time."

And on universal pay, the mayor said he was open to exploring the concept, noting that Stockton, CA., was giving \$400 to each resident. "Maybe we ought to broaden our definition of work," he said. "If you are taking care of a parent, or raising a child, isn't that work?"

**On climate change**, he explained, "To some extent we're already in adaptation mode. We've got to reduce carbon levels by the Paris Accords." He called for "more investment in renewables" and a "carbon tax," though he begged his audience to understand his more nuanced approach. "That cost is going to be paid, one way or another," he said.

His overall theme comes back to his eight-year tenure at the helm of South Bend. "The advances we've made in South Bend serve as a shining example at this point in our nation's history, especially when Americans have been offered a vision of greatness that means turning back the clock," he said. "We need big, bold policies that are shaped by what we want our country to look like generations from now. As a country, we're facing deep structural problems that can only be addressed by fix-



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ing the engine of our democracy. The reality is that every other important issue of our time, from gun violence to climate change to access to healthcare, isn't going to get better as long as our democracy remains warped. Our freedom depends on our ability to make bold changes."

**The Buttigieg campaign** now faces a two-and-a-half-month period where he will move out of exploratory mode. He will need to staff up. He will have to attract

enough donors in order to make the cut for the first party-sanctioned debates in June, with 11 others scheduled in the six months thereafter.

With septuagenarians Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders leading the early polling, Buttigieg will need to emerge as the youthful alternative in a field crowded with 40- and 50-something candidates in order to leave his "one per-center" status in the rear view mirror. ❖

## Trump's reelection prospects improve

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND — President Trump has been looking better. This isn't leading to some joke about more yellow in his unique hairdo. Nor is it satire. The president's chances for reelection have been looking better. Not great. Better.



It's true. His approval ratings, though certainly not sparkling, improved in polls after his State of the Union address, mistakenly thought by many Democrats to be a disaster for Trump.

And it wasn't just an overnight bump in ratings. An NBC/Wall Street Journal poll conducted at the end of February showed

Trump with an approval rating of 46%.

OK, disapproval was higher, 52%.

But remember when Trump's approval ratings were below 40%? And some pundits thought he was left with nothing but a base that was chipping away? That he couldn't climb beyond support by just a third of the voters?

The NBC/WSJ poll showed approval had climbed from 43 to 46% since January and disapproval had declined from 54 to 52%.

Most significant of all, the poll found that 88% of Republicans approved of the job Trump is doing. If Republican support remains so high – and Democrats wrangle and rupture over a Green New Deal or hard feelings from the primaries once again – Trump could win a second term.

**Prediction that he will win reelection?** No. Just saying that he could.

Trump faces serious woes with the work of Robert Mueller, investigations by House committees and continued revelations from Michael Cohen, his long-time fixer. A new poll showed Cohen is regarded by most Americans as more truthful than the president.

Yet, even if investigators find that "smoking gun," will his base believe it? And would over 80% of Repub-

licans, even though many don't condone his personal conduct, still find it better to vote for him rather than for a Democratic nominee allied with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and socialism?

Peter Hart, a Democratic pollster participating in the bipartisan NBC/WSJ survey, concluded: "It's 45-55 against the president at this stage of the game." Kind of like Trump's chances in some 2016 forecasts.

**Bill McInturff, a Republican** pollster also participating for NBC/WSJ, noted: "As long as these economic numbers look like this, that always keeps an incumbent president in the race."

An analyst for Sabato's Crystal Ball, projecting the Electoral College results that decide the presidency, found that the race starts with 248 electoral votes at least leaning Republican, 244 at least leaning Democratic and 46 votes in the toss-up category.

It could be close.

The NBC/WSJ poll also asked a question that sheds some light on why Trump improved in ratings after the State of the Union address and on the reason for his strategy of denouncing socialism and blaming it for the chaos in Venezuela.

When asked the least desirable characteristics for a presidential candidate, the voters offered almost no objections to an African-American or a woman and not much concern about a person who is gay or lesbian. The most objectionable characteristics by far were being over 75, with 62% citing that as negative, and being a socialist, with 72% turned off by that.

As Nate Silver, guru of electoral results prognosticating, put it: "Socialist goals (e.g. greater income redistribution) are often quite popular. But 'socialism' as a brand or label is really unpopular."

**Really, really, really unpopular** with the Republicans Trump will need to keep in his camp in order to prevail again in the Electoral College, even if he again loses the popular vote nationally.

Trump looking better? Well, he had been. But a new sampling, a Quinnipiac poll released Tuesday, showed he could be slipping again after the Cohen revelations. His approval was down to 38% in that poll.

Still, it showed Republican approval solid at 82%, a key to possible Electoral College survival. ❖

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

# INGOP hears a scorched earth Trump reelection strategy

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Hoosier Republicans got a preview of what can only be described as the coming scorched earth reelection campaign of President Trump and Vice President Pence from the ultimate insiders, Cory Lewandowski and Dave Bossie. Along with moderator Marty Obst, the pair laid out a nihilistic vision for the upcoming reelection campaign should the president survive the

Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia collusion report.

"The president is going to dismantle whoever the Democrats put up," said Bossie at Monday night's Indiana Republican Spring Dinner at the JW Marriott. "I believe in operation chaos. I'm going to impact every Democrat right up through the convention. I hope they pick Bernie Sanders, then you're going to see capitalism versus socialism."

Lewandowski was the first Trump insider. Bossie helped Trump narrow the vice presidential list from "16 or 17" to Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, then prepped the Republican nominee for his debates with Democrat nominee Hillary Clinton. The pair have written two books about the Trump era and are now preparing for nothing less than a 2020 Trumpian jihad.

With the Mueller investigation report "imminent," Bossie made it clear he wants the entire thing released. "We demand the Mueller report be made public," Bossie said to a smattering of applause. "We deserve to see. We're going to see the two sets of rules. One set of rules for Donald Trump and one for everybody else."

**In the view of Bossie** and Lewandowski, the Deep State has been at work. "Trump was never supposed to win. This was never supposed to be uncovered," Bossie declared. In his view, the "this" was a "treasonous" coalition of the FBI from Director James Comey, Rod Rosenstein to Andrew McCabe, Peter Stroz, and Lisa Page, along with former CIA Directors John Brennan and James Clapper, who ignored what they called the "crimes" of Hillary Clinton. At one point, Lewandowski declared, "Rod Rosenstein is a bad guy. They abuse their power because they don't like our politics. If you think that Comey and Clapper and Brennan and Barack Obama didn't know about it, you're naive."



"If I did it to them, it would be treason," Lewandowski continued. "Trump was never supposed to win. This was never supposed to be uncovered. That's what's going on."

Not only do they believe Rosenstein, the Republican deputy FBI director who ordered the Mueller probe days after Trump fired Comey, is a villain, but former national security advisor Mike Flynn "is an American patriot and a hero, and they did a number on him," Bossie said.

**Describing Flynn as a "hero"** was an odd twist in Vice President Mike Pence's Indiana GOP. Flynn was fired just weeks into the Trump administration, for lying to Pence over contacts he had with the Russians during the Trump transition, which was headed by Pence. Flynn has "flipped" as a cooperative witness for Mueller and faces sentencing for felony crimes.

The rollicking pair regaled the 800 or so Hoosiers in attendance with the 2016 Trump campaign. Bossie described the "mid-August" pivot from campaign chairman Paul Manafort (now a convicted felon) to Steve Bannon and Kellyanne Conway. "I was doing strategic planning and debate preparation," Bossie said. "I knew Hillary Clinton." He credited former Indiana congressman Dan Burton's House Oversight investigations of Clinton in the 1990s for Trump's ability to smear the former first lady.

"I had help from Dan Burton," Bossie said. "He



took the slings and arrows in the 1990s as chair of House Oversight. He was a key source in 2016, when Trump was trying to tell us how corrupt Hillary Clinton was, how bad Bill Clinton was."

He then mentioned the "Billy Bush weekend," in reference to the October 2016 "Access Hollywood" tape that surfaced, many believing it would doom the Trump campaign after the billionaire was heard talking about grabbing women "by their pussy."

**"We're going into that debate ...** everybody says it's over and the candidate went on stage and delivered a massive blow," Bossie said. "We brought in all the women who had accused Bill Clinton before. It upset the whole entire Clinton operation. It was so effective. He was willing to do those things to make sure the Clintons had to

pay for the things they had done in the past. It was 99.9% Donald J.Trump. Cory and me did .01%.”

It turned out to be the most unusual GOP spring dinner since First Lady Cheri Daniels regaled Republicans with stories of the Indiana State Fair as Gov. Mitch Daniels pondered a presidential run. Had that happened, there might never have been a “President Trump.” But this was a polar opposite to Cheri Daniels describing milking cows by hand and flipping pancakes. Today’s Republicans learned about “that freaky lookin’ dude” (Carter Page) and how “Lynin’ Ted” Cruz (now a Senate ally of President Trump) had defeated their man in the Iowa caucuses.

Lewandowski also described Pence emerging from a list of “16 to 17” candidates. He reached out to a “mutual” friend of Pence in Indiana, learned the Pences were driving their daughter to college. Told of the ticket potential, Mike and Karen “wanted to pray on it it.” Lewandowski asked, “How long does this take? Does he have a direct line to God? Donald Trump wants it in two minutes.”

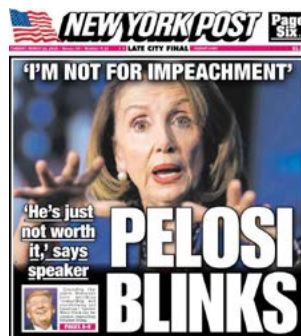
The assumption here is that Pence probably signed off on Bossie and Lewandowski appearing at the Indiana dinner Monday night. Hoosier Republicans heard a presentation unlike any other. When Bossie and Lewandowski concluded, there was understated, polite applause.

### Trump says Dems ‘hate Jewish people’

At an RNC fundraising event at Mar-a-Lago Friday night, Axios reported that President Trump cited recent anti-Semitism controversies with Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar, saying, “The Democrats hate Jewish people.” Trump said he didn’t understand how any Jew could vote for a Democrat these days. Trump talked about how much he’d done for Israel, noting his historic decision to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Trump said if he could run to be prime minister of Israel, he’d be at 98% in the polls, according to three sources who were there. Trump went off on what one guest called a “bizarre tangent.” He described being home alone in the White House over Christmas “while the Democrats were in Hawaii.”

### Pelosi won’t pursue impeachment

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) said she doesn’t support pursuing the impeachment of President Trump, saying such a step would be too divisive and the Democratic Party should focus instead on winning back the White House in 2020 (Wall Street Journal). “I’m not for impeachment,” Mrs. Pelosi said in a Washington Post interview published Monday. “Impeachment is so divisive to the country that unless there’s something so compelling and overwhelming and bipartisan, I don’t think we should go down that path, because



it divides the country. And he’s just not worth it.” Asked about critics’ concerns about the Trump presidency, she said the country “can withstand anything. But maybe not two [Trump] terms. So we have to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Asked if she believes Trump fit to be president? Pelosi responded, “Are we talking ethically? Intellectually? Politically? What are we talking here?” All — “All of the above. No. No. I don’t think he is. I mean, ethically unfit. Intellectually unfit. Curiosity-wise unfit. No, I don’t think he’s fit to be president of the United States.”

### Democrats pick Milwaukee for DNC

The Democratic Party has picked Milwaukee to hold its 2020 national convention, choosing to nominate its challenger to President Trump in the battleground state of Wisconsin (Wall Street Journal). Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez announced Monday that Milwaukee would play host to the convention from July 13-16, 2020. The Midwest city was selected over Houston and Miami. Republicans will hold their convention in Charlotte, N.C., from Aug. 24-27, 2020. Wisconsin holds special meaning for Democrats after the 2016 election. Mr. Trump stunned Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton in the state, which hadn’t voted for a Republican presidential candidate since 1984, and narrowly defeated Mrs. Clinton in the two other “Blue Wall” states of Pennsylvania and Michigan.

### Mayors

#### Merritt posts ‘Pothole Joe’ video

A new video by Chuck and the Holes immortalizes Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett and the well-known road problems that Indianapolis residents deal with day in and day out. The song, “Pothole Joe,” tells the fictional story of how one Indianapolis couple is forced to cope with the city’s disastrous pothole problem. The video can found at [ChuckAndTheHoles.com](http://ChuckAndTheHoles.com).

#### Times endorses Prince for Gary mayor

The [NWITimes](http://NWITimes) endorsed Lake County Assessor Jerome Prince for the Gary Democratic mayoral nomination. Prince is one of eight Democrats running against Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson. “Prince is the candidate best poised for the top-down change the struggling city needs,” the Times editorialized. “A look at Gary’s crumbling neighborhoods, unacceptably high crime rates and shambles of municipal finances should be enough to convince any Gary voter a change is needed at the top. Prince is an accomplished public servant who brings the freshness the entire Region should get behind. Prince has been the elected Lake County assessor for five years, bringing a credentialed professionalism to the way our county’s property values are calculated.” ❖



# Bias crime, teacher pay to headline second half of legislature

By JACOB CURRY

INDIANAPOLIS — The Indiana General Assembly has now moved fully into the latter half of its legislative session this year, with the crossover bills now having received their committee assignments and the first batch beginning to hit second reading. That means legislators will soon be feeling the squeeze of final deadlines in April.

While the Republican super majorities make the whole process a little more straightforward, there are still some hot button issues that the GOP will need to work out. In particular, Gov. Eric Holcomb, Speaker of the House Brian Bosma, and Senate President Pro Tempore Rod Bray have displayed disagreement over the passage of a bias crime law and a comprehensive gaming bill, but will also need to see to it that their party's efforts to raise teacher pay don't raise the ire of Hoosier educators.

## Bias crimes bill

Two weeks ago, Holcomb offered his fellow Republicans a new option to tackle the hate crimes issue as he spoke to the press. Installing the federal code's language into state sentencing guidelines, he said, would adequately fulfill the goal of getting Indiana off the list of five states without hate crime laws. "And we will do nothing new – nothing that's not already illegal," the governor added.

Don't put your money on legislators buying into that. All eyes are on the House as Senate Bill 12 now sits awaiting a Courts and Criminal Code Committee hearing, and House Republicans have been pretty reluctant to use that type of specific, list-based language all session.

Before Holcomb's press conference, Speaker Bosma had already indicated that Rep. Gregory Steuerwald's approach – which is fairly similar, at least in spirit, to what the amended bill looks like – was in his view a passable compromise. Last week, he said he didn't find the federal language option to be any better.

What does that mean?

Well, Steuerwald's original bias crimes bill,

HB1093, adds to possible sentencing aggravation a consideration of whether a person committed the crime "with bias and with the intent to harm: (A) an individual; (B) a group of individuals; (C) the property of an individual; or (D) the property of a group of individuals; because of the individual's or the group's real or perceived characteristic, trait, belief, practice, association, or other attribute the court chooses to consider." By the way, if you're thinking that sounds like a list, Bosma has referred to it in the past as "a description of categories."

If SB12 ends up getting amended in the fashion of HB1093, then it would certainly be more than the "two lines and a comma" approach that SB12's current opponents have lamented. Still, the governor's earlier remarks, and of course the remarks of Democratic lawmakers, suggest that there's still the question of vagueness of terms and whether or not this change would get Indiana off "the list."

The governor says he's ready to handle the disagreement with his fellow party members, saying, "We're not drones, we don't agree on 100% of everything. That's the beauty of this building and the conversations that mature over time." Once he returns from his nine-day trade mission in Europe, Holcomb will have to keep the conversation open with his own political capital and appeals to the public, which will surely be something to watch for in coming weeks.

## Schools and teacher pay

As always, education has been a top priority in this year's session, but the issue of teacher pay has been especially important. Of course, that's not just because it's becoming increasingly apparent that Indiana is lagging behind its neighbors in this area, but also because we've seen the issue flare up nationally in recent years. A teacher walkout like the one that took place in Arizona in 2018 probably won't be on lawmakers' list of desired outcomes, though Speaker Bosma told reporters that such an occurrence wouldn't necessarily sway him.

"Hopefully, we don't have any of that," Bosma said. "I think it just complicates it, probably makes it harder to make progress on the issue," he said, then added a reference to protests against Indiana's Right-to-Work law. "By the way, 15,000 screaming union guys outside my window here and a couple hundred at my house didn't stop us from doing the right thing. So, we're going to find the right place to land on this issue regardless."

For now, the hopeful quick-fix solutions look like they're in a strong position going into the second half. Hol-



comb's proposal to spend \$150 million to fully fund teacher pension obligations worked its way into the House budget bill and hasn't met much opposition in the Senate either. HB1003, which sets expenditure targets of no more than 15% of schools' education funds going toward operation costs, has also enjoyed strong support from Republicans. HB1003 is up for a hearing in the Education and Career Development Committee on Wednesday of this week.

Also in the budget are increases to total school funding of 2.1% in FY 2019 and 2.2% in FY 2020. That's slightly above the typical 2% mark for annual inflation, but the Senate apparently hasn't ruled out increasing those figures. "I think we want to at least be there," Sen. Bray told reporters, "whether or not we can get higher or not we're going to have to take a look at." Like with HB1003, the hope is that school corporations could take the extra money and put it toward teacher pay increases, but there would be no guarantee of that.

Still, with advocates from ISTA (and some teachers, like the 'Red for Ed' protestors at the Statehouse last Saturday) telling legislators that the current proposals don't constitute a lasting, satisfying fix, there's a lot of pressure building. Republicans are looking to study committees and task forces to find long-term solutions after

this session, and will be hoping the promise of future fixes will help them smoothly navigate these final two months.

### Gaming bill

Speaker Bosma's comments two weeks ago on the comprehensive gaming bill, SB552, suggested that it might be facing an uphill battle in the House. At least the casino portion of the bill, which the speaker said he considers a "major expansion of gaming." That alone is an alarm that there's some reluctance in the Republican caucus on that front, but when added with the recent talk of possibly splitting the bill, it's easy to think there's a lot of work left ahead.

The bill addresses two issues, one dealing with casinos and relocation and the other with legalizing sports wagering, which have largely been discussed apart from one another throughout the session. Whether the bill will be split to allow only certain parts of it to survive, or to simply facilitate in-depth discussions on all aspects of the bill, or whether it will be split at all will ultimately be up to the House Committee on Public Policy, chaired by Rep. Ben Smaltz.

Whatever the committee's decision may be, it's not is if SB552 is dead in the water. Bray and 28 members

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of his caucus didn't have the same hang-ups when they voted in late February, and the bill also received unanimous support from Democrats. It's been lauded as an economic boost for the city of Gary and Vigo County with the casino relocations, and for the state as a whole with sports wagering. So, proponents of the bill are bound to push back against the apprehension from some in the House.

### Redistricting

A single bill aims to rewrite a few standards for district-drawing before it begins again in 2021: Senate Bill 105. That bill barely passed the Senate by a two-vote margin, however, so there's good reason to doubt its chances of survival. The bill's House sponsor and Commit-

tee on Elections and Apportionment Chair Rep. Tim Wesco told HPI he has concerns himself. In an email, Wesco said that the bill would need "major revisions" if it moves in the House and seems concerned that it "only had minority Republican support" in the Senate vote.

That gives the impression the bill is in a tough spot and may not even receive a committee hearing, let alone a floor vote. If it does get that far, it's clear that it would look quite different at its final stage though those potential changes haven't come into focus just yet. Still, whatever the fate of SB105 will be this session, it's to be expected that the 2021 redistricting process won't be radically different from 2011's. ❖

## Talk about strange bedfellows on bias bill

By RICH JAMES

MERRILLVILLE — Talk about strange bedfellows. The Indiana Black Legislative Caucus and Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb are in lockstep on a bias crime bill.



The Democratic legislators have joined Holcomb in his quest to have the Indiana House restore a list of protected classes to a bias crime bill. Such a bill would give victims substantially more standing in court.

The bill would protect all Hoosiers regardless of race, religion, sex,

gender identity, disability, national origin, ancestry, age or sexual orientation.

Those classes were in the bill until a private meeting of Republican senators took them out and made the legislation rather generic.

**Let there be no** doubt that what the senators wanted out of the bill was the term "sexual orientation." It all brings me back to when Mike Pence was governor of Indiana and desperately fought the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual community.

He even went on television and embarrassed himself while trying to appear unbiased.

It's no wonder Pence ended up being a pawn for Donald Trump who is

one of the most prejudiced presidents in the history of the country.

If legislators ignore the governor and the black Democrats and pass a meaningless bias crime bill, Indiana will remain one of five states in the nation without a bias crime statute.

**We can be thankful** Holcomb is governor or Indiana wouldn't have a chance to join the 45 other states who care enough about their residents to have adopted a bias crime bill that means something.

Holcomb continues to amaze Democrats who often see him as one of their own on key issues. ❖

**Rich James has been writing about politics and government for 40 years. He is retired from the Post-Tribune, a newspaper born in Gary.**

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# IU research suggests ineffective hate laws

## Howey Politics Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS — New research from Indiana University suggests that bias crimes laws might not be very effective, at least when it comes to homicides (Er-dody, [IBJ](#)). The report, released Monday morning by the IU Public Policy Institute Center for Research on Inclusion and Social Policy, says that even in states where bias crimes laws that specifically list victim groups exist, charges relating to bias are often not pursued. The center analyzed data from the Bias Homicide Database on 409 homicides

that occurred between 1990 and 2016 to determine how often bias charges were sought on behalf of the victim groups. Indiana is one of five states without a hate crimes law, and state lawmakers are considering legislation that

would allow judges to enhance a penalty at sentencing if a crime is committed due to a bias. The bill initially included a list of victim groups that the law would apply to, but Senate Republicans stripped the list from the language before passing it last month. House leaders have already said there is little desire to re-insert the list. Despite Gov. Eric Holcomb's including hate crimes legislation on his top priorities for the session, some Republican lawmakers have also questioned whether Indiana needs such a law. The IU study questions the effectiveness of having such protections in place. It found that in 70% of the homicides identified as bias-related, bias charges were not filed. Most of those homicides, 91%, were considered anti-sexual orientation/gender identity or anti-race/ethnicity, but those cases only represented 35% of the bias charges filed.

## CIB/Pacer deal likely after session

The president of the Capital Improvement Board said negotiations on a 25-year deal with the Indiana Pacers are progressing, but a pact that finalizes the city's financial commitment to Bankers Life Fieldhouse is likely months away (Shuey, [IBJ](#)). That could push a deal past the scheduled April 29 adjournment of the Indiana legislative session, although CIB President Melina Kennedy said negotiators are aiming to finish by then. State lawmakers are debating whether to dedicate \$15 million a year over the next quarter century toward fieldhouse upgrades, which are expected to cost well over \$100 million, as well as improvements CIB wants in other facilities it owns. The legislation requires CIB to sign a 25-year deal with the Pacers to receive that revenue. "We want to make sure we have a long-term

agreement with the Pacers, but we aren't going to rush it," Kennedy said. In fact, negotiations are expected to miss an April 1 deadline for a deal outlined in the bill approved by the Indiana Senate and now under consideration in the House. Missing the mark by a few weeks, or even a few months, isn't expected to jeopardize the bill's status. Rep. Todd Huston, R-Fishers, who is sponsoring Senate Bill 7 in the House, said he views the deadline as more of a suggestion, saying it could be shifted if the Pacers and CIB are nearing a deal. Huston said he and his colleagues would like to see at least the framework of a deal before voting on the bill. But the timing of the 2019 General Assembly means the House will likely have to move on the bill without that. The approach taken by Huston differs from that of the bill's author, Sen. Ryan Mishler, R-Bremen, who emphasized the April 1 deadline in public and private conversations and floor hearings.

## Opposition to payday loan bill

A coalition of veterans, church leaders and advocacy groups gathered at the Statehouse Monday to oppose legislation that would expand subprime lending in Indiana (Horton, [Indiana Public Media](#)). They say these loans are targeted at -- and hurt -- those who protect the nation. In 2007, President George W. Bush signed the Military Lending Act, which put a 36% cap on payday loans for active-duty military members. Legislation now in the Indiana House would create two new types of loans with interest rates well above that. In fact, the interest rates are above what the state defines as felony loan sharking. However, Hoosier veterans say the law doesn't protect them, reservists, or the Coast Guard. Purple Heart recipient Steven Bramer Jr. says he was victimized by a payday lender. "There are many of us that have fought and bled and died for this country," Bramer says. "Please don't forget about us. I protected you at one point, now it's time for you to protect me. If Senate Bill 613 becomes law, I predict Indiana will move close, if not to be number one, the worst state in the nation for bankruptcies," Bauerle says.

## Holcomb at NATO, then Germany

Gov. Eric Holcomb paid a visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels before heading to Germany. NATO Ambassador Kay Bailey Hutchison tweeted, "I welcomed @Gov-Holcomb to @USNATO yesterday and discussed #Indiana's support of @NATO providing security & stability to the transatlantic region. Indiana's citizen soldiers contribute to @USNationalGuard's State Partnership Program in #Slovakia." ❖



# Shiny objects & felons in the homestretch

By **LINDA CHEZEM**

MARTINSVILLE – “Round and round it goes, where it stops, nobody knows” is a line from the “Major Bowes Original Amateur Hour.”



Kris Kristofferson sings a mighty fine song about not knowing where she stops. Sometimes not knowing where it stops is OK. But for law and policy, not so much! Our Spidey Sense should be tingling as the Indiana General Assembly works on its second-half pass. Other than knowing sine die will happen, who knows what we will have when the lawmakers stop? We do not know what the final version of a bill will be. Which of the shiny object bills will go to

the governor? What will the consequences be if those bills are signed into law?

“Shiny object” is a label for a bill that seems to accomplish something that sounds good to the public but either does nothing, costs more than it’s worth, or is detrimental in some way no one considered. For example, Senate Bill 36 is a shiny object bill that passed with a vote of 40 yeas and 9 nays to create an Indiana felony registry.

How can anyone expect a legislator to vote against something that voters believe will “protect” them from felons? The appearance of doing something against crime gives shine to the bill, but the public does not know the extent of the information already available from Indiana courts’ case management system, Odyssey. Never mind the fact that Odyssey already provides more detailed information than the proposed registry will.

I disagree with the recent letter to the editor of the Indianapolis Star that alleged “the intent of Head’s registry is to weaponize felony records in the service of public shaming.” A more likely and more fair assumption is that Sen. Randy Head was asked to carry the bill and he was acting in “good guy” mode.

**I really do not believe** the thought of weaponizing felony records would even occur to most people, politicians or otherwise. Indiana legislators (with maybe a couple of exceptions) are not nefarious folk, plotting against the interests of Hoosier voters. The ones I know and talk to are hardworking and sincere about doing good for the rest of us.

The House could do better to understand who pleads guilty to felonies these days and why those pleas are entered before setting up a new shiny object. Felony pleas are not just entered from robbers, murders, rapists,

and bad actors.

In Indiana, for someone with an alcohol or drug abuse problem or a mental illness, accepting a guilty plea may be their only path to access treatment services. Failure to examine the unintended consequences of the registry could be exacerbated by the passage of another shiny object bill that is seemingly unrelated. House Bill 1615 amends Indiana penalty for animal abuse from a Class A misdemeanor to a Level 6 felony (I.C. 35-46-3-12).

**If both bills become law**, it is likely that guilty pleas to felonies by people suffering from the mental illness of hoarding (Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition) will increase. Cruelty to people with disabilities is not acceptable, and stigmatizing those defendants with mental illness by listing them on a felony registry is not innocuous.

Do not misunderstand this comment. I am not in favor of animal abuse. I would never put my dog in a pet purse where it cannot freely move its limbs. Nor do I think a felony registry should prey on the mentally ill. Anecdotally, I know that many of the 500 or so animal abuse and neglect cases that are filed in Indiana each year involve hoarding.

A felony registry is a poor use of taxpayer funded resources. If SB36 is intended for employers to use as a subterfuge to refuse to hire former offenders, it makes a joke of the “ban the box” Senate Bill 312 and the executive order signed by Gov. Eric Holcomb in 2017. Actually, this whole discussion leads to questions beyond my allotted word count.

Indiana needs a good study of mental illness and the justice system. Many of the published studies that I have reviewed were based on a funding agenda that impeded their usefulness. Those studies are not valid to inform effective legislation and policy for the justice system. So, we stumble from shiny object law to shiny object policy. The real people who are trying to live in this justice system fantasy land are set up for failure. Throwing money at the justice system problems is foolhardy because there will never be enough money without a more informed approach to the systems. The lack of understanding of the role of mental illness and drug abuse in the justice system costs us all, big time. The combined effect of SB8 and HB1615, although seemingly innocuous, would bring unintended cruelty toward vulnerable populations of the mentally ill and drug and alcohol dependent. This surely does not reflect the kindheartedness of Hoosiers.

**Simply ditching the** felony registry and HB1615’s felony penalties would provide not only a kinder and better use of resources but lend integrity to the “ban the box” policy promoted by Gov. Holcomb. ❖

**Chezem is a former Indiana Appellate Court judge and practices law in Martinsville. She writes on legal and agriculture issues for HPI.**

# Lessons from the economic conference

By **MICHAEL HICKS**

MUNCIE — I spent much of last week at the policy meeting of the National Association of Business Economics in Washington, D.C. The theme of the conference was the dual considerations of promoting global economic



growth and domestic economic security. So, it should come as little surprise that discussions of short-run economic projections, trade wars, tax cuts and the underlying factors that cause economic growth dominated the agenda.

I'm not a business economist, but I was heartened by how much focus on the longer-term growth seemed to worry most of the crowd. American business

seems to suffer perennial critiques of its focus on short-run profits, but the talk last week among business economists was almost wholly about the absence of solid long-run economic growth. I could not visit all the talks, but found two elements very intriguing, and worth sharing in this column.

There was a lot of discussion about the debt, the deficit and recent tax cuts. Nearly all the speakers warned about continued deficit spending, but were split on how much deficit reduction should come from tax cuts and entitlement reforms. Nearly all favored some of both.

Paul Krugman argued that the current very low interest rates made case for more borrowing on some key items like infrastructure improvement. He pointed out that Japan's debt-to-GDP ratio was more than twice ours. He noted that as long as we borrowed in our own currency the drag of debt repayment was less than the benefit of infrastructure spending. He did acknowledge the political difficulty of this point, along with dismissing Modern Monetary Theory, which has been used to argue a free lunch in deficit spending.

**Nearly all the macroeconomic** discussion centered around the current very slow economic growth, which has averaged just 2.2% since the end of the Great Recession. The very real puzzle over slow wage growth also lacks a consensus opinion. At least two speakers, including Alan Greenspan, attributed the current rise of populism on the left and right to the astonishingly slow economic growth that has gripped us for more than a decade.

The trouble with these macroeconomic musings is the lack of data from which to draw robust conclusions. Theory is important, but not conclusive. That is far less a

problem in micro economics, and I thought the discussions of economic growth most interesting when micro economists outlined their research.

The condition of state budgets was an interesting session. Many states are struggling with revenues after nine years of growth. While a small share of states face deep structural problems with pension debt, nearly everyone struggles to add money to education or health care. That is uniformly disappointing after nine years in economic recovery.

**A session on manufacturing** outlined how slow productivity growth has been in the post-recession years. This has caused employment to grow in the short run, but makes sustained employment growth in factories highly unlikely. That should be cause for concern across the Midwest.

My favorite session was the one from which I learned the most. It featured Susan Dynarski and Susan Helper, two well-known economics professors who research human capital. They spoke mostly about post-secondary educational outcomes. Dynarski rebutted much of the current belief in a "college bubble." She explained how and why college attendance and graduation levels were too low, and that the U.S. failed to make college access sufficiently available to lower income students. It was a very refreshing antidote to many of the popular, but data-starved arguments that the U.S. has too many college graduates.

I continue to argue that since nearly all wage and employment growth is accruing to college graduates, that should be an obvious point. Dynarski framed the discussion differently, pointing out how much human capital was left on the table through unequal college access. It was a strong point, clearly supported by her research and others. Susan Helper added a helpful rebuttal to the falsity of "too much education."

**Explaining that nearly every job** benefits from more formal education, she used the agriculture example. Today, the majority of farmers in the world are barely literate, often producing only a few hundreds of dollars of food each year. In the most agriculturally productive country on earth, most farmers have a bachelor's degree, and master's degrees are common. Education can improve productivity in any profession. My hour spent listening to these women made the trip well worth my time.

I left the conference believing that there was much agreement among economists on the concerns of the day, and surprising consensus on remedies. I'm equally convinced that there's no political agreement on the problems, much less the solutions. That has me expecting much more of the same in the years to come. ❖

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# More happy news about Hoosier workers

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Here’s another bundle of happy news about Indiana’s workers. This time it covers a 10-year span, including both the recession and the recovery. We’ll compare Indiana’s labor force in 2007 with 2017. Yes, it would be more interesting to use 2018 data, but they are being checked and prepared for distribution.



**Happy item #1:** Of Indiana’s 92 counties, 88 have seen their number of unemployed persons decrease by a combined total of 30,700.

**Happy item #2:** Only four counties (Hamilton, Porter, Hendricks, and Boone) saw the number unemployed increase. So small were these few increases that they totaled only 1,100 persons. It was also these four counties that led the state in increased employment and increased labor force. Were these small increases in the number unemployed just a timing factor as many people flocked to these counties where job growth was so plentiful?

**Happy item #3:** The number of employed Hoosiers increased in 50 counties by 178,300. Boone had a 26% increase, Hamilton 25%, Steuben 24.8%. Also enjoying increases of 15% or more were Gibson, LaGrange and Decatur.

**Question #1:** Was the state’s economy healthy when 42 counties saw a decrease in the number of employed persons? Five counties (Orange, Jay, Blackford, Owen and Warren) each had losses of 15% or more in the number employed. Most people will be able to tell you what

happens in a growing county. Is it worth examining what happens in places where the number employed is decreasing?

**Happy item #4:** The labor force in 43 counties grew by a total 160,200 persons. This increase was less than the 177,000 growth in the number employed. This means the number unemployed in those counties fell by 16,800.

**Question #2:** Why did the labor force in 49 Indiana counties decline by a total of 47,400? Did these people move where the jobs were available or did they give up on finding a job, and why?

**Happy item #5:** The rate of unemployment statewide fell from 4.6% to 3.5% and declined in 89 Indiana counties. Porter, Warren and Switzerland alone had higher unemployment rates in ‘17 than in ‘07.

**Question #3:** Do counties matter? Should we focus on the state as a whole and not worry about disparities among counties? Labor is mobile, can adjust to changing conditions, and is not constrained by county lines. Perhaps a regional approach is more consistent with reality.

**Question #4:** Does such thinking neglect fundamental aspects of worker preferences? Does the labor market reflect family and community ties?

**Happy item #6:** Our Indiana economic or workforce regions are composed of counties. Therefore, regional data are easily aggregated from available county data.

**Question #5:** Are our Indiana regions based on administrative fatigue rather than the best model for forming regions?

Discuss these questions with a stranger. They are guaranteed to build friendships. ❖

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# What's the most important thing to be doing today?

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – It's been many decades now, but I still remember a piece of advice I got not long after entering Congress. It came in passing from a prominent journalist as we were talking about the bewildering array of issues Congress faced. Every day, he told me, I should ask myself a simple question: "What's the most important thing to be doing today?"



He was raising what may be the toughest problem in politics, though it's one you don't really confront until you take office: What do you focus on at any given moment?

Sometimes this is easy to answer. The 9/11 attacks occur, and the whole country turns to an agenda rising from that event. A river floods in your home district, and you put everything aside to deal with the problems created in towns and cities along its banks.

But in ordinary times, when we have the luxury of addressing every other pressing issue we face, legislators at all levels of government are confronted each day by a single, uncomfortable question: Am I doing what I most need to be doing right now? For the number of challenges facing policymakers is simply staggering.

Let's just look at the federal level, and start with the economic ones. At any given time, they're wrestling with:

- The economic growth rate;
- The need to provide broad-based economic opportunity;
- The perception, and often the reality, that too many Americans are being left behind;
- The challenge that adults today feel less likely to earn as much as their parents, and see a similar fate for their children;
- The need for investment in schools, hospitals, highways and other infrastructure;
- Annual deficits and a federal debt that has grown out of control;
- Appropriate levels of taxation.

Domestic policy challenges are no less daunting:

- Immigration and civil rights protections;
- The quality and availability of health care;
- The cost of higher education;

Third, there's a set of foreign-policy questions that

seem without end:

- Climate change;
- Cyberattacks and election meddling;
- Hostile powers like North Korea and Iran;
- Powerful adversaries such as Russia and

China;

- Global challenges such as environmental degradation and nuclear proliferation;
- Terrorism;
- The constant powder keg of the Middle East.

Finally, the political challenges:

- Uncertainty about whether our political system can meet the challenges confronting it;
- The disintegration of the political center;
- The weakening of political institutions;
- The depressing quality of political discourse;
- The difficulty of arriving at a common set of agreed-upon facts, let alone the possibility of building political consensus;
- Deep political divisions and our inability to negotiate and compromise.

This is just a partial list. And even so, it's hard not to feel overwhelmed.

Moreover, these are the same problems we faced last year, and we'll face them again in 2020. Many are intractable, impossible to solve. The best we can do is manage them, chipping away year by year.

In a very real way, the depth and breadth of the many challenges we face show the depth and breadth of America's abilities and ambitions. They are a symbol of all we have done and all we are trying to achieve. They also ought to create some sympathy for our policymakers, who sit down with an impossible agenda every day and try to make progress on it.

**So, how do they establish** priorities? The plain fact is that you can't solve problems like these alone. You need to find a lot of people who agree with you about them, and can agree on approaches to resolving them. So, it's not simply a matter of asking oneself, "What do I think our biggest problem is?" It's also, "What do I think is the biggest problem I can make progress on?" The answer involves the opinions of a lot of other people as well.

In short, my journalist friend was on the mark. Maybe the best you can do each day is ask yourself, "Am I putting my energy where it ought to be right now?"

It's what makes governing such a bewildering, challenging job. It's also what lies at its heart. ❖

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**Pat Rynard, Iowa Starting Line:** Even in an incredibly crowded 2020 field, there's plenty of ways that Pete Buttigieg, mayor of a mid-sized Midwestern city, stands out: he's young, gay, and an Afghanistan War veteran. But his first appearances in Iowa after his presidential campaign announcement were noteworthy in a much more simple way: how bluntly and honestly he answered questions. The South Bend, Indiana mayor kicked off his well-attended events in Ames and Grinnell on Friday with a very short stump speech (possibly too short, actually, for this early in the race for a little-known contender) before diving right into questions. The party activist and college student crowds that turned out in spite of the zero-degree weather had plenty on their mind. "It's a big field, there is a chance you might not win," one man asked early on at an Ames coffee shop. "What impact do you want to have?" "That was very diplomatic," Buttigieg joked in his response. "Because there is a chance we might not win, it gives us a kind of pressure, but I think it also gives us some permission, to be a little bolder in our thinking ... This is a season for big ideas, this is a season for bold initiatives. And I think the bigger and bolder various candidates are, the more it puts those stakes on a very big field and lets voters choose what makes the most sense." And that mindset certainly permeated throughout most of his interactions with Iowa caucus-goers. Buttigieg often took questions presented to him at face value, sometimes seeming to think about the topic for the first time and formulate his opinion on the go. It may seem silly to deem Buttigieg's candid responses as noteworthy, but go to enough Iowa Caucus events and you'll see candidate after candidate who pivots every single question back to a very specific, pre-set talking point. The Iowans who listened to Buttigieg seemed to notice it, with several students saying he seemed "genuine" and "real" afterward. For the multitude of candidates who begin the 2020 race as long-shots, they'll all need some sort of moment to break out nationally. But if and when that happens, that candidate will also need plenty of other skills to capitalize on it. One will be their retail politicking chops and ability to actually connect with choosy Iowans when speaking to them face-to-face. Buttigieg seems to at least have that part of his 2020 challenge down already. ❖



long way to go. At this stage in the 1992 election cycle, President George H. W. Bush was riding high, buoyed by America's success in the Gulf War. Less than two years later, Bill Clinton moved into the White House. Trump might prove incapable of engineering such a dramatic reversal of fortune. But if the economy continues to hum and he racks up a couple of wins on foreign policy, the public's perception of his presidency could shift. Democrats can't bank on voters being more dismayed by him than they are enamored of us. For that reason, Democrats need to take a strategic approach to the next 20 months. In the last election, Democrats were too quick to dismiss the possibility that voters would take Trump "seriously, not literally." This time, we should not only take him seriously—we should take him literally when he tells us exactly how he's going to run his reelection campaign. "Tonight," the president said in his State of the Union address, "we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country." That was a tell. Trump's going to spend the next two years using the bully pulpit to convince voters that Democrats are big believers in "government coercion, domination, and control." He's making a bet that if he labels Democrats "socialists" frequently enough, he'll be able to drive a wedge that scares swing voters out of the Democratic fold. If 2016 proved nothing else, it demonstrated that Democrats ignore Trump's antics at our own peril. ❖

**Jennifer Rubin, Washington Post:** Get ready for the Buttigieg boomlet. South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg had a stellar showing on CNN's town hall with him Sunday night, confirming a dispiriting truism about our politics. With eight years as mayor, military service and direct, substantive answers to questions, he is not considered a front-runner, but consider that a former congressman who's yet to give a meaty policy address or explain his vision (other than togetherness) is about to enter the race and sprint near the top of the pack. Could voters actually listen for an hour, hear Buttigieg and decide, "Hey, maybe celebrity status isn't a qualification or even a desirable trait in a candidate. Maybe I should go with the guy who has something to say about important issues and has run something"? Yes, Buttigieg gave a great sound-bite answer about Vice President Pence — wondering whether he "stopped believing in scripture when he started believing in Donald Trump." However, that wasn't the best part of his appearance. Buttigieg was impressive because he spoke directly, without political buzzwords or hyperbole. He actually answered questions and he had a comfort level with policy, even foreign policy(!), that many other candidates don't. If he sounds more informed and sensible than others, well then he deserves support. He addressed the "Aren't you too young?" question a couple of times, but the real answer should be this: He's a lot smarter than many people in the race and, coming from a red state, has a real understanding and respect for Republicans. ❖

**Rahm Emanuel, The Atlantic:** Few could have predicted that President Donald Trump would be this good at surrendering the political advantage of a strong economy. Not only is he now underwater in the three states that pushed him to victory in 2016—he's now unexpectedly vulnerable in places such as Texas, Florida, and Ohio as well. His popularity rises to 50 percent or higher in states that total a mere 102 electoral votes. Probably of more concern to his campaign: He's fallen below 40 percent approval in states encompassing a 201-electoral-vote bloc. But Democrats haven't won the 2020 election yet—and we've got a



## Trump budget headed for rejection

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is seeking one of the largest-ever cuts to domestic discretionary spending in a \$4.7 trillion fiscal 2020 budget proposal that also boosts defense spending and adds \$8.6 billion for building a border wall ([Bloomberg News](#)). The budget blueprint released Monday, which forecasts annual deficits extending beyond the next decade and rising national debt, represents a wish list for the president's priorities that is certain to be ignored by Congress.

It also raises the threat of a funding showdown that could trigger another government shutdown in the fall. The proposal calls for reducing regular non-defense discretionary spending from \$597 billion to \$543 billion, a \$54 billion, or 9 percent cut in 2020. When disaster-relief funding is factored in, the cut amounts to \$28 billion, or 4.6 percent. Particularly hard hit would be the Environmental Protection Agency, and departments of State, Energy, Transportation and Agriculture. The EPA would receive a 31 percent cut compared with its December funding level, while State would receive a 23 percent cut and Housing and Urban Development would see a 16 percent cut. Along with Defense, the departments of Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs would get increases larger than expected inflation.

## \$1 trillion deficits in Trump budgets

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's newest budget forecasts the U.S. fiscal deficit surpassing \$1 trillion this year and staying above that level until 2022 ([Bloomberg News](#)). The fiscal 2020 proposal sees the deficit expanding to \$1.1 trillion for 2019 and 2020, when Trump will run for re-election. The shortfall is seen narrowing slightly to \$1.07 tril-

lion in 2021 and \$1.05 trillion in 2022, before shrinking every year through 2029. The budget deficit has already climbed 77 percent in the first four months of the fiscal year.

## Indiana jobless rate holds steady

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana's unemployment rate held steady at 3.5 percent in January as the state's labor force continued to grow (IBJ). The

Indiana Department of Workforce Development released its latest unemployment report Monday. Indiana's labor force, which is composed of both employed and unemployed-but-willing-to-work residents, increased by 7,613 workers from December to January, to almost 3.4 million. Indiana's labor-force participation rate—the percentage of the state's population that is either employed or actively seeking work—stayed at 65.1 percent in January. It remains ahead of the national rate of 63.2 percent.

## Cheney grills Pence on foreign policy

SEA ISLAND, Ga. — Dick Cheney lit into Vice President Mike Pence behind closed doors over the direction of the Trump administration's foreign policy, flouting a set of agreed-upon subjects and forcing Pence on the defensive over President Donald Trump's foreign policy (Politico). The former vice president interviewed Pence at the American Enterprise Institute's annual World Forum in Sea Island, Ga., an off-the-record confab attended by approximately 200 top-dollar Republican donors, lawmakers, and business leaders who flock to the private island every spring. Cheney pressed Pence about Trump's proclivity for making major policy announcements on Twitter and his off-and-on commitment to NATO, according to four meeting attendees and a source briefed on their remarks. The former vice president, who has kept a low public profile in recent years,

questioned whether Trump places enough value on the findings of the intelligence community, which he has repeatedly and publicly dismissed. He suggested that Trump foreign policy has at times looked more like President Obama's — which Cheney has repeatedly lambasted — than that of a Republican standard bearer. At one point, a punch drunk Pence turned to his predecessor and inquisitor and joked, "Man, who wrote all these softball questions?"

## BMV offering third gender designation

INDIANAPOLIS — The Bureau of Motor Vehicles has begun issuing Indiana driver's licenses and state identification cards with a third, non-specified gender option for Hoosiers who identify as neither male nor female (Carden, [NWI Times](#)). The non-binary licenses, first made available this month, use an "X" for the sex identifier, instead of the traditional "M" or "F." Susie Guyer, BMV executive director of marketing and communications, said the agency decided to offer a third gender option to follow the credential standards recommended by the American Academy of Motor Vehicle Administrators, which include an "X" gender identifier.

## Evansville opts for climate resolution

EVANSVILLE — Acknowledging the accelerating rate of climate change, the Evansville City Council adopted a resolution to shift 100 percent renewable energy for city government operations by 2050 ([Evansville Courier & Press](#)). The non-binding resolution was adopted on a 7-2 vote at Monday's meeting. Council members Justin Elpers and John Hayden voted no. "I think it's a great idea," Hayden said. "But there are some very definitive statements that I don't think we can make, and I don't agree with, either." Elpers said he disagrees with climate change.

