

Will Trump Hoosiers return to polls?

Many Obama voters never returned after 2008; can GOP bring Trump voters back in next cycles?

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – In 2008 when Barack Obama became the first Democrat to win Indiana's Electoral College votes since 1964, some 2.7 million Hoosiers turned out to vote, including 1,374,039

for the Democrats, 1,345,648 for Republicans and 29,257 for Libertarians.

Of those 1.3 million Obama voters, following the secretary of state's voter purge in 2017,

only 780,806 are still on the rolls, compared to 960,779 Republicans.



Correspondingly, Donald Trump won Indiana in 2016 by a 1,557,286-to-1,033,126 margin over Hillary Clinton (56.9% to 37.8%). In the 2018 mid-terms, 1,019,732 Republicans showed up, helping Republican Mike Braun defeat U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly, as President Trump made six appearances in the state, including five times during

Continued on page 4

Azar seeks leadership

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Alex Azar, the former Lilly executive and Health and Human Services secretary, played a crucial role in the development of the COVID-19 vaccine after President Trump initiated "Operation Warp Speed" in the spring 2020 as the pandemic shut down much of society.



Seen by many as a modern scientific miracle – getting this "Trump" vaccine from research, trials and then into the arms of hunkered down Americans within a year – in early 2021 it was viewed as the key to fully reopening society.

In a [New York Times op-ed](#) published on Tuesday, Azar writes, "I know the vaccines'



"Unvaccinated assholes, they could not be more wrong. And it was based on people making choices that weren't in the best interest of themselves, or families, or friends, or their community."

- West Lafayette Mayor John Dennis



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Jack E. Howey
 editor emeritus
 1926-2019



features intimately because as secretary of Health and Human Services, I oversaw their development, testing, approval and distribution from April of 2020 until January of this year. After leaving office, I watched with pride as vaccination rates rose through the early months of the year, and then with dismay as the daily number of vaccinations declined.

"Among the many debatable issues around COVID-19 is one unassailable fact: The coronavirus is nonpartisan," Azar continued. "It makes no judgment about one's political leanings. The vaccines that were developed to fight this virus have no political bias, either. And yet the reluctance and even refusal of many Americans – including many of my fellow conservatives and Republicans – to get a COVID-19 vaccine is a frustrating irony for those of us who worked to expedite these vaccines. While the vaccines have had doubts cast upon them by politicians throughout their production and rollout, whether a person lives in a red or a blue state has no bearing on the vaccines' efficacy. They work incredibly well, and more than 160 million fully vaccinated Americans are proof."

And then Azar throws down the gauntlet to current officeholders: "Whether such skepticism is rooted in political misgivings, conspiracy theories or lack of accurate and timely information, there are still millions of Americans unwilling to take the simplest of steps to end this pandemic. That makes it incumbent upon all leaders and health experts to be honest about how safe and effective the

vaccines are and urge vaccination."

Several days before, U.S. Rep. Jim Banks had a different take on leadership. "I'm a congressman, not a doctor or a pastor," Banks told the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette last week. "My constituents don't elect me to tell them what to do or to preach to them. It was a personal decision."

As pandemic maps showed a steady encroachment of what has been described as COVID 2.0 – the pandemic of the unvaccinated – the 3rd CD comes in behind the state's 44% fully vaccinated: Allen County 43%, Huntington 42%, Noble 32%, Adams 28%, Whitley 39%, Wabash 35%, DeKalb 35%, Grant 34%, Steuben 40%, Kosciusko 33%, Wells 35%, Blackford 37%, Jay 30%, and LaGrange 19%.

Instead, Banks has taken a different stance, taking aim at the CDC while saying that he won't "preach" to constituents. The Journal Gazette reported: "Banks has pushed back against new federal guidance urging even those vaccinated to start wearing masks indoors again. And he has spoken against a mandate in the U.S. House to wear masks. On Fox and Friends First Friday he said, 'If you follow the science, there's no logic,' noting there are far fewer COVID-19 deaths now than when restrictions were dropped earlier."

On Wednesday, the Republican Study Committee chairman put the resurgent pandemic in a partisan frame, tweeting: "House GOP needs to make reforming and reining in the powers of the CDC one of our top

priorities when we win back the majority next year.”

Banks’ style of “leadership” contrasts with other Republicans, while debates at school board meetings rage across parts of the 3rd CD over masking policy.

Gov. Eric Holcomb told reporters last week, “I would recommend taking every safe step possible, imaginable, doable to keep the kiddos in school. There are steps that schools can take, many are, as they go back, they’ve stated, about distancing, about masking. I want to see the EUA, the emergency use authorization, turned into permanent. I do hear and I do understand parents, students who are waiting until it becomes permanent. I just spent a few days with about over 20 other governors. And I think to a person we were all kind of scratching our head as to when will this become permanent? We have millions who have been treated, the trials have been conducted ... This needs to become permanent.”

U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon, a heart surgeon, told Fox59 last weekend, “I’m concerned in Indiana because the vaccination rate is relatively low. I think nationally, it’s about 58%. In the Congress, it’s over 85%. In certain areas of the country it’s high. The delta variant spreads more rapidly. I don’t think it’s going to turn out to be more dangerous than the other variants, it just spreads more easily. We’re trying to get the timeline from the Food and Drug Administration on final approval of these vaccines. They’re under an emergency use authorization, as you know, and I think some people are a little nervous about that. They think they’re still experimental, which they’re not. But I do think formal approval from the FDA, if that can be done, would be helpful.”

In May, Bucshon joined other “doctors of the House” urging vaccination. The Associated Press reported: “When a group of Republican doctors in Congress released a video selling the safety of the coronavirus vaccine, their message wasn’t explicitly aimed at their conservative constituents, but nonetheless had a clear political bent. Getting the shot is the best way to ‘end the government’s restrictions on our freedoms,’ Bucshon, an Indiana Republican and heart surgeon who donned a white lab coat and stethoscope when he spoke into the camera.

“**I know the facts and** I think it’s the right choice to make,” [Bucshon says in a video](#) posted on Facebook. ‘Each vaccine was tested on tens of thousands of people. They cut red tape, not corners. While I am a doctor, I am also Republican member of Congress and I fully respect that this is your decision to make with your doctor. Talk to your doctor.’”

In Bucshon’s 8th CD, vaccination rates are higher than the 3rd, suggesting that even at the congressional level, leadership matters: Vanderburg County 47%, Warrick 52%, Pike 47%, Perry at 45%, Dubois at 46%, Vigo 41%, Knox 40%, Posey 38%, Gibson 37%, Spencer 36%, Vermillion 37%, Daviess 26%, and Martin 39%.

It’s not “preaching” as Banks put it, but acting as a reasoned conduit to get credible information to constituents. With so much at stake, with scores restaurants teetering on the brink; with school districts thrown into uncertainty, it behooves Gov. Holcomb and other state leaders to consider PSA-style campaigns like Bucshon’s to get Hoosiers to talk to their doctors and get vaccinated.

According to Republican pollster Frank Luntz, “If it’s politicized, they will not reach herd immunity. It’s actually very tragic that appealing to Black Americans about the importance of staying safe is heroic. But appealing to Republicans, who have their own concerns, is considered political.”

Azar acknowledged some mis-steps with the Operation Warp Speed rollout. “We could have done more to address vaccine hesitancy,” he explained. “We focused a



great deal of our efforts at the start on the groups that we thought might be most hesitant. We demanded all clinical trials include a diverse, representative sample of participants, and the Department of Health and Human Services provided funding for an effort by the Morehouse School of Medicine to coordinate a network of national, state, territorial, tribal and local organizations to deliver trusted information to racial and ethnic minority communities.

“**But we did not predict** the politicization of vaccines that has led so many Republicans to hold back,” Azar writes. “As of mid-July, 43% of Republicans said that they have not been vaccinated and definitely or probably wouldn’t be, versus 10% of Democrats, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.”

Azar added, “I’m glad former President Trump got vaccinated, but it would have been even better for him to have done so on national television so that his supporters could see how much trust and confidence he has in what is arguably one of his greatest accomplishments. The vaccines could be a victory lap for the Republican Party, and I call upon all party leaders and conservatives to double down on encouraging vaccination.” ❖

Trump voters, from page 1

the home stretch.

In 2020, Trump's totals swelled by just under 200,000 votes as he defeated Democrat Joe Biden 1,729,519 to 1,242,416, or 57-41%. Of those totals, according to the Bothell, Washington-based data resource firm L2, 1,174,552 (39.2%) of the 2016 Republican voters are still on the voter rolls, compared to just 937,902 of Democrats (31.3%).

The question heading into the next two critical election cycles is whether the Trump voter drop-off will be like that of the one-and-done Obama voter. "Trump turned them out in droves," said Dave Galvin, CEO of Colfax Communications. "There were 200,000 new Trump voters in 2020. Anger motivates people."

What occurred with the 2017 Indiana voter purge was the loss of 620,000 voters, of which 80% were African-American voters. According to Galvin, only a third of the new Obama voters participated in the primary. "They voted in the general election and then they never showed up again."

Of the voters who cast ballots in the 2016 general election the following voters remain on the state's voter rolls: Democrats: 863,843 (34.5%); Republicans: 1,137,208 (45.4%); and non-partisan: 479,971 (19.1%).

One big difference between the 2016 and 2020 elections was with the Libertarians. There were 133,993 who voted for presidential nominee Gary Johnson, many of them Republicans who distrusted Donald Trump but couldn't vote for Hillary Clinton. By 2020, just 59,232 Libertarians showed up.

What are trends heading into 2022?

There will be new maps following the redistricting process coming in September and October. According to Galvin, the new maps won't likely change the congressional dynamic. "Gerrymandering at the congressional level is just too good," he said, predicting that while Democrat Reps. Frank Mrvan in the 1st CD and Andre Carson in the 7th are likely to survive, the other seven GOP districts will likely be out of reach for Democrats.

In the General Assembly, Galvin believes that because of rural population loss, Democrats could have an opportunity to pick up a couple of House and Senate seats. He noted that State Sen. Mike Crider's district has lost 20,000 people. "His district will move west into Marion County," Galvin said. "He can't go further east; can't go into Ohio."



Analysis of voters in Indiana – as they stand today

Democratic:	1,231,673 (28.2%)
Republican:	1,320,792 (30.3%)
<u>NonPartisan:</u>	1,781,705 (40.8%)
Other:	4,706 (0.11%)
Unknown:	25,974 (0.6%)

High-fidelity voters

Voters with 60%+ performance in even year general elections

Democratic:	762,267 (33.3%)
Republican:	1,028,620 (45%)
<u>NonPartisan:</u>	475,129 (21%)

Who are these high-fidelity voters?

DEM:

Female:	59%
Male:	41%

GOP:

Female:	50.1%
Male:	49.9%

Over 65 yrs old: 38%

Over 65 yrs old: 42%

Ethnicity

European:	72.1%
<u>Af-Am:</u>	14%
Hispanic:	4%
Asian:	1.1%
Other:	1.3%
Unknown:	8.1%

European:	87.8%
<u>Af-Am:</u>	0.6%
Hispanic:	1.3%
Asian:	0.5%
Other:	0.8%
Unknown:	8.9%

Active military: 787 voters
Veterans: 35,706 voters

Active military: 1,926 voters
Veterans: 65,770 voters

"I would expect districts around Marion County to contract in size geographically, and districts outside of Central Indiana are going to expand in size geographically," State Rep. Timothy Wesco (R-Osceola), who chairs the House Elections and Apportionment Committee, told WANE-TV.

Galvin adds that if Democrats let the GOP 2022 and 2024 narrative of high crime and critical race theory define the campaigns, they will not make gains. "If the stars align, if dollars in people's pockets and the child tax credit shape the narrative, there might be a decent Democrat year on the state level" in 2022.

Don't expect a 2018 redux of Donald Trump showing up often in the state. Trump has declined to endorse U.S. Sen. Todd Young, who is a close ally of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, with whom the former

president is estranged. Young also slammed Trump ally, U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, calling her an “embarrassment” to the GOP. Young’s \$2.5 million war chest is expected to thwart any credible primary challenger from trying to find traction. So the key question is whether there will be a drop-off of the 200,000 new Trump voters who showed up in 2020.

The L2 data has some interesting clues.

There have been 25,891 registered Democrats who have switched to Republicans in the past four years, and 32,236 in the past year, for 58,127 total.

But Republicans who have switched registration to Democrats include 24,289 in the past four years, 43,531 in the past year (but before the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection and the resurgence of the pandemic), for a total of 67,820 voters. So the Democrats have a tiny 9,000 vote edge there.

Galvin says the Democrat to Republican switchers are high school graduates with some higher education, along with voters age 65 and older. People with college degrees were the hallmark of those switching from Repub-

lican to Democrat.

He noted that of the high-fidelity voters, 59% of Democrats are women and 16% are renters; compared to 50.1% of Republicans who are female, 42% are age 65 and older, and 8% are renters.

He identifies “high fidelity voters” are 1,028,620 Republicans, 762,267 who are Democrats and 475,129 who are independent. “High-fidelity voters decide elections,” Galvin said. “Based on primary ballots, there are nearly a half million non-partisan voters, but they’ve been swinging heavier toward the Republicans.”

He points to HD20, where Republican Jim Pressel won an open seat in 2016, defeating incumbent Democrat Karen Biernacki 57-37%. Pressel defeated Karen Salazar 61-39% in 2018 and Tim Gust 68-31% in 2020. “In District 20, there are more Democrats, but Republicans won there because Democrat high-fidelity voters didn’t show up. Maybe Biden’s American Rescue Plan and the child tax credit will help. But if the election were held today, the Republicans would kick the Democrats’ ass.” ❖

Banks’ China bill contrasts with Young’s

By **MARK SCHOEFF JR.**
and **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. Jim Banks (R-3rd CD) introduced sweeping legislation last week meant to contain and punish China while offering a sharp contrast to a Senate-passed bill co-written by Sen. Todd Young.

The 268-page bill, the Countering Communist China Act, is the House conservatives’ alternative to the Endless Frontier Act, the

bill Young co-authored with Sen. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., that was incorporated into larger legislation the Senate approved on a bipartisan vote in June.

The House measure would curtail companies and universities receiving federal grant money from working with companies and other entities with ties to the Chinese military or government, according to a press release from Banks’ office. It also establishes sanctions against Chinese companies that steal U.S. intellectual property and focuses on pinning blame on China for unleashing the coronavirus pandemic, among other provisions.

The Banks release touts the bill for spending “just \$1 billion as compared to the \$250 billion Senate bill.” It did not mention Young by name but it did criticize what it called “Sen. Schumer’s expensive and ineffectual Endless Frontier Act.”

The Senate bill would bolster U.S. technology, advanced manufacturing, research and development and

workforce skills in those areas to help the country compete with China. Banks chairs the Republican Study Committee, the largest caucus of House conservatives. It has made confronting China one of its policy priorities. “Democrats’ China spending bills fall short, so that’s why House conservatives are introducing our own China bill as a benchmark for how Congress should address the China threat,” Banks said in a statement. “Their bill places a burden on taxpayers and lets China off easy, but our bill protects taxpayers and holds the Chinese Communist Party accountable.”

Despite introducing the bill by taking shots at Young’s signature legislation, Banks did not immediately draw pushback from the state’s senior senator, who is up for reelection next year. Young spokesman Jay Kenworthy declined to comment.

Politico poll on pandemic blame

Who is being blamed for the increase in COVID cases throughout the country? According to a new [POLITICO/Morning Consult poll](#), 67% of voters say that unvaccinated Americans bear the blame – a bipartisan supermajority that included 77% of Democrats, 67% of independents and 58% of Republicans. Some 70% of voters claimed they are vaccinated, including 80% of Dems, 64% of independents and 63% of Republicans. Some good news for President Biden: His approval rating is still clocking in at 52% overall, and 56% of voters approve of his handling of the pandemic.

Rokita legal losing streak continues

For those keeping track of Attorney General Todd Rokita’s legal battles with Gov. Eric Holcomb, the Indiana Supreme Court dealt the former another legal defeat.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday denied an emer-



agency request by Rokita to stall Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb's lawsuit challenging the increased power state legislators gave themselves to intervene during public health emergencies following conservative objections to his COVID-19 actions (AP).

Rokita petitioned the Indiana Supreme Court last month after a Marion County judge ruled against arguments from his office that he alone has the legal authority to represent the state in court and can decide whether the new law is allowed under the state constitution. The Republican attorney general asked the Indiana Supreme Court to order the trial court hearing the case to "cease all proceedings" in the lawsuit, arguing that Holcomb's lawsuit does not meet the narrow standard for cases can filed with the Supreme Court. The emergency request was turned down 5-0 by the court without comment.

This comes on the heels of Marion County Superior Court Patrick Dietrick denying Rokita's legal action against Holcomb, citing it as "absurd" in July.

Urban League blasts Rokita's bill of rights

The Indianapolis Urban League is strongly condemning Attorney General Todd Rokita's continued attacks on critical race theory (IndyStar). "The document uses Critical Race Theory (CRT), as an imprecise catch-all phrase and loosely defined term, to falsely claim and imply that liberals and diversity advocates espouse the belief that America is fundamentally racist," said the Indianapolis Urban League CEO Tony Mason in a news release.

Ford, Qaddoura seek redistricting hearings

Senate Sens. JD Ford and Fady Qaddoura say they want additional redistricting hearings after preliminary congressional and General Assembly maps are forged.

"Redistricting plays a huge role in how communities across Indiana are represented in Congress and the General Assembly," Ford said. "In recent years we have seen extreme legislation coming out of the Statehouse, in part due to our maps being more biased towards Republicans than 95% of maps across the country. While I look forward to hearing from Hoosiers across the state over the next couple of days, I am troubled that Hoosiers will not have this opportunity to comment after the maps are released. I encourage the Republicans to hold a separate round of hearings after they draw their maps so constituents can see if they were heard. Without a second round of hearings, Hoosiers don't have a chance to hold their legislators accountable."

Sen. Qaddoura added, "I firmly believe that voters should pick their representatives, not politicians picking their voters. This is why I offered SB283 during this year's legislative session to create a nonpartisan redistricting commission to draw our maps. Throughout the 2021 session, I advocated not only for protecting voting rights but also for ensuring the integrity of our redistricting process. Redistricting should not be a partisan issue, especially given the impact partisan gerrymandering has on our de-

mocracy and the quality of life for all Hoosiers."

Redistricting hearings scheduled by the General Assembly Republican majorities begin in the nine CDs on Friday and conclude next Wednesday at the Statehouse.

Bucshon leans toward reelection

U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon told the [Evansville Courier & Press](#) today he expects redistricting changes to the 8th CD and is probably going to seek another term. "I'm planning on running for re-election at this point," he said. "I'm going to have to pick up people. It's hard to know exactly how that will happen. I suspect the district will end up going a little more to the east," Bucshon said. Not surprisingly for a Republican member of Congress who represents such a Republican district, Bucshon speaks in fiery partisan terms. Bucshon called the House select committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol a ploy by Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to help Democrats in next year's midterm elections by dwelling on an event largely blamed on Trump. On that day, a mob of Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol to try to stop Congress from confirming state-certified Electoral College results. Democrats, though, do not agree. They have said it's relevant if Trump tried to use the U.S. Justice Department to subvert the result of the 2020 presidential election in the weeks leading up to the attack Jan. 6 on the Capitol. They want to know more about Trump's actions and conversations leading up to the attack. The election is over and Trump is no longer president, Bucshon said in response. "I want to talk about the future, honestly. I'm looking forward, not backward," he said.

INDems jobs tour in North Manchester

At 6 tonight in North Manchester, AFL-CIO President Brett Voorhies, State Sen. Eddie Melton, and State Sen. J.D. Ford will continue the Indiana Democratic Party's American Jobs Plan tour. It will take place at The Fire House, 108 W. Street.

Biden approval falls on pandemic

In a Quinnipiac poll, the share of Americans who approved of President Biden's Covid-19 handling fell to 53%, down 12 points from May. His job approval fell to 46%, from 49% in May. Approval of Biden's handling of the economy also fell, with 43% approving and 48% disapproving.

DeSantis trails Crist in poll

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) has slipped behind a Democratic gubernatorial rival in a new poll as he faces scrutiny over his handling of the pandemic amid a surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in the Sunshine State ([The Hill](#)). The survey, conducted by Florida-based firm St. Pete Polls, found that 45% said they would vote for Democratic Rep. Charlie Crist, who previously served as governor from 2007 to 2011, while 44% back DeSantis. ❖

How many Americans believe in the Big Lie?

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – How many Americans believe the Big Lie? A lot.

I hear from some when I write about the Big Lie that Donald Trump actually won reelection and soon will return as president, following vote “auditing” and searching for bamboo in Arizona and “discovery” of massive vote fraud in other states.



After a column about a company called Cyber Ninjas conducting its pro-Trump Arizona “auditing,” including testing for bamboo on ballots to see if they came from Asia, and pursuit of other nutty conspiracy theories, a reader had this evaluation: “You are a liar.”

Those who want to believe QAnon theories about Trump’s presidency being restored – though predictions on dates for this keep getting missed – aren’t

going to be swayed by facts.

But belief in the Big Lie that Joe Biden actually lost isn’t as widespread as sometimes portrayed.

Most Republicans in Congress, even ones who voted against accepting the certified election results, know better and will say, perhaps reluctantly and in terms to avoid angering the Trump base, that Biden won and is president.

Sen. Mitch McConnell, Senate GOP leader, has made clear that Biden won. He delivered a scalding denunciation of Trump as “morally responsible” for the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

Polls seeming to show that a sizeable majority of Republican voters believe that Biden won only because of voter fraud are somewhat suspect in determining actual belief in the Big Lie. As asked in a Salon website analysis: “But is this something they really believe or something they simply say out of tribalist loyalties because they believe that repeating the lie is useful” in political strategy?

I don’t find that very many of the Republicans I talk with believe the lie. They may well say they wish that Biden hadn’t won. They disagree with Democratic philosophy on various issues. But they don’t believe he didn’t win. They may want changes in election laws. But it’s not because they believe there was widespread fraud that elected Biden.

OK, I admit that the Republicans I know around here are mostly ones who would rank Ronald Reagan and

Dick Lugar ahead of Trump, not true Trumpsters. True believers in all that Trump says about the election being stolen from him are in that solid Trump base he needs to retain as he continues to raise funds and eye a presidential campaign again in 2024. To admit now that he lost would be for Trump a sign of weakness and an admission that could shake loose at least some of the true believers in that vital base.

Trump’s recent trip to Arizona to hail the work of the Cyber Ninjas shows his intent to keep promoting conspiracy theories. He predicted that when the “audit” is complete, uncovered fraud will be “so outrageous” that it will lead to successful investigations all across the nation. Gosh, will the Ninjas sprinkle magic bamboo dust on the ballots?

In a diatribe about those who let him down by failing to overturn election results, Trump attacked, among others, McConnell, Mike Pence and Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. He orchestrated loud booing of Pence by denouncing what he said was lack of courage by his vice president on Jan. 6 in failing to reject the official election results.

Courage?

Pence refused to leave the Capitol, even though rioters shouted for his hanging, and insisted on carrying out his constitutional duty of vote certification.

Think back to when Trump downplayed the coronavirus, though knowing of its rapid spread and deadly



impact. He didn’t want to spook the stock market and hurt the economy by telling the truth. Is he again remaining unacquainted with the truth on election results, not wanting to spook his base and hurt his political future?

How many Americans really believe the Big Lie? Does Trump? Really? ❖

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

Why voters vote the way they do

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – Maybe it’s just a professional preoccupation, but I’ve always been intrigued by why voters cast their ballots as they do. I’ve never made a formal study of it but have talked with plenty of them over the years, and one thing sticks with me from those conversations: There’s no one thing. People find a myriad of interesting, and sometimes idiosyncratic, reasons for voting this way or that.



Some care mostly about a single issue – abortion, say, or climate change – and if a politician doesn’t meet muster on it, they don’t even give her or him a second glance. Or they care about a candidate’s ideology or

party – conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat – and don’t feel much need to look beyond the label. For some decades, split-ticket voting was fairly common; that is, voters chose a Republican presidential candidate and a House Democrat or, less commonly, a Democrat for the White House and a GOP House member. This has grown much less common in both federal and state elections.

As ideological camps have hardened, party affiliation is part and parcel of who many people are.

Sometimes, it’s not so much ideology as what a party’s leaders stand for. I remember asking one man in my district how he voted and why. He responded, “I always vote for FDR.” This was years after Roosevelt had died. “FDR’s not on the ticket any more,” I told him. He laughed and said he knew that, but he always voted for whoever he believed would vote in accord with Roosevelt’s principles. This was not as whimsical as it sounds; he was saying, essentially, that the New Deal values Roosevelt pursued in office were still relevant to him, and he wanted candidates who’d uphold them.

What has always struck me, though, is that voters also find plenty of more particular reasons to cast a ballot one way or another. Sometimes, they care a lot about a particular project – a road, a new school, or some other piece of infrastructure. Or they worry about the taxpayer dollars required for that project, and so vote against

anyone who supports it.

Sometimes, public policy actually has nothing to do with how they vote. Over the years, for instance, I’ve noticed repeatedly that likability matters a great deal, and may in fact override everything else. We tend, for instance, to like people who are positive, constructive, and forward-looking, and who make us feel hopeful. Or we like how they behave in public.

I still remember an intriguing conversation with a group of Democratic women who told me they planned to vote for Ronald Reagan that election. Given their party affiliation, this surprised me. One of them explained, “Well, I like the way he treats his wife,” which drew nods from others in the room; they saw in Reagan’s graciousness toward Nancy a sign of character that drew them, and I’m confident they weren’t the only ones.

Of course, there are always the highly personal reasons. I ran into a fellow once who told me he always voted for a certain politician. “I don’t agree with anything he stands for,” the man said, “but he helped get my son out of Vietnam.” Another one told me I had his vote because he liked my short haircut. I refrained from saying I hoped there was more to it than that, but I certainly thought it.


In general, though, Americans seem to like candidates who display a basic sense of decency, know right from wrong, and show compassion for people who are struggling in their lives. We don’t always vote for them; sometimes, other issues rise to the fore in a given election.

But I’m reminded of a conversation I had early one frosty morning, standing at a plant gate. An election was coming up, and I asked a man striding past me how he planned to vote. He was supporting the same ticket I was running on, he told me, adding, “I vote for the candidate I think will help the ordinary guy.” That’s a very American sentiment. We back candidates we think will bear our interests in mind and reflect our concerns. However we define them. ❖

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YOUR FRIENDS ALL HANG OUT HERE... DO YOU?

Slowing of the economy caused by unvaccinated

By MICHAEL HICKS

MUNCIE – Just a few short months ago, economic optimism was strong. A fast recovery seemed imminent even if actual data revealing a rapid recovery was sparse.



Businesses were beginning to re-open and hire, the vaccine was becoming universally available. Most of us were eager to return to restaurants, theaters and other places that were unsafe during COVID. Spring was as it should be, hopeful and optimistic.

As of mid-summer, the very rapid recovery has failed to fully materialize. Wage growth last month was weak and the mix of new jobs

signaled growth in lower-wage sectors rather than across-the-board growth. In a normal labor market, we would welcome the 2021 average of a half a million new jobs per month, but that speed of recovery will not see us hit pre-pandemic employment levels until the summer of 2022. At the current pace of job growth, it will be late-2023 or 2024 before we return to trend employment levels.

The more-sluggish-than-expected recovery comes at a time when combined economic stimulus remains near an all-time high. Additional fiscal or monetary policies will not rescue us from slower growth. That isn't an argument against any piece of legislation or federal policy, simple an acknowledgement that the slowing growth isn't really a direct economic policy issue. It is something else.

Over the past few weeks, COVID is again filling hospitals and killing Americans at an accelerating rate. But, the effects of the disease and its likely economic effects are not equally distributed. Over the last 90 days, nearly all the COVID deaths are among the unvaccinated. In just the last three months, more than 32,000 Americans died of COVID. In just the past month, the long and slow decline in deaths reversed, and is now growing at a rate that could easily return us to the levels seen last fall.

With 99.2% of deaths among the unvaccinated the burden of this disease now falls on those families and communities where vaccination rates are low. For anyone who has studied public health, this is familiar territory. Poorer populations, poorly educated places and those with a larger share of racial minorities exhibit lower rates of vaccinations. However, a new and horrific development is the strong political dimension to the rates of vaccination.

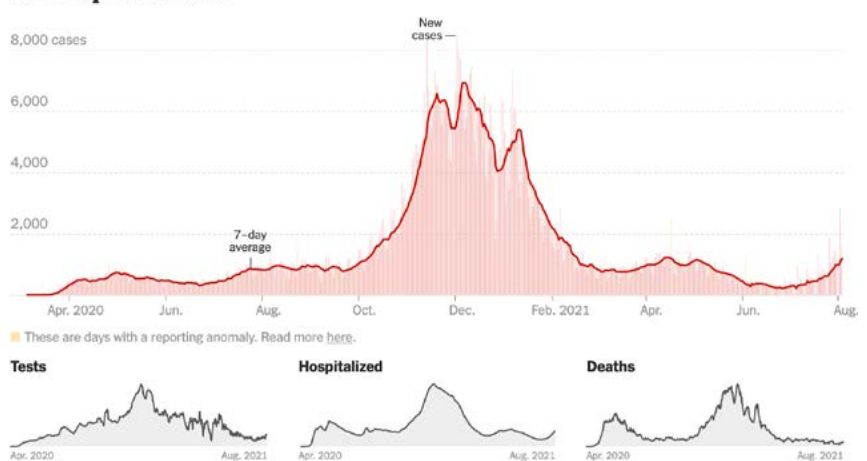
The typical approach to public health research

examines such things as race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age and levels of education to explain differences in the incidence of disease and access to preventive healthcare. The understanding of these dynamics allow policies to target those places and people least likely to benefit from healthcare spending without additional intervention. Today, the strongest predictor of COVID vaccination rates is simply the share of the 2020 presidential vote that accrued to Mr. Trump.

This is not an accident, it is not an artifact of population density nor is it the result of state-level variations in public policy. The states with the highest and lowest rates of vaccination are both led by GOP governors. It is shocking that even in a sweeping election loss, Donald Trump won 24 of the 25 states with the lowest vaccination rate. The refusal by so many Americans to take the vaccine is linked to the public statements of Donald Trump and his supporters who sought to downplay this pandemic. The politicization of the most common form of public health measure – vaccinations – has one source: Donald Trump.

The politics of this anti-vaccine campaign make little sense. They are not rooted in libertarianism, nor conservative thought. They are not spawned by the type of republicanism that gives states the authority to oversee such matters. Letting your supporters die is hardly a winning populist strategy. This anti-vaccine rhetoric isn't even

New reported cases



mature contrarianism. This is the stuff of childish obstinacy designed to divert attention from other failures.

COVID is now killing more than 10,000 Americans per month, with the rate of death accelerating. At least one forecast projects that we will have nearly 100 million sick Americans by Christmas. The deaths will be particularly acute in those states that voted for Mr. Trump. I just ran the correlation between vote share and vaccine rates. This is the sort of analysis I perform several hundred times a year for most of the past three decades. However, this correlation is the most startling statistical relationship I have ever seen.

A full 75.6% of the differences in state vaccination rates can be explained solely by the Trump share of votes in 2020. Moreover, each 1.0% decrease in the vote share for Mr. Trump is correlated with a 0.78% decrease in vaccination rates. One bizarre outcome of last year's fractured national politics is that Mr. Trump unleashed disinformation that is now causing the disproportionate death of his supporters.

It is time to state and restate an obvious truth. The rapid spread of this new variant, the uptick of deaths and the spreading economic damage falls squarely at the feet of those who chose not to get a vaccine. These folks are either dupes of the anti-vax campaigners or themselves morally culpable for the spreading disease. Most bear both burdens.

Many vaccinated Americans will be rightfully angry at the self-centered mulishness of the unvaccinated. Since 99.2% of these deaths are voluntary, some will even be tempted to discount their deaths. That is a mistake. We should not surrender to the immorality that influenced the unvaccinated. These are our neighbors and fellow citizens.

We should remind the unvaccinated that their choices hurt others. The resurgent pandemic will cause more businesses to fail this year. Some schools will close and many students who are not yet eligible for vaccines will be at home in isolation or quarantine. Some will die. Many have taken the vaccine, but have compromised immune systems. Hundreds of these Americans who otherwise would have loved and been loved through a normal lifespan will instead die of COVID this year.

The moral weight of these deaths and disease falls squarely on those Americans who chose not to get a vaccine. It is time we shame, cajole or coax these folks into getting the vaccine. We want these people to survive this pandemic, so that they may thank us later. ❖

Michael J. Hicks, PhD, is the director of the Center for Business and Economic Research and the George and Frances Ball distinguished professor of economics in the Miller College of Business at Ball State University.

Hoosiers wearing designer fool's caps

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – In 2010, the General Assembly, inspired by Gov. Daniels, offered voters an amendment to the State Constitution that capped property taxes as a percent of gross assessed value.



Hoosiers rose to the bait. Of the 1.56 million who voted, 72% approved the measure. They believed lower property taxes were a good idea. They didn't think through the consequences of lower local property taxes and the shift of power they granted to the General Assembly.

The property tax starts with a local assessment of value. If you think the assessment is wrong, you can discuss the matter with your county or township assessor. Or you can appeal the assessment through a local board and even arouse your neighbors to protest inappropriate assessments.

If your property taxes are included with your mortgage, you might be totally ignorant of your property taxes; the mortgage company pays those taxes in May and November.

People who get a large part of their income from use of their property, don't like property taxes. Farmers, property developers, landlords, and businesses with expensive equipment traditionally seek every possible way to lower their property taxes. They join the railroads and utili-

ties in seeking state protection from local property taxes.

Homeowners, renters and businesses are dependent on local governments for schools, libraries, parks and public safety services (sanitation, health, police and fire). Some voters, however, don't see themselves as significant users of local public services. As a result, they can be convinced property taxes are too high and supporting a property tax cap amendment to the state constitution will benefit everyone.

This past week several reports have come out proclaiming the health of Indiana's finances, our massive state surplus, and the refund of the excess to be paid out to taxpayers. How much of this bonanza resulted from the state failing to use federal COVID aid as intended?

The state has replaced some of the shortfall in local revenues caused by the property tax caps. For schools alone, according to the Legislative Services Agency, that shortfall amounted to \$307 million in 2020. This was only part of the one-billion-dollar losses for all local governments from the tax caps that year.

We are told there's too little money for the protection of children, for public safety, for the security of the elderly and infirm, for rehabilitation of the addicted, even for local potholes. The everyday maintenance of public buildings, street and traffic signs and lights, along with other services are taken for granted.

The neglect of our cities, towns and counties is accepted by Hoosiers who can't believe we're more comparable to the poorer Southern states than to our Great Lake neighbors. But how could there be any knowledge of these matters without quality state and local news coverage? ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist. Reach him at mortonj-marcus@yahoo.com.

Some folks like living in alternative reality

By **KELLY HAWES**
CNHI News

ANDERSON – The note from a reader in Virginia came days before four police officers captivated a House committee hearing with testimony about what happened on Jan. 6.



"Are you ignorant or just a liar?" the note read. "You really think Biden won? Do you not know most of the Capitol trouble was instigated by provocateurs, i.e. the left? Capitol police standing down, turning down National Guard 2 days before the 6th? You are not a journalist!" This reader had apparently stumbled upon a column I wrote in February decrying efforts to make what hap-

pened on Jan. 6 seem normal. Nearly six months later, this guy still hadn't come to grips with the result of the 2020 election.

Joe Biden won. Donald J. Trump lost. That's reality for most of us, but not this guy.

You have to wonder whether the man saw even a portion of the hearing in which those officers described what happened that day. Maybe not.

We live in a world where lots of folks see only the news they want to see. They're drawn to commentators who support a reality they wish to be true. For many, that source of news and commentary is Fox News, and to its credit, the channel did broadcast the committee hearing. Of course, that doesn't mean the usual viewers tuned in. CNN's Brian Stelter reported the channel's ratings had fallen by almost half during that time period.

"Fox bottomed out at noon with just 736,000 viewers, a far lower audience than usual for Fox at that hour," Stelter tweeted.

By 8 p.m., though, Tucker Carlson was insulting the lawmakers involved in the hearing, and the audience was back to 3 million. Not all Fox News personalities dismissed the hearing. The channel's media commentator, Howard Kurtz, admitted he had

not been prepared for the powerful accounts delivered by those four officers.

"No one would dispute that they are heroes," he wrote in his "Media Buzz" column. "They held the line, with democracy at stake. It was heartbreaking to watch, not least because of the sense of betrayal in their voices about being assaulted by those they are pledged to defend."

Perhaps Kurtz should have a chat with fellow Fox News personality Laura Ingraham. A chyron at the bottom of the screen during her broadcast that night pretty much summed up her reaction to the testimony. "Dem-led committee," it said, "holds first performance investigating Jan. 6 attack."

Ingraham handed out best actor awards to two of the officers, Harry Dunn and Michael Fanone.

For those who don't recall the testimony, it was Dunn who spoke of what happened when he told a rioter he had voted for Joe Biden. A woman in a pink MAGA shirt used the N-word as she yelled to the crowd, he said, and the crowd yelled back, using an expletive and the N-word again. It was the first time in his life, Dunn said, that he had heard the racial slur hurled at him while in uniform. In Ingraham's eyes, the testimony earned Dunn the "best political performance" award.

Fanone, meanwhile, recalled a rioter repeatedly lunging for his gun. "I heard chanting from some in the crowd, 'Get his gun and kill him with his own gun,'" Fanone recalled. He said he had been shocked repeatedly with a Taser. "I'm sure I was screaming," he recalled, "but I don't think I could even hear my own voice."

For Ingraham, Fanone's testimony merited the "best action performance" award. Such a skewed version of reality serves its purpose. Those rioters were only pretending to be Trump supporters. And those police officers? They were just playing a role.

Just ask that guy in Virginia. ❖



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A Young-McDermott race will be nuanced

By **DAVE KITCHELL**

LOGANSPOUR – For all the incredible success he has had since he first ran for Congress, Todd Young might be known in Washington as the Jerry Seinfeld of the House of Representatives.



Why?

Well, Seinfeld was a highly successful comedian who acknowledged his show was “about nothing.” In the same light, Young may be successful, but it would be hard to identify one issue or vote that has made his career. Granted, he ended the undefeated run of former Sen. Evan Bayh, who had never lost a statewide race in Indiana. But he also did it in a short

campaign when former Congressman Baron Hill dropped out and Bayh stepped into his place. That also happened during the height of the Trump Era in Indiana.

If a campaign match-up between Young and Hammond Mayor Tom McDermott materializes, it will be one heavy on nuance and difficult for casual voters to find differences.

The largest difference that is apparent is that Young is apparently trying to characterize his philosophy as both the newer version of the Republican Party and the former one. McDermott, whose father was a Republican, is likely very similar in political philosophy.

Both Young and McDermott are veterans. McDermott in particular is a former Navy Seal, which should appeal to the kind of Indiana voter that not only likes veterans, but would love a Jesse Ventura personality. McDermott is nothing if not shy.

One nuance that is apparent is McDermott’s ties to northern Indiana vs. Young’s ties to Central Indiana. McDermott has degrees from Purdue and Notre Dame and has been a highly successful mayor. Young hails from Carmel, and is noted as one of the most famous graduates of Carmel High School, the hub of Republican-rich and rich Republican Hamilton County.

While there may be many voters who won’t vote for McDermott simply because he is from “The Region,” there are those who don’t particularly care for another Indianapolis area politician calling the shots as the state’s senior senator.

Sometimes, it’s simply hard to tell what Republican voters want. That was never more true than in the three-

way race for the last Senate election when then dark horse Mike Braun emerged from a three-candidate field to defeat two congressmen.

Now, without the Trump influence in Indiana and without a Lugar, Coats or Quayle around to run for the Senate for one of the few times in the past 50 years, this is a strange off-year election.

Although the race leans toward Young, the atmosphere is right for McDermott. A new Democratic chair with connections to the national party, and the commitment of the DNC to pour more funding into Indiana, voters can expect a race more like the Donnelly–Mourdock race of 2012 than Braun-Donnelly in 2018.

Back in 2012, I wrote a column on the Senate race in which I said we’re about to know how red a state Indiana is. We did, and it wasn’t as red as everyone thought. Six years later, we found Indiana was redder than 2012, but it’s a different time with different candidates and issues.

No one can argue the fact that Republicans usually vote for their own incumbents, but Republicans are not a unified party, witness the differences between Young and Braun on several votes. And remember that Republicans didn’t care that Richard Lugar had served more terms than any other senator in 2012. In fact, they turned out the most successful senator their party had ever had.

What both candidates have to do is resonate with voters. Young scores with thoughtful narrative. McDermott is huge on local issues, and is passionate about things



such as college attainment. Young sounds comfortable in foreign policy and military discussions.

It’s hard to say which Senate races will be worth watching next year, but as we begin the second half of 2021, it’s clear this one race in Indiana could be one to watch the further away we are from Trump Era. ❖

Kitchell is a former journalist and Democratic mayor of Logansport.

Parsing the special CD elections in Ohio

By **J. MILES COLEMAN** and **KYLE KONDIK**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – In two special elections Tuesday night, Ohio voters in two congressional districts went to the polls to cast ballots in primaries. Though there were four primaries overall, the results in the the two most watched contests were, to some degree or another, unexpected.

In the Cleveland area's OH-11, County Council-woman Shontel Brown upset former state Sen. Nina Turner in the Democratic primary. Turner, who had superior name recognition, built a fundraising advantage and was seen as a clear, but not prohibitive, favorite for much of the campaign. Though Turner represented part of the area in the legislature from 2008 to 2014, she was most known for her work on Sen. Bernie Sanders' (I-VT) presidential campaigns. Brown, who was initially elected to the Cuyahoga Council in 2014, positioned herself as a mainstream Democrat.

As the campaign wound down, Democratic heavy hitters flocked to the district, as the race, rightly or wrongly, was cast a re-litigation of their party's 2016 presidential primary. In the closing week, Sanders stumped for Turner while House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D, SC-6), a major figure in the Congressional Black Caucus, made a visit on Brown's behalf – Hillary Clinton endorsed Brown earlier on.

Despite Turner's apparent advantages, Brown prevailed by a 50%-45% margin (there were almost a dozen minor candidates who split up the balance). While Turner's association with Sanders undoubtedly seemed to help raise her profile, her association with the Vermont senator may ultimately not have been much of an asset in OH-11: in the 2016 primary, it was Clinton's best district in the state, giving her a nearly 40-point advantage over Sanders.

Roughly 90% of OH-11's votes come from Cleveland's Cuyahoga County, where Brown did slightly better than her districtwide showing, but there were some interesting local patterns. Brown ran better in most suburban communities, and held Turner to just a narrow edge in Cleveland proper – Brown was especially strong in Beachwood, which has a high Jewish population.

Though it doesn't account for much of the district, Turner narrowly carried OH-11's portion of Summit County. An interactive map from our friends at RRH Elections gives a detailed breakdown: Brown carried many of the white-majority areas while Turner ran better in the heavily Black precincts that make up Akron proper.

Both the LA-2 result and the New York City Democratic mayoral primary, where Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams was seen as a moderate choice, represent, to some degree or another, disappointments for

progressives. Now, with a loss in Ohio, progressives find themselves looking for a high profile win.

Elsewhere in Ohio, someone else who needed a win last night – and got one – was former President Donald Trump. In June, Trump waded into the crowded OH-15 primary and endorsed lobbyist Mike Carey. Not surprisingly, against a field that featured several state legislators, Carey positioned himself as the "conservative outsider," a profile has seemed to hold increasing currency in Republican primaries.

In an 11-way field, Carey prevailed with a 37% plurality. State Rep. Jeff LaRe, who had an endorsement from former Rep. Steve Stivers (R, OH-15), finished next, taking just over 13%. Impressively, Carey finished first in 11 of the 12 counties that make up OH-15 – state Sen. Bob Peterson represents Fayette County in the legislature and carried it last night.

Carey's commanding primary win comes as a relief to Trump, who was stung last week in a Texas special election. Though now-Rep. Jake Ellzey is by no means anti-Trump, he defeated the former president's pick, Susan Wright (the widow of the man Ellzey will replace), in a low-turnout intra-

party runoff.

With the prospect of another defeat looming, Trump's Make America Great Again Action PAC upped its spending on Carey's behalf last week, immediately following Wright's defeat. Though the power of Trump's endorsement will be put to the test the coming election cycle, for now, the former president's allies can claim, with some authority, that the TX-6 result was a fluke.

In the OH-15 Democratic primary, state Rep. Allison Russo easily received the nomination, taking about 85% of the vote. Since 2018, Russo has represented part of the Columbus metro area in the legislature.

With the primaries settled, the general elections for both Ohio districts will be on Nov. 2. In OH-11, which gave President Biden 80% last year, the general election is close to a formality – Brown will almost certainly be its next congresswoman. While the Crystal Ball sees OH-15 as a more competitive race, it is still a Likely Republican contest. While the lower turnout that often characterizes special elections sometimes lead to noisy results, OH-15 supported Trump by double-digits last fall, so the Republicans are favorites to hold it.

Southern redistricting

The late 2010s featured a number of near-misses for Democrats to get a seat at the table in redistricting in four, large states that lean Republican but are or are getting more competitive. In 2018, Democrats lost the Florida and Georgia gubernatorial races by 0.4 and 1.4 points, respectively. Had they won those races, Democratic governors could have used their veto power in those states to block Republican gerrymanders.

Democrats also heavily prioritized flipping state



legislative chambers in North Carolina and Texas last year, but came up well short of doing so.

So Democrats are now fearful, and Republicans are hopeful, that the GOP can squeeze even more seats out of these four growing states. The Democrats' worries were spelled out last week in the liberal publication *Mother Jones*, which reported data from the Democratic firm TargetSmart arguing that Republicans could net anywhere from 6-13 seats just from gerrymandering these states alone. The National Democratic Redistricting Committee pegs the potential Republican gains in these states as possibly even higher: 11-16 seats.

Now, some of this might be just "sky is falling" rhetoric from Democrats who are trying to shock Democratic senators into doing away with the filibuster and pushing through the party's "For the People Act," which would mandate independent redistricting commissions in every state (the Democratic-controlled House has already approved the bill). But there's also no question that Republicans are going to try to sharpen their already-impressive congressional margins in these four growing states, and it's easy to imagine them reaching at least the floor of the Democrats' pessimistic projections (netting six seats), and quite possibly gaining more than that. In other words, the sky might actually be falling for Democrats in these states.

As of right now, these four states, combined, have 90 of the 435 House seats, and Republicans currently hold 55 of these seats, or 61.1% of the total. That's a markedly better share of the seats than the region's presidential vote from 2020 might indicate: Donald Trump won 51.6% of the two-party presidential vote in these four states, combined. Florida and North Carolina, two states that Barack Obama won at least once, have remained stubbornly right of center. Georgia and Texas are trending Democratic relative to the nation, but are also right of center (Texas more so than Georgia, which Joe Biden narrowly carried in 2020).

Texas will be adding two seats, going from 36 to 38, while Florida and North Carolina will be adding a seat apiece, going from 27 to 28 and 13 to 14, respectively. Georgia, which added a 14th seat last decade, is the only one of these four that won't add a seat this decade. That will push this quartet's total to 94 seats, meaning that they will have one-fifth (22%) of all the nation's House seats.

Florida: In Florida, the coming redistricting process should bring no shortage of heartache for Democrats, but one of their most critical letdowns occurred almost three years ago: the winner of the 2018 gubernatorial race would get the opportunity to fill three seats on the state Supreme Court, as three Democratic-appointed justices were set to retire (judges on that court face a mandatory retirement age). In 2015, the state Supreme Court forced changes to the state's Republican-drawn congressional map. The new map precipitated several Democrats pickups in the 2016 and 2018 cycles.

Despite trailing in most polls, and running in an

unfavorable national environment, then-Rep. Ron DeSantis (R, FL-6) upset then-Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum (D) to keep the governor's mansion in Republican hands. DeSantis filled the three positions, and the Florida Supreme Court is now one of the most conservative state courts in the country. With a new jurisprudence dominating the court, Democrats will find a less sympathetic audience for any redistricting challenges, though Republican legislators may not want to get too creative for their own good. Republican mappers may also be limited by the Fair Districts Amendment, a ballot measure that passed in 2010 and was meant to encourage compact and fair districts (but which Democrats are fearful that this court effectively will not enforce after the more liberal version of the court used it against GOP gerrymanders last decade).

Georgia: Georgia has been at the forefront of national politics over the last year. After hosting a razor-thin presidential contest and two blockbuster Senate runoff elections, the Peach State will once again find itself in the national spotlight when maps are redrawn later this year. Though Democrats have found success in recent statewide elections, Republicans will be overseeing the mapmaking process because they still have majorities in both chambers of the state legislature and hold the governorship. With that trifecta, Republicans will face a tough balancing act: they will want to stymie Democratic gains in the Atlanta area but also protect their own incumbents -- all while keeping the Voting Rights Act in mind.

Texas: A mid-1960s scholarly article on gerrymandering has as part of its title "Dragons, Bacon Strips, and Dumbbells," which are terms sometimes used to describe what heavily gerrymandered districts look like. There's no shortage of these kinds of shapes in Texas, one of or perhaps the most consistently gerrymandered state in the country for many decades: previously by Democrats, now by Republicans.

Back in 1994, a year when Republicans won a majority of seats in the South for the first time in modern history (and the House majority for the first time in four decades), the Democratic gerrymander of Texas endured: Republicans won the aggregate statewide House vote by 14 points, but won only 11 of the state's 30 seats (that aggregate vote is inflated, as Democrats left five seats uncontested while Republicans had a candidate in every seat, but this was still a clear gerrymander). In the Democrats' 2018 national wave year, Republicans won 64% of the seats with less than 52% of the two-party vote (though the Republicans left four seats unopposed).

There's no question that Texas has become a more competitive state at the presidential level in recent years. Mitt Romney won the state by 16 points in 2012, and then Donald Trump won it by only nine in 2016 (that was as the national popular vote contracted from Barack Obama by four to Hillary Clinton by two, so Texas became markedly less Republican). In 2020, Trump won the state by 5.5 points, meaning that Trump did about 3.5 points worse last year than he did in 2016. ❖

Ken de la Bastide, Anderson Herald Bulletin:

Republican Sen. Todd Young has become the focus of discontent among Indiana party leaders. Young was one of 17 Republicans in the U.S. Senate to vote for the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill being sought by President Joe Biden. The Republicans joined with the Democratic Party senators to avoid a possible filibuster hurdle. The bill also has the support of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. Indiana's other senator, Mike Braun, voted against the legislation because it would add to the national debt, he said. "As the Crossroads of America," Young said in a statement explaining his yes vote, "Indiana understands the need for federal investment in our crumbling infrastructure, especially with nearly 5,500 miles of Hoosier highways in poor condition. That's why I voted today to formally begin debate on a bipartisan infrastructure bill." An interesting development was a tweet by the Indiana Republican Party calling the legislation President Biden and the radical left's reckless spending. So is Kyle Hupfer, chairman of the state GOP organization, unhappy with Young's vote on the legislation.

Whether or not the state GOP is unhappy will probably not have much of an impact on Young's bid for reelection next year. He is not likely to face a strong challenger in the GOP primary for a second term in office. But there is a lot of speculation about what may take place in GOP circles in 2024 during the next presidential election year. Indiana will elect a new governor, because Eric Holcomb's two terms will have been completed. Braun could seek a second term in the U.S. Senate. However, speculation is that Braun will not run for his Senate seat but will rather run for governor in Indiana. Braun could be one of many candidates seeking the GOP nomination. Others include Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Attorney General Todd Rokita and possibly Hupfer or former Indiana House speaker Brian Bosma. The word is that Holcomb will seek the GOP's nomination for the U.S. Senate in 2024. Of course it's not known who will be the Democratic Party candidate for the Senate seat in 2024, but former Sen. Joe Donnelly has to be considering another run for the office. Donnelly is proving to be a team player as the state party works to re-energize its base of support. ❖

James Briggs, Indystar: Todd Young is one of the serious senators. Young, the Indiana Republican, is not among the members of his party pushing a narrative that Democrats stole last year's election from Donald Trump or that Joe Biden's presidency is a product of rampant voting irregularities. Young even went so far as to confront protesters who traveled to Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6, telling them that "the law matters" and he would not vote against election certification because, "I took an oath under God." That moment set Young apart from many of his more opportunistic Republican colleagues who have calculated that perceived loyalty to

Trump amounts to political success. Those Republicans have kept alive what has come to be known as the Big Lie, or the idea that Trump only lost because the election was rigged. Young won't tell the Big Lie. But, at the same time, Young is joining his party in some blatant little lies that demonstrate the extent to which reality distortion has become a prerequisite even for the most principled Republicans. Young last Sunday authored an op-ed about the economy that was breathtaking in its sophistry. Young argued that we're in the midst of a "Biden-Harris inflation crisis" and the only way out is to vote for Republicans. His Times of Northwest Indiana op-ed blamed Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris for price increases on gas, groceries, housing, restaurants, appliances and other items. The crux of the argument is that Democrats' \$1.9 trillion stimulus package, which included direct payments to Americans, has caused runaway inflation. "Bottom line: Since Democrats took control of Washington, Americans are spending more money for basic goods and services with less cash in their wallets," the op-ed said. Young then went on tour with this message, appearing on Fox Business and saying more things that he almost certainly does not believe. Young called the so-called "inflation crisis" a "cost-of-living tax" that Biden has forced onto Americans. This is truly absurd — especially after Trump spent years single-handedly adding costs to consumer goods through his obsession with tariffs. ❖



Mark Bennett, Terre Haute Tribune-Star: It could be people reading the statistics that show cases of the faster-spreading COVID-19 delta variant are surging in Indiana. Maybe it's young adults seeing the surge among their own age group. Some who felt invincible may be realizing they're not. Others might've realized their defiance poses a risk to others. Whatever their motivations, the number of Hoosiers getting their first dose of COVID-19 vaccinations finally increased last week for the first time since May. That's a sign of hope. Cases of the delta variant are spiraling through a state with 56% of its eligible population still unvaccinated. Indiana has averaged 900 cases a day through July, according to ISDH. Last Thursday, the state recorded 1,461 cases — the most since May 8. In June, Indiana averaged fewer than 2,000 cases per week. Rather than the state mandating mask wearing and vaccinations, Gov. Eric Holcomb and state health officials said this week Indiana will continue to rely on residents using their "personal responsibility" to take those actions. Face masks and vaccinations remain "recommended." The state is also leaving vaccine and mask mandates to local officials, school districts and businesses. That strategy, so far, has resulted in Indiana ranking 36th in the nation for its 44% rate of fully vaccinated residents. The thought of that being as good as it gets — or the prospect of the state and country enduring more sickness and heartache, unnecessarily — is hard to imagine as cooler fall weather arrives and people gather indoors. ❖

Mayor Dennis isn't mincing words

WEST LAFAYETTE — A recent rise in COVID-19 cases, more than four times the weekly average in Tippecanoe County from the start of the summer thanks to a more-contagious delta variant, doesn't have county health officials ready to request capacity restrictions in restaurants and limiting events, the way they were at the height of the pandemic through much of 2020 (Bangert, [Based in Lafayette](#)). And Tippecanoe County commissioner were clear that they weren't interested in pursuing those, now that they had a formal say in any sort of mandate – whether masks, vaccines or restaurant capacity – under a new state law. But during the first county update on the COVID-19 pandemic in months, an hour of community health leaders pleading with 44% of eligible, unvaccinated county residents to get shots as the surest way to slow the spread of the virus and help relieve pressure on at-capacity hospitals, West Lafayette Mayor John Dennis didn't mince words. "Unvaccinated assholes," Dennis said, referring to people who insist the pandemic is fake or "doesn't have any impact on their life at all." "They could not be more wrong," Dennis said. "Nobody likes to revisit the negative past. But we need to be acutely away of what we went through a little over a year ago, when the leadership of this community had no other choice but to start closing things down – when a lot of the freedoms we enjoy were restricted. And it was based on people making choices that weren't in the best interests of themselves or families or friends or their community." Dennis said the local economy couldn't take another shutdown. "I don't think that this brief period we've had of presumed freedom – freedom from masks, freedom from other restrictions, freedom from



COVID – needs to become a boilerplate for further resistance," Dennis said. "It's important that we listen to our local doctors and respect their advice."

Young's war repeal passes Senate test

WASHINGTON — A key Senate committee voted on Wednesday to repeal two authorizations for the use of military force against Iraq, setting up a full chamber vote later this year ([Politico](#)). All Democrats and three Republicans on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee backed a bipartisan bill to scrap the 1991 authorization for the Gulf War and the 2002 authorization to topple Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad. The vote marks a significant step toward Congress reasserting its constitutional authority over matters of war and peace, proponents said, and the effort is on track to become the first successful repeal of an authorization for the use of military force in 50 years. "Congressional action to repeal these authorizations will represent a step toward Congress taking its most solemn responsibility seriously," said Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), who led the repeal effort alongside Sen. Todd Young (R-Ind.). "Allowing outdated authorizations to persist in perpetuity invites the prospect of serious abuses in the future."

Holcomb resists mask mandates

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb has not imposed a mask mandate inside state buildings despite federal guidance that masks should be worn indoors and a surge in the number of Indiana counties approaching high risk for community spread of COVID-19 ((AP). The Republican governor has also maintained he won't reinstate a statewide mask mandate or other restrictions, instead leaving such decisions to local officials. Masks are still not required in state government buildings or for state employees, a spokesperson for

the governor told The Journal Gazette. Inside the Statehouse, there is no signage about face coverings except outside a House Democratic office that asks for masks to be worn before entering. Holcomb also isn't following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation himself. He attended an indoor event in Hancock County without a mask on Tuesday. However, some members of Holcomb's administration continued to wear masks. Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch was wearing a mask indoors at a Marion County event Tuesday. State health officials wore masks last week during an indoor news conference.

IU, BSU announce mask mandates

BLOOMINGTON — Masks will once again be required on the campuses of Ball State and Indiana University to start the new school year ([WANE-TV](#)). Indiana University announced masks will be required indoors for all campuses beginning Thursday, including IU Fort Wayne. In a tweet, the university says this is a time-limited recommendation, with possible changes being considered based on local coronavirus data. Ball State's mask mandate will go into effect Monday, Aug. 9. University President Geoffrey Mearns announced the decision in a letter on Wednesday morning.

Vanderburg begins COVID marketing

EVANSVILLE - The Vanderburgh County Health Department is starting a new marketing campaign, hoping to answer and address any questions, about COVID-19 vaccines ([WFIE-TV](#)). The health department is bringing in local leaders and doctors from around the area to help address any concerns. Organizers say this will help address any misinformation that has been going around. The health department's Mobile Vaccination Unit will also continue to play a major role in vaccination efforts.