

COVID-19 is winning in Indiana

With half population refusing vaccine, health leaders are hemmed in; pandemic will become an on-going fact of life

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – COVID-19 is winning in Indiana.

The pandemic will become a fact of life, moving forward, with half the Hoosier population taking the free,

easily obtained mitigation that the vaccine offers, as well as a willingness to mask up to protect friends, family and community. The other half, in a self-declarative pursuit of “individual freedom,”

is willing to risk health, lives and in-person learning in schools to do whatever it is they desire.

Indiana’s leading public officeholders have acqui-



esced to this COVID-19 victory. Hoosier public health officials from Indianapolis to Spencer to Evansville have stated their cases and are now preparing to deal with sprawling consequences like exhausted doctors and nurses, and scores of unvaccinated school girls and boys facing exposure. The state announced more than 5,000 infections at

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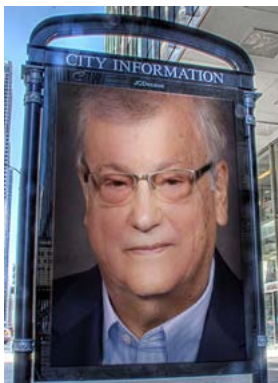
The right to vote

By **MARK SOUDER**

FORT WAYNE – The right to vote is so closely connected to protecting the right to having an honest vote that the two subjects cannot be separated.

Furthermore, it is always a partisan issue because the Democrats jockey for perceived advantages (which vary by time and place) and so do Republicans. To make claims that one party is more political on the issue merely demonstrates one’s personal partisanship. A policy so potentially critical to political success is hardly conducive to the “moral high ground” that both sides claim.

Before plunging further into this “hot” discussion, let me



“I’m here to announce the completion of our withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of the military mission to evacuate American citizens, third country nationals and vulnerable Afghans. The last C-17 ... lifted off this afternoon at 3:29 p.m.”

- Gen. Frank McKenzie of Centcom



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Jack E. Howey
 editor emeritus
 1926-2019



state a couple of what I think are obvious positions, though many Republicans dispute the first and many Democrats dispute the second one.

1.) The 2020 election may have some corruption, as all national ones do, but it was certainly less than in 1960 (as in, far less) and there is no proof that it was any worse than the 2016 election in which Democrats questioned the legitimacy because of Russian meddling. The attempts to overthrow a certified election by county election boards, all 50 states and over 50 court cases was, in my opinion, an attempt to steal an election. Had it succeeded, how to conduct a free election in the future would be a very serious problem. These mythic claims that it was "stolen" are a serious Republican problem. The Democrats trumped up the Russian problem to undermine the 2016 election, but they accepted the certified results. It is one thing to argue whether there was cheating, it is another to make unproven claims and then try to actually steal a constitutionally certified election.

2.) The voting changes in 2020 were driven by problems related to COVID-19 and not accepted for long-term change. To make it that way means those who advocated the change were deliberately deceitful. This is the false premise of Democrats. If there is not agreement on this fundamental fact, how can there ever again be an agreement to handle emergency situations? Are we going to make every issue one in which the winner changes all our laws? Fundamental changes need to have some degree of consensus to last. Jamming things through is a hollow victory. It also fractures trust and stability.

The Republicans need to grant that some of the changes addressed some problems. For example, in Indiana the 6 to 6 voting time limitation would be completely absurd if the relaxation of absentee and alternative early voting hadn't been steadily expanded without much fanfare. It existed prior to two-parent working families being the norm, before sub-

urban voters in particular had long commutes, and back when workers had more stable 9 to 5 hours. These changes arguably helped Republicans in Indiana more than it helped the Democrats.

Among the overwhelming majority of Americans who do not think that COVID-19 was a plot to defeat Donald Trump there was wide agreement that making it easier to vote was a fair and wise decision. However, it did raise other concerns vital to a free democracy. Some, in fact, could lead to abuse. And, if continued, would certainly lead to problems.

One of the discussions that I had in Baghdad, Iraq, (with a variation in Afghanistan) forced me to reflect more thoroughly about U.S. politics. A small group of us had a meeting with Provisional Authority leader Paul Bremer and representatives of the Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish factions prior to the first election there. When I asked them if they thought that people would feel free to cast a vote against whoever their tribal or religious leader was (in other words, was it an intimidation-free, secret ballot), all three representatives said that they "hoped so."

I pressed the Shi'a leader hardest for two reasons: They were the largest faction and the representative was the top staffer and direct representative of Ali al-Sistani. Finally, after the third re-wording of my question, he replied with some exasperation: "How would I know? We have never had a free election before."

In reality, in both Iraq and in Afghanistan elections were only superficially free. Not surprisingly, the people did what their regional leaders said, and they did not really have a freedom to choose. The right to privacy of a ballot is rather unique to western countries with few exceptions. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, in Tripoli, took great pains to assert how popular he was and how he won nearly 100% in free elections. Saddam Hussein made the same claims.

In the U.S., even with private voting booths and voter ID, we have long struggled with organized cheating. To pretend that absentee balloting, especially combined with longer lead times, doesn't risk less true independence is absurd. If ballots are allowed to be "collected" more than one at a time, it compounds the risk of true fraud – especially if those who desire to win by cheating have a longer time in which to establish systematic manipulation.

But there are things that can be done. It was sickening to see examples, not uncommon, of African-Americans lined up for six hours in urban cities, whereas in more white areas lines seldom topped an hour or two (and often were less). There is a gross imbalance in accessibility of polling places in some areas.

Part of the problem is also the increasing difficulty of getting sufficient election day workers, making sure they are trained, and getting poll-watchers whose goal is fairness, not intimidation. In other words, there are likely financial costs to maintaining true fairness to cast a free vote not wiped out by cheaters while making sure that only qualified voters can vote.

Counting the results should not be delayed from the public until all votes are in. Report precincts, publicly, as they are tallied. It would reduce the potential (which happened regularly, including in Indiana in my lifetime) when both parties sometimes held back votes to deny the other side knowing exactly what "number" they needed to win.

Allowing people to vote twice – absentee and then in person – is just stupid. It makes identification and privacy harder, makes counting accuracy rife for chaos, and a host of other reasons. We should try to make cheating

harder, not easier.

A similar challenge, weighted with partisan debate, rages around requiring identification. In the past, especially in the South, to deprive Black voters who had the right to vote the opportunity to cast a vote. In the North, it has been used as an intimidation method. When that happens, people who do it should be prosecuted. We seem to be obsessed with bullying but not of voter intimidation.

But the fact is that you must prove that you are the person you claim to be. That must be verified. You have to meet the legal qualifications to vote, including, for example, you must be alive. That wasn't always true in many places, with Chicago being a prime example. Children can't vote. Change the rules through our process if you think some identification requirements are wrong. But we require identification for about everything else in life these days.

That said, some accommodation should be discussed as forms of alternative ID if there are other ways to authenticate it, but people who are not eligible to vote should not vote. Many lower income people move around a lot. They may not own a car. There are some things that can't be accommodated but either some flexibility will need to occur, or irresponsible changes will lead to chaos. Stonewalling reasonable points will ultimately result in very bad final resolution.

We can have reasonable discussions on voting rights, especially legal participation by voters who are underrepresented. Many Americans, on all sides, simply believe that fairness is now impossible. That is a bigger and bigger threat to our nation. ❖

Souder is a former Republican Member of Congress.

Pandemic, from page 1

Indiana schools on Monday.

Those are the takeaways from last Friday's pandemic press conference conducted by Health Commissioner Kris Box and Chief Medical Officer Lindsay Weaver. Box described this state of 6.7 million people as entering its "darkest hour of the pandemic."

Dr. Weaver added, "It is incredibly heart-breaking as a health care provider to care for somebody who is sick and dying because they haven't been vaccinated. It's young people, pregnant women, older people, and honestly for a lifetime of being OK with people ignoring my medical advice, this is different, and it's feeling for the health care workforce because it's not just them that's dying; it's other people who are also getting very sick from it."

Missing from this scene was Gov. Eric Holcomb, who for about 13 months had been the transparent spokesman, advocate and "decider" for

the pandemic. Like President Trump back in the spring of 2020, Holcomb engaged in a weekly pandemic "show." But unlike Trump, he advocated social distancing and mask-



ing. When the vaccine was announced, Holcomb was an ardent proponent, publicly receiving the vaccine at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway with General Assembly leaders and members of the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus.

But since he gave his "light at the end of the tunnel" speech in late March, he's been inconspicuous, even as this avoidable fourth surge began spiking in late July among the unvaccinated at first in the Deep South, and now spreading northward across our state, just as schools began reopening for in-person instruction. Indiana Democrats

are pointing out that he last attended a pandemic briefing 153 days ago.

Holcomb signed Executive Orders 21-22 and 21-23 on Monday. In Executive Order 21-22, Gov. Holcomb renewed the public health emergency for 30 days. It is set to expire on Sept. 30, 2021. The governor also signed 21-23, which extends the Executive Order specific to COVID-19 through Sept. 1. The short-term extension will allow for ongoing conversations with healthcare stakeholders to evaluate pertinent information that supports hospitals during the current COVID surge.

The vaccine has become politicized, with most Indiana counties which voted for Donald Trump in 2020 languishing in the 30th percentile for fully vaccinated.

Now the state is facing another 6,000 deaths and the specter of schools shifting to virtual learning formats while local governments fight over masking and other mitigation policies. The University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation is forecasting 100,000 additional COVID-19 deaths in the United States by Dec. 1. As for Indiana, which had 14,190 deaths as of Aug. 19, it is forecasting 21,485 deaths by Dec. 1, peaking at 131 per day by Oct. 15. It is projecting 6,500 daily hospitalizations by October.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become the most lethal health sequence in the state's 205 years, far surpassing the estimated 10,000 lives taken during the 1918/1919 Spanish flu pandemic. It has been a maddening microbe, leaving upwards of 40% of guest bodies asymptomatic, while dealing a cruel blow to those who ended up in a crowded ICU ward (or hospital hallway or temporary tent), and, for 14,000 Hoosiers, an early grave.

There are now thousands of kids, teachers and staff who are either hospitalized, in quarantine, or reverting back to virtual learning due to the fast spreading Delta variant. Indiana schools reported 5,529 student COVID-19 cases in the last week, including 612 among teachers and staff. Some 12% of schools are not reporting, while 27% of new cases since the ISDH update on Friday have been kids under 18.

"Many of our hospitals are once again struggling with staffing and capacity issues," said Dr. Box, who described a "sharp increase" in the number of pediatric cases

involving 5- to 9-year-olds as well as older teenagers. "Nearly 2,200 Hoosiers are currently hospitalized with COVID. Keep in mind our peak was just under 3,400 patients. We see available ICU beds fall again, which impacts every Hoosier in need of critical medical care."

Box said four of 10 regional hospital districts are utilizing "more than 100%" of ICU beds.

"We have also seen an increase in children being hospitalized," Box said. "Many of these children are not yet eligible to be vaccinated. To anyone who argues that COVID-19 does not impact children, I can assure you that every parent with a hospitalized child would disagree. This surge continues to be fueled by the extremely infectious Delta variant.

"None of this is good news for Hoosiers," Dr. Box said. "I've heard other medical professionals around the country state that this is ... the darkest time in the pandemic. Unfortunately, I share those sentiments.

"I want Hoosiers to know this surge isn't just impacting those diagnosed with COVID. It impacts the person who needs a biopsy to see if he or she has cancer," Dr. Box said. "The accident victim who gets held in an emergency room because there isn't enough staff to put them in a room. The person who is depending on a joint replacement to relieve them of extreme pain. I saw a photograph of a young cancer patient from Indiana sitting in the back of a van instead of being in a hospital where there were no beds for him."

"I think we are fully preparing that things are going to get much worse with our hospitalizations in the next four weeks," said Dr. Weaver, the state's chief medical officer.

This comes as the Indiana General Assembly took steps last winter to mitigate the input of the governor and local health officials. The gubernatorial powers Holcomb exercised in March 2020 are no longer in full effect, compromising his political capital as a parallel result.

Holcomb's limited public access

Holcomb has since limited his public access to scheduled events. When Howey Politics Indiana asked for an interview as this fourth surge began in July, Holcomb's office referred us to the ISDH and said he would be available for comment at public events.

"Indiana is 'on fire' yet again as COVID-19 cases



Holcomb steers through virus gauntlet

'Light at the end of the tunnel' speech comes as he begins to loosen restrictions toward normal

By BRIAN A. HOWEY INDIANAPOLIS — Last October, Gov. Eric Holcomb and Indiana Republican Chairman Kyle Huffer pulled into a parking lot in Shelburn, Ind., where the governor did a media event with the local press. The power pair then disappeared momentarily into the governor's black Toyota before emerging adorned in Hawaiian shirts. It was meant to be a bow to the fashionable Sullivan County Republican Chairman Bill Springer before they addressed his Lincoln Day luncheon. But Springer turned the tables on them out of apparent respect, wearing a three-piece black suit. The conservative, Trump-loving Sullivan County Republicans were partially masked for the meal,



and during about a roughly 20-minute Q&A that Holcomb and Huffer conducted, many a complaint was heard on how the governor was handling the pandemic.

The pundit class isn't needed to validate Holcomb's job performance during the unprecedented pandemic of 2020-21. A mere thorough measure came on Nov. 3 when 1.7 million Hoosiers, or 56.5% of voters, decided to send him back for a second term in a race waged against a former state health commissioner.

The novel COVID-19 pandemic didn't create that one moment snapshot of gubernatorial authority, like it did in 1989 when Gov. Evan Bayh led a hundred

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Clown car blocks pandemic tunnel

State tax rate stalls as variants pose threat to return to normal

By BRIAN A. HOWEY INDIANAPOLIS — Last March 23, Gov. Eric Holcomb used the first anniversary of his COVID-19 shutdown to give a statewide address, his "light at the end of the tunnel" speech, a glimpse at a post-pandemic life returning to normal. "It's up to each and every one of us to do our part to stay on our course," he said.

Little did the governor, or most of us, realize that the end of that proverbial tunnel would be blocked by a clown car, with commentators and anti-vaxxers tumbling out, erecting an arcade-style house of mirrors. At this writing, only 43.1% of Hoosiers are fully vaccinated, according to CDC statistics, and only 45.8% have received one dose — far, far below President Biden's July 4 goal of achieving a



70% vaccination rate on the way to herd immunity. Instead of reveling in that social achievement coming on the heels of one of this nation's greatest scientific breakthroughs (getting a safe, effective vaccine to the general public within a year), the U.S. is now rigidly divided along political fault lines.

The top 22 states (including D.C.) with the highest adult vaccination rates all were carried by Joe Biden in the

Continued on page 3

and hospitalizations have reached levels not seen since last winter, and yet, Gov. Holcomb is forcing the media to chase him down to get answers on how the state is responding to the latest surge brought on by the Delta variant. It's long past time for Governor Eric Holcomb to provide an update with Hoosiers about the coronavirus," said Lauren Ganapini, executive director of the Indiana Democratic Party.

Last week he was asked about the surge while appearing at a NWI Times event. "I'm good with where we are from a state perspective," Holcomb said. "What we want to do as a state is to make sure local authorities have the resources that they need. And that may be endless, but we're going to work on it every single day – together. We know 98% or 99% of all positive cases, week after week after week, are unvaccinated; positive hospitalizations, unvaccinated; intensive care unit beds, unvaccinated; deaths, unvaccinated – so we know the answer to prevent those adverse reactions. We're trying to make sure we're doing everything we can to equip local authorities to make the decisions to be as safe as they can depending on the local data, literally in their neighborhood."

Last Wednesday, he said he would not reimpose a mask mandate. "We are not going to have a mask mandate. We are not going to mandate everyone doing one thing when this is different per community," Holcomb said. "The goal that the state of Indiana has is to make sure they have (vaccine) access. It's easy, it's free."

That came two days after ISDH reported 43 counties were in Indiana's second-riskiest category for the spread of the virus, up from 29 counties a week earlier, while about 1,300 Hoosiers currently are hospitalized with COVID-19, according to the most recent data released by the state health department. Since then, infection rates have increased to up to 5,000 per day.

Dialogue with the Governor

Dr. Box was asked about dialogue with Holcomb about the surge and masking. "There's always a conversation with the governor on-going about everything with regard to this pandemic and that hasn't changed from Day One," Dr. Box said. "I'm sure it won't change until we finish this. I will say that whether we have a mask mandate or not, the bottom line is masking is the mitigation effort that will decrease transmission of this Delta variant, until we get out of this surge. I'm not talking about this fall or even into June of 2022, but right now we have to decrease the transmission in the state of Indiana and masking and getting vaccinated are the main ways we're going to do that."



As Friday's pandemic media avail continued, it became increasingly apparent that Dr. Box and Weaver were becoming frustrated.

Asked about widespread non-compliance of CDC guidelines involving masking, Weaver and Box appeared unsure of how to respond. "I think this is a time when lives have felt very out of control for a lot of people across our state and the ability to have control over something that is important to them that is something very difficult to give up," Box continued. "I do not understand how wearing a mask is so difficult."

Pressed by reporters over the patchwork of local masking and learning strategies, many of which have been reversed in recent days, Box said, "I don't know how we could have messaged or planned or made available for vaccinations any better than we've done. I'll be very honest with you; the accessibility of these vaccines, our partnership with local public health and with our hospital systems across the state and our National Guard have been absolutely remarkable. I really feel we have done everything within our power to make this vaccine available to speak to the risks associated with this vaccine, which are minimal, and over and over again the benefits of being fully vaccinated."

KPC News reporter Steve Garbacz asked for their reaction to a Whitley County Board of Commissioners decision that would allow those in close contact with a COVID case but showing no symptoms to continue to work or school. Dr. Box responded, "Very very early in this process we did a Fairbanks study where we tested people, we just randomly tested people and it became very clear 45% of individuals who tested positive were totally asymptomatic at the time they tested positive. So we know that 100% up to 48 hours before and with the delta variant it may be longer than that so we know you are infecting other people. So that's why the allowing people to show up to school or work concept doesn't work. It is absolutely incorrect and not an appropriate or science-based process."

When Garbacz asked about Indiana feed and livestock stores running out of ivermectin, the horse/cattle deworming drug that has been recommended by several Fox News talk show hosts, Weaver said, "It is not proven to be beneficial. It could actually harm you." Dr. Box added, "Don't take a medicine that is prescribed for especially large animals. That's my recommendation."

This exchange was followed by nervous laughter, the kind of dark humor often expressed during grueling sequences.

When WTHR-TV's Rich Nye pressed them on a breakdown in pediatric pandemic cases and a lack of

contact tracing by school districts, there was acknowledgement of the current dangers.

Dr. Box responded, "Most certainly having students in school together and doing extracurricular activities is contributing to these cases. We could definitely decrease these cases and transmissions if students would be fully masked, all day, in school. All students, teachers and staff. It is difficult know exactly what is happening when schools are not willing to report cases and not willing to report close contacts and we are working with schools and talking to the Department of Education about what future actions or supports will be given schools."

At the end of the press conference, Box and Weaver were reminded by a reporter that this isn't the first time "we've heard you urge people to get vaccinated. Is there a point when somebody has to do something to stop it?"

Box responded, "I am not sure what additional things to do. Even last year when we had a mask mandate there were many areas of our state that chose to totally ignore that mask mandate. We can show the data showing how this is affecting Hoosiers, even Hoosiers who are fully vaccinated in their health care. People feel very strongly this is a personal thing and they want to have control over and I understand that.

"I do not understand how wearing a mask is so difficult for people to prevent transmitting this virus," Box continued. "We are incredibly blest to have these vaccines that are incredibly safe at the same time. Other than continuing to impress upon people the importance on this and the effects their decisions have on other people ..."

After describing the "darkest times of the pandemic" approaching, the health officials were asked, "Where do you see pandemic going?"

"For two to four weeks, no, things are going to get worse if Hoosiers do not start wearing masks and more Hoosiers don't get vaccinated," Dr. Box said. "We are going to see cases continue to increase until right after Labor Day and then we will see hospitalizations follow as far as their increase over the next two to three weeks. I think the things we are able to control by getting vaccines now is if we have another surge later this fall or winter."

Dr. Weaver: "I think we are fully preparing for things getting much worse with our hospitalizations in the next four weeks."

Politicized vaccine

Clearly the wide gulf between the vaccinated and unvaccinated follows the 2020 presidential map, both nationally and in Indiana. The vaccines were developed under President Trump, but he was angered when they weren't released for use prior to his loss to Democrat Joe Biden in

November 2020. He refused to take the vaccine publicly while in office. Since then, use of the vaccine has followed the 2020 political contours.

Earlier this month at a MAGA rally in Alabama, Trump recommended the vaccine. "I recommend take the vaccines. I did it. It's good. Take the vaccines," he said.

Some boos rang out from the crowd, who were largely maskless, signaling that even Donald Trump cannot control the vaccine recalcitrance. "No, that's OK. That's all right. You got your freedoms. But I happened to take the vaccine. If it doesn't work, you'll be the first to know. OK? I'll call up Alabama, I'll say, hey, you know what? But [the vaccine] is working."

Recalibrating COVID expectations

The other question is: What are we actually trying to achieve in the United States? If the goal is getting to zero infections and staying at that level before dropping restrictions, one set of policies apply. If the goal is to make this virus like the seasonal flu, a different set of policies should follow.

While a number of political figures have recorded videos and PSAs – most notably U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Illinois Gov. Pritzker, Lafayette Mayor Tony Roswarski, West Lafayette Mayor John Dennis and

Tippecanoe County Commissioner Tom Murtaugh – most Hoosier Republicans haven't. That is due, in part apparently, to fear of a political backlash, or baked-in attitudes that have about half of the population unmoved toward the vaccine.

Previous governors like Mitch Daniels haven't been reticent about using their ample political capital to move Hoosiers into a better place. Gov. Holcomb's polling may be showing that expenditure of that capital may not produce a policy dividend and, with the GOP primary electorate, may pose a future risk.

Meanwhile, Lafayette's Dave Bangert describes a video of Schanna Lawinger, a registered nurse at Franciscan Health, who looks the part when she looks into the camera for a new video plea from Lafayette's hospital strained by the latest COVID-19 surge and says: "We're exhausted."

This pandemic has been exhausting for everyone it has touched, from governors and mayors to health commissioners, doctors, nurses and other first responders and caregivers.

The unfortunate truth facing us all here in the dog days of August 2021 – which had been expected to be the new era of the post-COVID promised land – is that here in the Hoosier State, the virus appears to have won an extended lease on life. ❖



Redistricting schedule released on Monday

By Howey Politics Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS – House and Senate Republicans laid out the redistricting schedule on Monday, with proposed congressional and General Assembly House maps to be posted online Sept. 14 at iga.in.gov.

House Committee on Elections and Apportionment Chairman Tim Wesco (R-Osceola), is expected to host a public meeting of the committee to gather feedback from the public on the initial drafts of the U.S. House of Representatives and Indiana House of Representatives maps Sept. 16 in the House Chamber of the Statehouse in Indianapolis.

The committee is expected to meet again at 10 a.m. on Sept. 20 for an amend-and-vote-only meeting. The full House is expected to vote on the adoption of the committee report that same day. House lawmakers are then expected to return to the Statehouse Sept. 22 and 23 for second and third reading, respectively. Meeting times will be posted online at iga.in.gov once they are available.

"We currently expect the initial drafts of the Senate maps to be available Sept. 21. When they are ready, they will be posted online at iga.in.gov," said House spokeswoman Erin Wittern and Senate spokeswoman Molly Fishell in a joint statement on Monday.

Senate Committee Elections Chairman Jon Ford (R-Terre Haute) is expected to host a public meeting of the committee to gather feedback on the maps from the public Sept. 27. The committee is expected to meet again Sept. 28 for an amend-and-vote-only meeting. The times and locations of these two committee meetings are still to be determined. Meeting schedules will be posted online at iga.in.gov. The Senate is expected to reconvene Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 for second and third reading, respectively. Meeting times will be posted online at iga.in.gov once they are available.

Sen. Kruse to retire

State Sen. Dennis Kruse (R-Auburn) announced Friday he will not seek reelection upon the conclusion of his current term, which is set to expire in 2022. Kruse has served in the Indiana General Assembly since 1989 and in the Senate since 2004.

Kruse becomes the second Senate Republican to announce he won't seek reelection, following Sen. Ron Grooms, (R-Jeffersonville).

"Being able to serve my community for so many years has been an opportunity of a lifetime," Kruse said. "I am thankful to God and for the people of Allen and DeKalb counties for putting their trust in me," Kruse said. "I have decided to retire to spend more time with my wife and family, but as I go into my final session, I will continue to serve

Senate District 14 to the best of my ability."

Sen. Sanders in West Lafayette

After sweating out a 90-degree Friday evening of Sen. Bernie Sanders selling what he called the most important piece of social spending legislation since FDR's New Deal to an overflow crowd ready and willing to hear it – overheard on the way back to the Tippecanoe County Amphitheater parking lot: "Every progressive in town was in there" – someone in the second row had one question for the U.S. senator from Vermont (Bangert, [Based in Lafayette](#)). How can everyone there be sure, he wanted to know, that Sanders can follow through and get everything – the child care, the free community college tuition, the equivalent of Medicare for All, paid family leave, the solutions for climate change, with the whole \$3.5 trillion deal funded by taxing the wealthiest Americans and corporations – done without him cratering during budget negotiations with a skeptical Congress?

"Are we going to have to fight like hell in the House and the Senate to maintain and protect progressive provisions?" Sanders answered. "We will." But on the first stop of a two-city tour aimed at reaching working class voters in red congressional districts in the Midwest, Sanders said progressives were at a moment where they could make good on promises made in recent years and do what he said would make American lives better.

Whether a single Republican jumps on board for the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation bill he's shepherding as Senate budget chairman was another story. It was a prospect Sanders all but guaranteed wouldn't happen. "I am here in Indiana this evening, absolutely convinced that if we have the courage and the determination to stand together in the fight for justice, for fight for economic justice, for social justice, for racial justice, and for environmental justice," Sanders said, "not only can we successfully address the crises that we face, but we can move this country forward in a very different and positive direction." Sanders followed up, telling the crowd of 2,300-plus people in a space with 1,511 fixed seats that it was "unacceptable that a generation lives paycheck to paycheck" while the GOP championed tax cuts for billionaires. Why, he asked, was it OK to help people he said had so much money they didn't know what do with it, so they're funding trips into space?

"Never in our lifetime has there been a piece of legislation which goes as far as this does in addressing the long-neglected problems facing the working class and middle class of this country," Sanders said. "Clearly,



we have a long way to go to create an economy that works for all Americans and not just the 1%, not just the billionaire class and not just the wealthy campaign contributors.”

U.S. Sen. Mike Braun, U.S. Rep. Jim Baird and Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita took part in a rally organized by Americans for Prosperity, a conservative political action group initiated by the billionaire Koch brothers. Each took shots at the Democratic plan Sanders was carrying to Tippecanoe County, calling it a slide toward socialism and a surefire way to run up federal deficits and debt.



Even at the Tippecanoe County Amphitheater, some of Sanders’ fans came away with some of doubts – if not in the same category of those of the 4th District’s delegation to Congress, then of the guy who asked the question from the second row.

“You have to like what he was saying – I certainly did,” Marianne Johnson, a Carroll County resident who said she voted for Sanders over Hillary Clinton in the May 2016 primary, said. (Sanders won Indiana’s primary that year, before losing the nomination in the weeks that followed.) “But it seems a bit idealistic, everything he said,” Johnson said. “Some of it? Maybe. All of it. I just don’t know, no matter how much I’d like to see it.”

A few strides behind her, Sarah Gaffney, who drove from Indianapolis to see Sanders, said: “I’m with him 100%. All the way. In there, hearing him, only made it stronger. If we could only get people who represent us to think even just a little more like Bernie.”

Steve Nelson, a Republican from Remington, had joined an Americans for Prosperity-led protest that had been corralled into the full sun, on the park grounds about a football field away from the Amphitheater gates. Rallying around a giant pig, on a trailer and painted with “Pulling the Pork” on its side, and chanting, “Hey! Hey! Ho! Ho! Socialism has got to go!” took its toll pretty quickly, he said. So, he went in to hear Sanders for himself. Braun said he liked some of what was in the spending bill. (He did not give specifics about which parts he’d like to save.) But he said he planned to vote against it “out of principle.”

Walorski calls for Biden to resign

U.S. Rep. Jackie Walorski called for President Biden to resign following Wednesday’s ISIS-K terror attack on the Kabul airport during the U.S. pullout. “The Biden Administration’s chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan has endangered American lives and emboldened our adversaries. Yesterday, the death of 13 servicemembers in the line of duty was heartbreaking and horrific,” Walorski said. “The brutal terrorist attack that


claimed these American heroes and nearly 100 Afghans was tragic. This botched operation is a direct consequence of the president’s decision to entrust the safety of American citizens and our Armed Forces to the goodwill of the Taliban. We owe it to our fallen servicemembers, and their families, to hold our nation’s commander-in-chief accountable for missteps that jeopardized their vital mission of evacuating American citizens, partners, and vetted allies from Afghanistan. As the president has said repeatedly, the buck stops with him – and I agree. The buck must stop here. President Biden has demonstrated that he is unfit to serve as commander-in-chief, and, therefore, must resign.” The White House ignored the statement from Walorski and several U.S. senators who called for Biden to resign.

Banks & Pelosi

U.S. Rep. Jim Banks is urging his party to punish every lawmaker investigating the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol if Republicans take back the majority in 2022. “When we win back the majority next year, we have a duty as Republicans to hold every member of this committee accountable for this abuse of power, for stepping over the line, by preventing them from being in positions of authority,” Banks told Fox News host Tucker Carlson on Tuesday. “Take them off any committee, get them as far away from positions of power as you can because they’ve shown us that by threatening to do this that they abuse their power, wherever they are.” This comes after Speaker Pelosi removed Banks from the Jan. 6 committee, which then said it would seek phone records from he and other Republicans. “We’ll see what the [January 6] committee finds out about them,” Pelosi said. Banks responded: “Speaker Pelosi threatened to investigate her political opponents without pretext. That is an abuse of power and if she follows through she needs to be held accountable. It is banana republic style politics that doesn’t belong in America.” ❖

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

Last year's recession will hit locals next year

By **LARRY DeBOER**

WEST LAFAYETTE – The National Bureau of Economic Research is our quasi-official umpire of recessions and expansions. Last year it marked the peak of the last decade's expansion as February 2020. In July it marked the trough – the economy's low point – as April 2020. That made the pandemic recession the shortest but sharpest decline in history. The trough of a recession means that things aren't continuing to get worse. We all know that the recovery still has a ways to go. The recession may be over for the U.S. economy, but for Indiana local governments the recession is just about to start. That's because the property tax and the local income tax respond to economic changes with a two-year delay. What happened to the economy in 2020 happens to local tax revenues in 2022.



Here's why. County assessors set property assessments for 2021 based on what happened to property values, new construction and business equipment purchases in 2020. Tax bills for 2022 will be based on 2021 assessments. Next year's tax bills will be affected by last year's property values.

State law sets a maximum amount that local governments can raise from the property tax. This maximum levy can increase by a "maximum levy growth quotient." The quotient is based on the six-year average of statewide income growth. It's recalculated each July for the coming calendar year, based on the most recent data. This year's MLGQ was set in July 2020, based on income growth through 2019. The 2022 MLGQ was set this July, and included data from 2020. Recession year income changes will enter the levy calculation next year.

Local income taxes are collected by the state government and distributed back to local governments. Each year's distribution is based on revenue collected in the previous state fiscal year. So, the distributions for 2022 that the State Budget Agency just announced are based on tax collections from July 2020 to June 2021. Most of those collections were from the spring 2021 income tax payments, which were based on incomes from 2020. Local income tax distributions in 2022 are based on incomes from the recession year.

The Great Recession that troughed in 2009 affected local governments most two years later, in 2011. Statewide assessed values dropped by half a percent. That doesn't seem like much, but assessed values had declined only three times in the previous 59 years. Any drop was a

shock. The drop in statewide income from 2009 entered the MLGQ formula, and the growth quotient fell from 3.8% to 2.9%. It was the lowest MLGQ ever. Local income tax distributions fell 23%, the biggest decrease ever.

The pandemic recession of 2020 will affect Indiana local governments in 2022. It looks like the effects of this recession will be smaller than in 2011.

The Department of Local Government Finance announced next year's MLGQ back in July. It increased from 4.2% this year to 4.3% for 2022. Statewide income actually grew more than usual in the recession year, because of the CARES Act payments and the added unemployment insurance benefits. Local governments can choose to increase their levies slightly more than usual.

In August the State Budget Agency announced local income tax distributions for 2022. They were down 2%. Part of this decrease was caused by the postponed due date for income tax payments, from the usual April 15 to May 17. The Department of Revenue wasn't able to process as many returns by the June 30 deadline for setting distributions. Part of that loss will be made up in supplemental distributions in May 2022, but the rest will have to wait until 2023.

We don't yet know what will happen to assessed values. We know that home values are rising. We also know that farmland assessments will be stable. Assessments of commercial property – such as restaurants, malls and office buildings – are the concern.

If assessed values rise less than the levy, tax rates would rise and more people would hit their tax caps. Local governments would collect a smaller share of their levies. Still, compared to the last recession, this one likely will have a much smaller effect on Indiana's local governments. The 2020 recession was sharp but mercifully short.



DeBoer is a professor of agriculture economics at Purdue University.

Lessons from Sept. 11

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – Most Americans alive 20 years ago remember where they were on September 11, 2001. They remember the airplane hijackings, the attacks, and the collapse of the Twin Towers. They remember the nearly 3,000 who perished.



As our nation refocuses on that searing event, it will be tempting to pay attention to the lessons we've learned in the decades since when it comes to dealing with foreign threats and to

homeland security. These are, of course, crucial. But in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, we also learned some important lessons about Congress and how it works, and about the benefits to the country of a truly bipartisan approach to difficult issues.

I say this because I was honored to serve as the vice chair of the 9/11 Commission, along with former New Jersey Gov. Thomas Kean. Over 18 months, we reviewed more than 2.5 million pages of documents and conducted 1200 interviews. We sought to be independent, impartial, thorough, and non-partisan, and joined our commission colleagues, equal in number from both sides of the aisle, in issuing a bipartisan, unanimous report.

During that inquiry we learned many lessons that are still valid today. We learned, for instance, that there's a thirst for accountability in this country. Americans expect their country to work and they're disappointed when it does not. They react negatively when bureaucrats say, "Trust us." This is why we pursued our inquiry in an open manner, not behind closed doors; transparency helped the public gain confidence in our work.

We also learned the necessity of pursuing consensus. Without a unanimous report, our effort would have failed. Bipartisanship in national security, we found, is essential.

There's no question that the specifics the commission recommended – a director of national intelligence, to pull together the work of the country's 16 intelligence agencies, and a National Counter Terrorism Center whose analysts work together to connect the dots and prevent future attacks – have made a difference. Though there have been lapses, intelligence and law enforcement have disrupted scores of plots. Our aircraft and borders are more secure. Our military eliminated the leadership of Al Qaeda and ISIS and decimated their capabilities. The institutions created after 9/11 have made us safer.

Yet the challenges ahead are many, and, notably, many of them involve Congress. A major unfinished recommendation from the 9/11 Commission is changing how Capitol Hill works. Because the commission recommended the creation of powerful executive-branch institutions, it also recommended powerful congressional committees to serve as watchdogs. Instead, DHS still reports to dozens of oversight committees. Agency leaders spend precious time before them and receive muddled guidance. When everybody is in charge, nobody is in charge.

The challenge of domes-

tic terrorism also requires strong government powers checked by rigorous oversight. The Justice Department and the FBI must lead the effort against domestic terrorism, carefully monitored by watchdogs, above all Congress and the courts.

The United States has also fallen short in addressing the upstream causes of terrorism. Our military and intelligence services are superb at finding, tracking, and eliminating terrorists. Yet it is easier to destroy threats than to rebuild societies. Prevention is less costly than military intervention, but it requires time and patient effort.

Looking beyond the report, the threat to our information networks demands focused congressional action. Ransomware and cyberattacks are with us daily. These threats to our security and prosperity are urgent. No one wants to read some future commission report about our collective "failure of imagination" to address the cyber threat when its dangers have been in plain sight for years.

Perhaps most notably, the most important lesson of the 9/11 Commission involved the absolute and central importance of bipartisanship. None of what followed its report would have been possible without it. We cannot address our country's problems unless we work together.

The experience of the 9/11 Commission and the nation's experience rallying together after the attacks shows that this is not a pipe dream, though it will be up to Americans and their leaders to determine whether it becomes reality. I'm optimistic that our system of self-government can rise to meet the challenges before us, but it will take the kind of bipartisan determination that the 9/11 attacks awakened. ❖

Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government; a Distinguished Scholar at the IU Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies; and a Professor of Practice at the IU O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.



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Trump's Friday the 13th 'reinstatement day'

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – With President Trump reinstated on that lucky Friday the 13th of August, we already see positive changes. His surrender deal with the Taliban finally is implemented.

What's that? Some of you didn't know Trump is back? That's because the "fake news" media wouldn't report it. You didn't read about it in The South Bend Tribune. Local TV didn't inform you. National publications and TV networks didn't report it. Of course not. They're all "fake news."



But Aug. 13 was the day, proclaimed "Reinstatement Day," the day Trump rightfully returned to the presidency that he supposedly lost. Patriotic QAnon believers,

fighting for Trump and against "deep state" pedophiles, proclaimed Aug. 13 as the date. The MyPillow guy guaranteed it. It was there on social media. It was all over the internet. What more do you need? It must have happened. President Trump himself talked of being back as president in August.

MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell, close confidant of Trump's and leader of the relentless effort to prove all that fraud in the presidential election, alerted us that he would present solid proof of the rigging at a mid-August cyber symposium in Sioux Falls, S.D. The pillow tycoon promised "100% non-subjective evidence" that would bring a unanimous Supreme Court ruling that Trump won the election.

Said Lindell confidently: "Once we have the symposium, by the night of the 12th or the morning of the 13th, if everyone has seen it, including the administration that's in there now that didn't win, maybe Biden and Harris would say, 'Hey, we're here to protect the country' and resign."

If you can't trust a pillow salesman, who can you trust? Lindell said he proved his case with mounds of data.



The purveyors of fake news, however, quoted participants at the symposium, including Lindell's own hired cyber expert, as saying nothing was proven and the data was rubbish. Do you believe them or the MyPillow guy?

Further proof that Aug. 13 was indeed "Reinstatement Day" comes from QAnon followers citing that date. QAnon is a cause for Americans opposing a cabal of "deep state" rulers in the media, entertainment, the corporate world and the Democratic Party engaging in child sex trafficking, abusing kids and drinking their blood.

If you can't trust Americans opposing pedophilia and cannibalism, who can you trust? Yes, QAnon had mentioned other earlier dates when Trump would vanquish the pedophiles, including storming in at the Jan. 20 Inauguration to put a violent halt to swearing in of Joe Biden. But it later became clear that the storm was to come in March on the original inauguration date for the country.

Well, actually, not then. Jan. 6 was when some Trump supporters thought fraudulent election results would be overturned. They stormed the Capitol to block certification of the electoral votes, shouting, "Kill Mike Pence!" Alas, some uncooperative Capitol Police officers slowed them down, and they didn't bring Pence to justice or overthrow the electoral results.

Aug. 13? You can find on line that there are true believers of that date as the day when Donald Trump really was reinstated. It's right there on the internet. Unfortunately, it will take a little longer for the skeptics and liars to admit that Trump is back.

Maybe the report of the Cyber Ninjas conducting that long Arizona election audit, including a careful search for traces of incriminating bamboo, will finally convince

everyone. But the report was delayed last week when three of the Ninjas on the five-member analysis team were stricken with COVID-19. Could this be fake news to pretend COVID is serious and promote a deadly vaccine and suffocating masks?

What's that?

The MyPillow guy now says reinstatement wasn't Aug. 13, but it will come before 2021 ends. Only a delay. Be patient. Just relax, resting on your favorite pillow.



Colwell has covered Indiana politics for the South Bend Tribune.

How to think about the infrastructure bill

By **MICHAEL HICKS**

MUNCIE – Earlier this month, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (HR 3684) passed the U.S. Senate in an overwhelming bipartisan vote. This legislation launches a multi-year one-trillion-dollar effort to improve roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, broadband, the electrical grid and other mostly traditional infrastructure projects.



This is the type of legislation for which there is both principled opposition and support. In other words, this is a normal law. One way to think through this law is to consider the magnitude of this spending and what infrastructure spending does and does not do for the economy.

This legislation spends roughly one trillion dollars over several years on infrastructure. The total value of publicly owned infrastructure in the U.S. is about \$30 trillion. Our annual federal budget is about \$4.5 trillion per year, and state and local tax collections add another \$1.8 trillion per year. Spread over seven years, this is investment equal to about 0.4% of total capital stock and 2.2% of state and local tax revenues.

Placing that in the context, let's compare this bill to a homeowner who earns \$50,000 a year and owns a \$150,000 home. The infrastructure bill is roughly equal to between \$600 and \$1,100 of home maintenance, repair and remodeling. I'm not a fan of household comparisons of public spending, but this at least provides a scale of spending. However, this comparison misses some state and local contributions, and ignores the fact that public infrastructure has a much longer lifespan than private infrastructure.

Many folks view infrastructure spending as a job creator. While it is true that this spending tends to create construction and manufacturing jobs, the inevitable tax dollars used to pay for it destroy jobs in other sectors. Even if this spending is financed through borrowing, the real benefit lies elsewhere. It is also true that there will be large reallocation of jobs from one industry to another, and possibly from one year to another. It is not at all certain there will be net employment growth. The real benefits of infrastructure spending don't come from the short-term construction jobs.

The efficiency of public infrastructure is a key part economic growth. Private firms do not see a direct return on investment for public roads, bridges, sewers, or water systems, but there can be an overall impact on productivity. And productivity – how much a worker produces each year – is the key to economic growth. This is where the

potential benefits of infrastructure spending occur.

The decision to invest more in public infrastructure is really a decision about the relative productivity benefits of public versus private spending. Every new tax dollar spent on public infrastructure reduces investment in private infrastructure. So, spending on this infrastructure bill necessarily removes money from private investors who would otherwise spend it on urban housing, research and development, more productive capital or private amenities.

Assessing these trade-offs has rarely been easier than it is today. Financial markets tell us a great deal about the perceived value of private infrastructure. Low costs of borrowing suggest businesses see little return on investing in new plant and equipment. Today's interest rates for new plant and equipment are at historic lows.

There's not enough demand for investment dollars to drive up interest rates, suggesting that the productivity benefits of private investment are historically low.

In contrast, the low interest rates make government borrowing uncommonly cheap. The rate of return on public infrastructure is devilishly hard to measure, but at today's rates it need not be high to justify additional spending. That means we are in a rare window to borrow for long-term infrastructure improvements, but only if this spending improves the productivity of the economy.

So, if done well, the real benefits of this spending would be on improved productivity associated with updating infrastructure. Some benefits are obvious. Roadways and many railways are deeply congested, causing fuel waste, damage to shipped goods and lost time for workers. There are many hundreds of economic studies quantifying these types of losses.

One common example used for comparison involves the U.S. air traffic control system. Today's system is so antiquated, it costs the average passenger more than a half hour extra wait for each flight. That waste alone costs billions of dollars per year, yet fixing the system is perhaps a one-billion-dollar expenditure. So, comparing the benefits of a billion dollars spent privately by airlines to perhaps improve their inflight WIFI versus a billion dollars spent to upgrade the air traffic control system, makes the benefit of public infrastructure spending pretty obvious.

To be fair, this example is helpful only to understand the issue. The air traffic control problem is apparent, and airlines could spend their own money to upgrade air traffic control. I'd support privatizing air traffic control, but that seems politically infeasible. In the meantime, modernizing the system is a good investment.

There are many other investments that have obvious benefits. Many of our nation's water and sewer systems are in dire need of investment. The debacle of Flint, Michigan's, water system could be repeated in dozens, if not hundreds, of cities across the nation. A surprising share of water main pipes in U.S. cities approach a full century of service. The cost of replacing them is high, but potentially much lower than allowing them to fail when

considering the effects.

Some of the investments will hasten the shift away from coal as an energy source. That transition would have been impossible just 10 years ago, but a growing share of Americans understand that we are moving beyond coal as an energy source. It is telling that both of West Virginia's senators voted for the infrastructure bill.

It is too much to suggest that America's infrastructure is crumbling, as the annual report from the American Society of Civil Engineers suggests. Of course, it could be they aren't wholly disinterested observers. However, there are many examples of real problems that that the spending in this infrastructure bill will at least partially remedy.

Indiana housing trends this decade

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – The 2020 Census tells us Marion and Hamilton counties accounted for 40% of the state's population growth of persons 18 years and older, with 37% of Indiana's increase in occupied dwelling units from 2010. Meanwhile, over the last decade, Delaware and Grant counties led the state in both lost population 18+ and a decline in the number of occupied dwellings.

Vacancy rates can be difficult to interpret. A housing unit may be vacant because it has been abandoned or is unsuitable for occupancy yet is still standing. It may be awaiting sale or rental. Or it may be a second home or a seasonal dwelling.



In 2020, Indiana's vacancy rates were lower in 83 of 92 counties. They ranged from less than 5% in the suburban Indianapolis metro area (Hancock, Hendricks, Hamilton and Johnson counties), to more than 20% in four counties.

Of those four, Steuben (26.9%) and Brown (22.3%) have many seasonal houses. But slow adult population growth in Crawford (0.04%) and White (1.6%) may account for the 26.2% and 22.8% vacancy rates respectively in those rural counties.

Kosciusko County presents a question: While both adult population and occupied housing units in Kosciusko increased by slightly more than the 6.5% and 6.6% statewide rates, why was there an 18.2% vacancy rate, the sixth highest in the state? Is this a temporary case of recent overbuilding?

Nationally, over-crowding in housing is of declining concern as household size decreases. More people living

There is principled opposition to this bill. One trillion dollars is a lot of money, and our national debt must be a concern, even if it is not an imminent worry. A better bill would be implemented more slowly, with a better cost-benefit analysis of projects. Still, it is refreshing to see legislation that is so widely supported on an issue that American policymakers have ignored for too long. ❖

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alone, fewer children, and higher incomes have resulted in more space per person. According to a study for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, "the rate of overcrowding fell from 2.82% to 2.41% between 1985 and 2005." In addition, over those same 20 years, households went from an average 740 square feet per person of living space to 916 square feet.

The 2020 Census reported 2.54 persons per occupied housing unit in Indiana, with a high of 3.19 in La-Grange County and a low of 2.34 in Blackford County. This does not mean no families live in over-crowded conditions. Averages easily hide reality, but we don't have the data, as yet.

In sum, 56 counties had growing adult populations and increased housing units. Likewise, 26 counties saw adult populations fall along with the number of occupied units. That leaves just 10 "contrary" counties where adult population and housing moved in opposite directions.

Lawrence County led Warren, Jennings and Henry in reducing the number of dwelling units while adding to their adult populations. Vigo, Cass and Gibson were among the six counties with decreased adult populations while adding to their number of dwellings.

We'll know more about population and housing when more data are released. ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist. Reach him at mortonj-marcus@yahoo.com. Follow his views and those of John Guy on "Who Gets What?" wherever podcasts are available or at mortonjohn.libsyn.com.

COVID miracle vax comes up short

By **KELLY HAWES**
CNHI Indiana News

ANDERSON – The U.S. Food and Drug Administration sent out a recent warning via Twitter. “You are not a horse,” it said. “You are not a cow. Seriously, y’all. Stop it.”

Days later, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a similar warning, describing what it saw as an alarming increase in prescriptions for ivermectin, a drug typically used by veterinarians to get rid of worms in large animals such as horses and cows.

This probably shouldn’t have come as a surprise.



For months, conservative media personalities have been promoting this so-called miracle drug as a possible treatment for COVID-19. Among them was Phil Valentine, a Nashville-based radio personality who went from vaccine skeptic to vaccine promoter after coming down with the virus. In announcing his illness, Valentine told listeners he was “taking vitamin D like crazy” and had begun using ivermectin. Neither

treatment worked. Valentine died Aug. 21.

While the drug is generally safe in low doses, the FDA warns that large doses can cause side effects including “skin rash, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, facial or limb swelling, neurologic adverse events, sudden drop in blood pressure, severe skin rash potentially requiring hospitalization and liver injury.”

In the advisory, the CDC pointed out that more than 88,000 prescriptions had been issued in the week ending Aug. 13. That’s 24 times the number typically recorded before the pandemic.

At the same time, the agency said, calls to poison control centers had gone up three-fold. The agency reported that one person trying to avoid the virus had to be hospitalized for nine days after drinking a formula intended for cattle.

The CDC reminded physicians in the advisory that ivermectin had not been approved for the treat-

ment of COVID-19. Researchers did explore the possibility, the agency said, but clinical trials “yielded insufficient evidence” that the drug was effective.

The website MedPage Today reported in July that a 500-patient trial in Argentina had found that ivermectin had no effect in preventing hospitalization and that, in fact, COVID patients who took the drug wound up on ventilators faster than those who took a placebo. A study carried out in Egypt had more positive results, the website reported, but that study was retracted based on accusations of plagiarism and the use of questionable data.

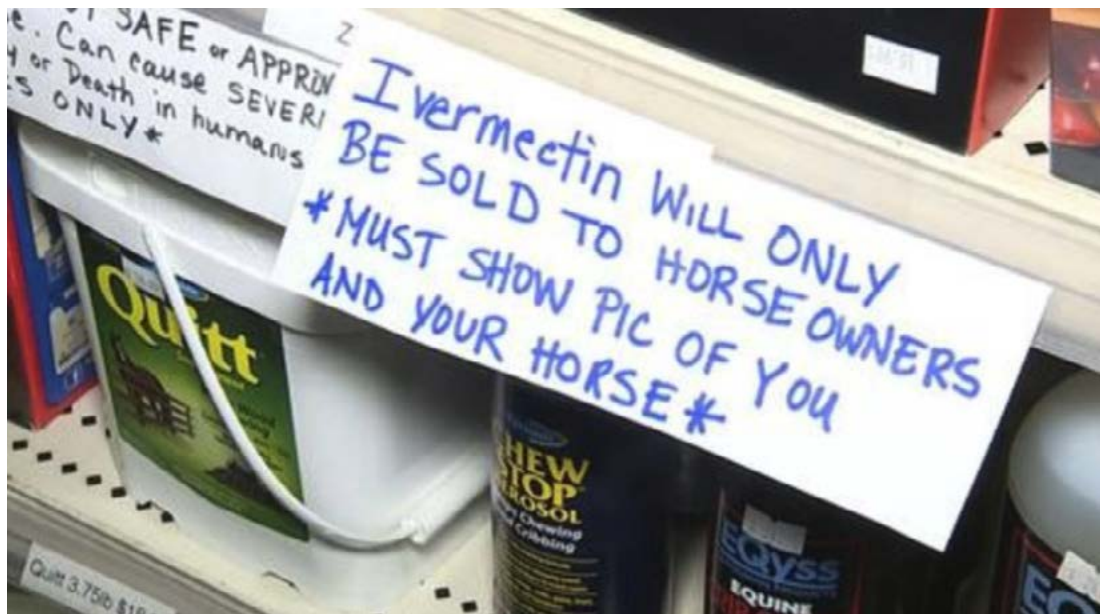
A report from NBC News notes that one of the biggest promoters of ivermectin is a group called America’s Frontline Doctors. That organization gained notoriety last year when then-President Donald J. Trump retweeted a video from a news conference in which one of the group’s physicians, Dr. Stella Immanuel, falsely called hydroxychloroquine a “cure” for COVID-19.

The organization’s founder, Simone Gold, faces charges related to events at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6. She has spent much of the last year sowing doubt about the COVID vaccines as she travels the country on what she calls “The Uncensored Truth Tour.”

The actual truth is included in that CDC advisory. Getting a vaccination, it says, “is the safest and most effective way to prevent getting sick and protect against severe disease and death” from COVID-19.

Take it from Mark Valentine, who spoke on his brother’s behalf as the talk radio host was fighting for his life in a hospital intensive care unit. “First of all, he’s regretful that he wasn’t a more vocal advocate of the vaccination,” Mark Valentine said. “For those listening, I know if he were able to tell you this, he would tell you: ‘Go get vaccinated. Quit worrying about the politics. Quit worrying about all the conspiracy theories.’”

He might also suggest that you steer clear of that miracle drug ivermectin. ❖



Indiana GOP has shot at 8-1 CD map

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

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – Let's first start with an apology to Pennsylvania: yes, we know you are not actually part of the Midwest, as properly defined. The Keystone State is typically part of the Northeast.

However, for political purposes, Pennsylvania belongs in the same category as several other states that at least partially touch the Great Lakes and are considered part of the Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Together, these seven states still represent a great presidential battleground, particularly in recent years. In 2004, Ohio was the decisive state in reelecting George W. Bush, even as he lost five of these other states in the process (holding only the Buckeye State and Indiana, consistently the most Republican state in the competitive Midwest).

Four years later, Barack Obama swept all seven states, including Indiana, in his impressive national victory. In 2012, Obama held all but the Hoosier State as part of a smaller win. In 2016, Donald Trump performed extremely well in the region, with a 78,000-vote combined margin in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin the key to his win. In 2020, Joe Biden recaptured that trio, albeit narrowly, which played a vital role in his victory. While Biden won five of the seven states, the collective vote in the region was just 49.9%-48.3% for Biden.

In a nation where the number of truly competitive states has been on the decline over the past several decades, the Great Lakes/Midwest states stand out for their vital swing role.

In the last decade, the seven states were almost all gerrymandered. Republicans won major 2010 victories in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, creating new governing trifectas in all five states and giving themselves total control over redistricting. Minnesota, as it so often has been, was split, while Democrats narrowly maintained control over Illinois, giving them redistricting power there.

Republicans used this power largely to lock in their big 2010 gains, and while the Democratic gerrymander of Illinois proved effective, Republicans won 60% of the House seats in these seven states in 2012 (55 of 91 total) even as Obama won 53% of the regional two-party vote for president. Democrats have since netted an additional six seats in the region, cutting the GOP edge to 49-42, even as Trump outperformed Mitt Romney across the region.

As we go state by state, it's obvious that a lot has changed in redistricting from 10 years ago. Republicans

no longer have an edge in control: While Democrats retain their gerrymandering power in Illinois, Republicans still hold it only in Indiana and possibly Ohio (we add the caveat there because of Ohio's new, potentially less partisan redistricting system, which we'll describe below). Michigan has a new commission system, while Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin have divided government. Courts are likely to be important players in several of these states.

INDIANA: Number of seats: 9 (no change from 2010s); **Breakdown in 2012:** 7-2 R. **Current party breakdown:** 7-2 R. **Most overpopulated district:** IN-5 (Northern Indianapolis suburbs/exurbs). **Most underpopulated district:** IN-8 (Southwest Indiana). **Who controls redistricting:** Republicans. **2012 control:** Republicans



Despite being for decades the most clearly Republican state among the seven discussed here, Indiana once had a reputation for competitive House races. Democrats over-

came a Republican gerrymander in the 1980s and ended up holding eight of the state's 10 seats by the end of that decade. More recently, in the 2000s, Indiana featured perhaps the decade's most intense congressional rivalry, as Mike Sodrel (R) and Baron Hill (D) battled for four straight elections over southern Indiana's 9th District: the incumbent Hill fought off Sodrel in 2002 but then lost to him in 2004. Hill came back and beat Sodrel in 2006 and then beat him again in 2008.

But in 2010, Hill lost to Todd Young (R), who is now in the U.S. Senate. And Indiana's famously competitive House elections became much less so. Part of that was because of Republican-controlled redistricting, but also because of political trends in the state, as traditional Democratic strength withered outside of the Indianapolis metro area. In 2012, Democrats only narrowly lost northern Indiana's IN-2, which Joe Donnelly (D) left behind to successfully run for Senate after Republicans redrew the district, but Rep. Jackie Walorski (R, IN-2) has easily held the district since. Democrats also competed for IN-5, a highly-educated suburban/exurban district that runs north of Indianapolis, in 2020, but now-Rep. Victoria Spartz (R) held it in an open-seat race. That about sums up all of the major House-level competition in Indiana over the past decade, where Republicans have won a 7-2 edge in each election.

In redistricting, Republicans have a liability to address, and an opportunity to consider.

The liability is the aforementioned IN-5, where Mitt Romney's 17-point edge in 2012 contracted to just a two-point margin for Donald Trump last year. Shoring up the fast-growing district likely will be a priority.

The opportunity is in northwest Indiana, where Democratic performance has softened in IN-1, held by first-term Rep. Frank Mrvan (D). Obama's 2012 margin of 24 points fell to just nine for Biden in 2020. If Republicans got aggressive,

they could try to slice up the district, although they may also just keep it intact with the hope that trends in the Gary/Hammond-based Chicago-area district continue to push it toward Republicans over the course of the decade -- given its heavily blue collar character, this is a real possibility.

So even without aggressive redistricting, Republicans could win an 8-1 edge in the state sometime this decade, although they have to be careful to stay ahead of Democratic trends in Greater Indianapolis.

ILLINOIS: Number of seats: 17 (-1 from 2010s); **Breakdown in 2012:** 12-6 D; Current party breakdown: 13-5 D; **Most overpopulated district:** IL-7 (Downtown/West Side Chicago); **Most underpopulated district:** IL-17 (Northwest Illinois) **Who controls redistricting:** Democrats. **2012 control:** Democrats

With a 13-5 edge in the Illinois U.S. House delegation already, Democrats are not going to be able to squeeze a ton more out of the Land of Lincoln. But they should be able to do better than they are doing now and, just as importantly, they should be able to better protect some of the competitive districts they already hold. As they draw the maps in Illinois, Democrats will be building off their gerrymander from a decade ago -- one that worked out great for them in the long run of the decade, though not really as intended.

Republicans won 11 of Illinois's 19 House seats in 2010, but Democratic control of the state legislature paired with then-Gov. Pat Quinn's (D) narrow victory allowed Democrats to draw the state's map. They designed a map that they hoped would elect 13 Democrats and five Republicans.

Illinois, one of the few states that actually lost population from 2010-2020, is once again losing a House seat. Two-thirds of Illinois's population lives in either Chicago's Cook County or one of its five surrounding "collar counties" (DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will). Democrats hold all 13 districts that cover these six counties with the exception of Rep. Adam Kinzinger's (R) IL-16, which takes in a bit of the Chicago collar. Meanwhile, Republicans hold four of the five outstate districts, with IL-17 as the only exception.

So Democrats have several obvious goals in gerrymandering: Make sure that the eliminated district is one of the five current Republican seats. Protect Underwood in her exurban Chicago seat and, less pressingly, Casten, without endangering any of the other Democratic Chicagoland seats. Reconfigure the downstate districts to go after Davis in IL-13. Accomplishing all of these goals would result in a 14-3 Democratic map, an improvement on the current 13-5 advantage.

MICHIGAN: Number of seats: 13 (-1 from 2010s); **Breakdown in 2012:** 9-5 R; Current party breakdown: 7-7 Split; **Most overpopulated district:** MI-11 (Detroit suburbs/exurbs); **Most underpopulated district:** MI-5

(Bay City/Flint/Saginaw); **Who controls redistricting:** Commission; 2012 control: Republicans

In both the 2000 and 2010 round of redistricting, Michigan Republicans, who controlled the process, drew maps that Democrats decried as partisan gerrymanders. Though the current map worked as intended for Republicans during much of the past decade, Democrats gained two suburban seats in 2018 to produce a tied 7-7 delegation, and they held them last year. Aside from altering the composition of the congressional delegation in 2018, Michigan voters made another critical change: in a 61%-39% vote, they approved a referendum that established an independent commission for redistricting. The 13-member commission is made up of four Democrats, four Republicans, and five independents -- the final maps need seven votes to pass, with two members of each group supporting the plan.

OHIO: Number of seats: 15 (-1 from 2010s); **Breakdown in 2012:** 12-4 R; **Current party breakdown:** 12-4 R; **Most overpopulated district:** OH-3 (Columbus); **Most underpopulated district:** OH-6 (Eastern border along Ohio River) **Who controls redistricting:** Republicans; **2012 control:** Republicans.

It's difficult to find a big-state gerrymander that was as effective as Ohio's Republican-drawn map was in the 2010s. It's also difficult to find a big state with as many variables in its redistricting process for the 2020s. Let's review the history first, and then explore the new system. In 2008, Democrats won a narrow, 10-8 advantage in the state's U.S. House delegation, breaking through on a Republican-drawn map. It's the only time Democrats have won a majority of the state's delegation since the Republican Revolution of 1994, when Republicans won the House for the first time in four decades. Another Republican wave, in 2010, restored the Republican gerrymander and then some: The GOP won 13 of 18 seats, a seat better than their high-water mark from earlier in the decade. Controlling the process in advance of the 2012 election, Republicans had to deal with the slow-growing state's loss of two congressional district. They axed one district from each party, with the goal of electing 12 Republicans and four Democrats. It worked -- no seats changed hands throughout the decade -- although that glosses over some of the change in the 16 districts over the course of the 2010s. Few states performed better for Donald Trump in 2016 and 2020 compared to previous Republican presidential nominees than Ohio. Trump carried the state by eight points in each of his elections, pushing the one-time bellwether state further to the right compared to the nation as a whole than it had been since before the New Deal. The pro-Republican shift was perhaps most notable in Eastern Ohio. OH-13, a district drawn by Republicans as a Democratic vote sink under the 2010s map and held by Rep. Tim Ryan (D), gave Barack Obama a nearly 30-point margin in 2012. ❖

Marc Chase, NWI Times: While in the Region on Tuesday, Gov. Eric Holcomb was clear that he has no interest right now in a statewide mask mandate coming from his office. That's a decision we disagree with but at least we know where he stands. But something must be done to stem the most recent surge of COVID-19. Vaccines are readily available, and those who can get vaccinated should. But what about children under 12 who are back in school and exposed to the virus? It's time for local school boards to step up and take action. Over 3,500 new positive cases among students were reported to the Indiana Department of Health as of Monday. Despite a brief respite earlier this summer, the virus is back, and the delta variant is causing cases in Indiana to spike. On Wednesday, the state reported more than 5,000 new cases. ❖



John Krull, Statehouse File: Power, sadly, often responds only to power. That's the reality of the redistricting process in which the Indiana General Assembly now is engaged. Advocates for responsible and responsive government made many creative suggestions. They have called for lawmakers to establish a process that allows citizens to submit maps of legislative districts that accurately represent Indiana and its people. The idea aims to be a win-win: Voters feel more ownership over the political process and legislators get the benefit of free labor and ingenuity. The lawmakers' response—at least that of the Republicans who form supermajorities in both chambers of the Indiana General Assembly—has been to pat the good-government types who came up with the idea on the head and send them off to bed. Those same good-government types have called for the process to be transparent. They have asked—politely, deferentially—the legislators to commit to a series of public hearings on redistricting at places and times convenient for citizens to attend. The lawmakers—or, again, at least the Republicans who own supermajorities—have refused to make even that modest commitment. That's because they don't have to. "The problem is that the supermajority doesn't have to listen," Common Cause of Indiana Policy Director Julia Vaughn said. "It's really frightening to think that they've set out a timeline that would provide no additional public (statewide) hearings and very little time for people to evaluate the maps that they're now going behind closed doors to draw." She's right on all counts, but that's the reality. The members of the Republican Party who hold supermajorities don't feel any debt or obligation to the public. That's one of the dangers of gerrymandering—the dark science of drawing legislative maps so they unfairly and inaccurately favor one party over another. Politicians who end up wielding power no longer feel that they draw that power from the people they're supposed to represent. Instead, they feel beholden to the system that keeps them entrenched in office. They feel responsible to

other members of their party. But to no one else. ❖

Jim Ayello, IndyStar: The Colts cannot count on Carson Wentz this season. They know that now. Maybe they already knew, but they learned it for sure over the past couple of days when their non-vaccinated quarterback was ruled a high-risk close contact of a member of the staff who had contracted the COVID-19 virus. Wentz was placed Monday on the Reserve/COVID-19 list. Wentz's unreliability will remain a fact until and unless he decides to change his mind about life-saving vaccines. Beyond how his anti-vax stance makes him look as a leader in the Indianapolis community, it most definitely makes him a liability in the Indianapolis locker room. Unless Wentz gets vaccinated, he will continue being susceptible to being a high-risk close contact of those who contract COVID-19 every week for the rest of the season — especially with so many of his teammates also choosing not to vaccinate. In other words, this problem isn't going away. And that means the Colts can't count on him. ❖

Charlie Sykes, The Bulwark: Talk show host Phil Valentine was not merely anti-vax, he had actually recorded a parody about vaccines. Before he fell ill with the virus, Valentine had spoken out against mask mandates and written a parody of The Beatles' song "Taxman" called "Vaxman" mocking the preventative. He was 61 years old when he died of COVID-19. A West Palm Beach Florida radio host who died of COVID had also mocked medical experts. Dick Farrel, 65, used his local talk show and social media to rail against Dr. Anthony Fauci, who he called a "power tripping lying freak," and say that no one should get the coronavirus vaccine. When COVID-19 sent him to the hospital for three weeks, though, he changed his tune, urging friends to get vaccinated, friends told local station WPTV. Before he got COVID, Marc Bernier had called himself, "Mr Anti-Vax". The Volusia county sheriff, Mike Chitwood, said the station told him Bernier, 65, died on Saturday night. Forty-five-year-old H. Scott Apley was a member of the Texas Republican Party's governing board. "I wish I lived in the area!" he wrote this spring about a "mask burning" party in Cincinnati. According to the Washington Post, he once replied on Twitter to a doctor's post celebrating the effectiveness of Pfizer's shots against the coronavirus: "You are an absolute enemy of a free people." He remained a skeptic almost to the very end. [On] Friday, the 45-year-old Dickinson City Council member republished a Facebook post implying that vaccines don't work. Two days later, Apley was admitted to a Galveston hospital with "pneumonia-like symptoms" and tested positive for coronavirus, according to an online fundraising campaign. He was sedated and put on a ventilator. On Wednesday, he died.. This is not an occasion for schadenfreude, because each story is a tragedy. But they raise the nagging question: why has this happened so often? ❖

U.S. Afghanistan withdrawal ends

TAMPA — The last US military planes have left Afghanistan, Gen. Frank McKenzie, the commander of US Central Command, announced Monday at the Pentagon. The US departure marks the end of a fraught, chaotic and bloody exit from the United States' longest war (CNN). "I'm here to announce the completion of our withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the end of the military mission to evacuate American citizens, third country nationals, and vulnerable Afghans," McKenzie told reporters. "The last C-17 lifted off from Hamid Karzai International Airport on August 30th, this afternoon, at 3:29 p.m. East Coast time, and the last manned aircraft is now clearing the airspace above Afghanistan." "There's a lot of heartbreak associated with this departure," McKenzie said. "We did not get everybody out that we wanted to get out." President Joe Biden weighed in with a statement later on Monday and thanked the final US forces serving in Afghanistan for executing the "dangerous retrograde from Afghanistan as scheduled," with no further loss of American lives. "The past 17 days have seen our troops execute the largest airlift in US history, evacuating over 120,000 US citizens, citizens of our allies, and Afghan allies of the United States. They have done it with unmatched courage, professionalism, and resolve," the President said in the statement. He said he will make an address about Afghanistan to the nation on Tuesday. Biden will speak at 1:30 p.m. about ending the war in Afghanistan from the State Dining Room. "Now, our 20-year military presence in Afghanistan has ended," Biden said. As of Monday, more than 122,000 people in total had been airlifted from Hamid Karzai International Airport since July, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters Monday morning. Since August 14, the Penta-



gon deployed US Special Operations Forces to bring in 1,064 US citizens and 2,017 at risk Afghans or Special Immigrant Visa applicants, McKenzie said.

Sanchez's mom on her 'hero' son

LOGANSPORT — The deadliest day for Americans in Afghanistan became one of the most harrowing for a Logansport family. U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Humberto A. Sanchez, 22, had been sent to one of the gates inside the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he was killed during an enemy attack Thursday (CNHI). Originally, Sanchez — who was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, California — was stationed in Jordan. He worked as an embassy guard. It was a duty that Sanchez found fulfilling and enjoyable. But when the Taliban took over Afghanistan recently and chaos erupted, Sanchez's unit was re-assigned because of its proximity to the Kabul airport. They were called in because "they were the best of the best." Those were his exact words when he told his mother, Coral Briseño, why the transfer was necessary. "They were the most prepared," she recalled Monday from her home in Logansport. "He enjoyed his life. He told me he was prepared for this, and we knew this was (something) that could happen. "But we weren't at war anymore. We didn't think this would happen." "He told me that if he didn't make it home, I was to tell his story, so I'm doing this for him," said Briseño. "I've heard from a lot of good people. My son was more concerned about getting kids out of the gate" at the airport, she said. "My heart broke when I heard that. My kid was a hero.

Box criticized for going maskless

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana's health commissioner defended herself

Monday against criticism arising from a photograph circulating on social media showing her not wearing a face mask during a wedding reception (AP). Dr. Kristina Box said in a statement that she "made an informed decision" to take off her mask while dancing or talking at a recent family wedding with guests fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Box said all but five people at the wedding were fully vaccinated. Several social media comments called Box's actions hypocritical as on Friday she said Indiana had reached "the darkest time in the pandemic." The photo shows Box standing amid several people, none of whom are wearing masks.

Valpo U drops Confucius Institute

VALPARAISO — Valparaiso University, citing criticism and the potential loss of federal money, said it will close a program that promotes Chinese music (AP). The Confucius Institute will continue performances before closing March 1, university President Jose Padilla said Monday. "We are proud of what the CIVU program has accomplished over the last 14 years," Padilla said.

Masks reinstated at unruly meeting

FORT WAYNE — An unruly audience on Monday criticized the three school board members who voted to reinstate Northwest Allen County Schools' mask mandate. The requirement takes effect Wednesday (Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). "Revote! Revote! Revote!" mask mandate opponents chanted after two hours of public comment. Member Steve Bartkus, who opposed the mandate along with President Kent Somers, was game. "Let's just revote then," Bartkus said to cheers. His attempts to rescind the measure supported by Vice President Liz Hathaway and members Kristi Schlatter and Ron Felger weren't successful.