

Rokita makes his case for GOP Senate

Republican gears up for fourth statewide race, urges Messer to stay on House leadership track

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita reported \$1.5 million cash on hand this week as he prepares for his fourth statewide campaign, this time for the U.S. Senate.



It will likely pit him against U.S. Rep. Luke Messer, making for a second consecutive cycle

member vs. member Republican Senate primary. During our interview at Starbucks on the north side of Indianapolis, HPI asked Rokita why he would leave a safe 4th CD and a potential House Budget Committee chairmanship for a risky



U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita talks to HPI on Wednesday and encouraged potential Senate rival Luke Messer to stay on House leadership track.

Senate run in the first mid-term of President Trump. It was a similar question asked of Messer last month about leaving the House leadership track.

Rokita quickly turned the tables on Messer. “Hopefully Luke doesn’t run because that’s exactly right,” Rokita responded. “He has a terrific pathway to help the state of Indiana. He could be majority leader, he could be speaker. That’s not a path

Continued on page 3

Draining the swamp

By **MARK SOUDER**

FORT WAYNE – Every day we get lectured by the media and Trump critics that he is not “draining the swamp” as promised. In fact, he is expanding it. The key is how one defines the swamp.



To liberals, the swamp is a place that looks like Okefenokee. Stagnant water, with partially submerged trees dominated by clinging Spanish moss. To them, the smooth flow of government is stagnated by business interests. Their lobbyists strangle the trees, feeding off a corrupt system. This is the core view of Bernie Elizabeth Warren.

Libertarian conservatives



“When the president says all options are on the table, all options are on the table. We’re trying to make it very clear to people in this part of the world”

- Vice President Mike Pence on a potential use of force in North Korea



Howey Politics Indiana
WWHowey Media, LLC 405
Massachusetts Ave., Suite
300 Indianapolis, IN 46204
www.howeypolitics.com

Brian A. Howey, Publisher
Mark Schoeff Jr., Washington
Jack E. Howey, Editor
Mary Lou Howey, Editor
Thomas Curry, Statehouse
Mark Curry, photography

Subscriptions

HPI, HPI Daily Wire \$599
 HPI Weekly, \$350
 Ray Volpe, Account Manager
317.602.3620

email: HoweyInfo@gmail.com

Contact HPI

bhowey2@gmail.com
 Howey's cell: 317.506.0883
 Washington: 202.256.5822
 Business Office: 317.602.3620

© 2017, **Howey Politics Indiana**. All rights reserved.
 Photocopying, Internet forwarding, faxing or reproducing in any form, whole or part, is a violation of federal law without permission from the publisher.



would prefer D.C. reverted back to its days of original swampland. To them, the "swamp" means all the buildings of intrusive government workers that have now expanded the swamp of big government out to the surrounding beltway and beyond.

But what did the swamp mean to the Trump core? The 25% to 35% of Republican primary voters which enabled him to have the largest faction over and over again? He reached 50% only as Republican voters opposed to him were faced with fewer choices and found him preferable to, say, Ted Cruz. In other words, the Trump political operation was not built upon a majority but a plurality that grew as the choices narrowed.

This is critical to understanding why his core is mostly unrattled in spite of the chaos, but also why so many Republicans peel off when asked if they approve of him. They don't. But, if the vote were again held today, they would still find the same reasons to vote against Hillary (e.g. "I don't agree with him but the Supreme Court appointments are critical").

While candidate Trump certainly criticized lobbyists and the insiders who ruled Washington, it was not conventional usage of the reference. Little he says or does is conventional. Trying to fit him into a traditional box is impossible because he pretends that he is not inside any box of consistency.

On the other hand, he has certain patterns of core statements about which he has been consistent for most of his life. He is an opportunist. He views himself as a deal-maker, which means that he stakes a hard position and then negotiates. He's oversensitive to criticism. He thinks about everything can be purchased; he's transactional. He views himself as a businessman who is hard-nosed (i.e.

"you're fired"). He doesn't like "weakness" and leans toward things that seem "strong" (including authoritarian thugs). I could go on, but you get the point. He's not totally unpredictable but illusive because of his willingness to pivot.

Trump stated over and over again that he was going to bring in "people like my friend Carl Icahn." If you went up to him and said "Hello," a tape started and he'd repeat that phrase. What did the media and Trump critics think he meant by that? Why did he say it so much? Did you think it was just a gimmick? Look at the business side of his cabinet. It is stuffed with people like Carl Icahn.

People complain – including conservatives – that he is hanging around with too many New York Wall



Donald Trump with John Connally and Richard Nixon.

Street types. Like he said he would. He said, over and over, that he was going to put them in charge. The people he pre-identified as a class were not conservative Republicans. And they were walking conflicts of interest. Trump's view of the swamp was not billionaire businessmen, nor was it government itself. It was a government that didn't work for "us."

"Making America great again" did not mean burning down the federal buildings in Washington. For example, Trump has never favored pure free market health care. In fact, he favored single payer health care. Republicans continue to remain confused on this point, which is why when he compromised, Speaker Ryan

was willing to take it. Some, however, were still under the illusion that Trump wasn't president.

What Donald Trump promised was that he "was going to bring in the smartest people" to make government more efficient and accomplish certain things (e.g. build a wall which is Americans first in the workplace, make America first militarily, put America first in trade).

Donald Trump isn't "changing." "People like Carl Icahn" meant people with business experience, smart people, who could make government work better to serve business and people (which Trump doesn't necessarily separate). He said he was going to do this and he's doing it.

President Trump promised to bring in tough guys (i.e. billionaire businessmen) whose very wealth made them theoretically immune to self-interest. They were going to "break glass" on behalf of us. His loyalists believed him, in part because all the rhetoric (right and left) had convinced them that there was no other choice. Everybody else was in on a deal to defraud them and enrich themselves.

The president most like him in most ways is not Ronald Reagan (at all) but rather Richard Nixon. Nixon had

a connection with his voter base that was not ideological in specific ways but more visceral. When I would complain that Nixon went to China (and we'd have called Humphrey a communist if he had done so) and that Nixon implemented wage and price controls (and we'd have called Humphrey a socialist if he had done so), my dad would bring up his Checkers speech about some dog and Pat's coat. And then he'd add, as the clincher, that Nixon put ketchup on his cottage cheese. Which did not impress me.

But the connection was visceral; my dad believed that Nixon was trying to fight for regular people against an Establishment that hated Nixon. The more the Establishment beat on Nixon, the more my dad dug in. It proved what Nixon was doing was right.

The people who are appalled will remain appalled. The people who were his core will wait to see if those "smart people" can drain the swamp that they viewed as a swamp, not the media definition of the swamp. And, what worries me, is that if Trump fails they will conclude that our system has failed. ❖

Souder is a former Indiana Republican congressman.

Rokita, from page 1

I'm on."

Rokita further explained, "The way I'm looking at this, how can you best help Indiana? What can you best do? If I'm going to leave a seven-year-old, a nine-year-old and my beautiful, talented wife every week, how can I add the most value?"

While Rokita called himself an "executive at heart" that drove him to win two secretary of state races and the brief run for governor last summer after Gov. Mike Pence set aside his nomination for that of vice president, he added, "I've also proven to be a serious legislator. I've got four major bills done, one the Wall Street Journal called the largest de-evolution of power they've seen from the federal government to the state in 25 years, the Every Student Succeeds Act.

"For all those bills, at the end I was always over at the Senate making a deal, mostly to try and prevent my language from being watered down," Rokita explained. "At this point, six years in and being part of those significant accomplishments, I want to be over in the Senate moving those legislative levers. They are very different than the

House. That's what's driving me on this."

Messer has hinted he will officially enter the race next month. Rokita was asked about his timeline and he responded, "It's a bit of a balancing act depending on how some of the fundraising is going from different parts of the country. There are bylaws in place that with an announcement make me an immediate challenger. So no final decision has to be made. It won't be long, we're not going to drag it out. If we get in, we're in it to win."

Of his three prior statewide runs, Rokita said of his Senate exploration that began in March, "I am having a great time getting around the state. I had forgotten how much I missed it. When I was secretary of state, I drove 45,000 every year and visited all 92 counties every year. Luke has been doing this for at least six months. I started

in March, so it may be around that time, it may be a little longer than that."

Asked what the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee has told him, Rokita said he had a long talk with Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. "He wants Donnelly gone and with so many other seats to go after, he doesn't intend to get in unless there's a reason to get in."

In the 2016 race where U.S. Reps. Todd Young



and Marlin Stutzman battled with now-Gov. Eric Holcomb, the Senate establishment eventually sided with Young.

Asked what he learned from that member vs. member showdown in 2016, Rokita said, "Primaries are ugly. I don't want this to be ugly, but it would be naive to conclude that it won't be. These are high stakes and we're all adults. Donnelly is going to highlight the vulnerabilities of my potential opponents. I hope it doesn't go that way. I like and respect all the potential candidates in the race and I suspect that will hold through the entire race."

The field already includes Kokomo attorney Mark Hurt, New Albany educator Andrew Takami, Atlanta businessman Terry Henderson, and possibly State Sen.

Mike Delph. Asked if a crowded field is a good thing, Rokita said, "I'm one that believes competition is a good thing, the more the merrier. Of course you're talking to a guy who had 13 people in his primary and five for secretary of state the first time, with good candidates including Mike Delph, Richard Mourdock, John McGoff and Kent Benson for awhile. We were all unknown.

"What I learned from that experience is I see myself as a better candidate," Rokita said. "And now I'm known statewide; two statewide elections, one coming in a terrible year for Republicans when we lost three House seats. Yet I got tens of thousands more votes than the nearest Republican. No one else can say they've done this twice. Plus the grassroots, and an \$8 million donor network."

About Sen. Donnelly, Rokita observed, "I'm definitely the best candidate against Joe Donnelly. No. 1, he works the state real hard. I see him on the airplane with me every weekend. That's why we need a candidate who comes back to the state, lives in the state, raises his family in the state. It keeps me connected, just like Joe Donnelly, who is fairly connected to voters in this state. With the two statewide elections and the two polls we've done and others I've seen, we're within 5 to 10 points of Donnelly already."

And Donnelly's vulnerabilities? "Joe Donnelly is like most moderate Democrats," Rokita said. "Every time it doesn't matter, he's right there on our side. But when it does matter, defunding Planned Parenthood, Obamacare or voting for that terrible Iran deal, he's right there with Schumer, Pelosi and President Obama."

Donnelly, Dems post eye-popping FECs

Though no one denies Senate Democrats are in

for a rough 2018 midterm election, a host of their vulnerable incumbents just posted some eye-popping fundraising numbers — a sign the party won't easily cede more ground to Republicans next year (Politico). With a \$2.8 million haul, Sen. Claire McCaskill shattered fundraising records in Missouri, raising more than any other senator or Senate hopeful in her state during the first quarter of an off year. So did Sen. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota, whose \$1.6 million sum was the best first-quarter figure for a Senate candidate in that state in a nonelection year. Two other Senate Democrats in ruby-red states also had strong quarters: Jon Tester in Montana raised more than \$2 million and Joe Donnelly brought in \$1.3 million in

Indiana. In other states where Democrats are defending Senate seats, Sherrod Brown raised \$2.4 million; Bill Nelson of Florida \$2.2 million; Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin \$2.2 million; Bob Casey of Pennsylvania \$2.7 million; and Debbie Stabenow of Michigan nearly \$1.3 million. Potential Republican challengers collected middling amounts by comparison. Indiana

Rep. Luke Messer, who is considering a challenge to Donnelly, raised just over \$700,000. Rep. Todd Rokita, another potential Donnelly opponent, raised a mere \$320,000. By comparison, Sen. Todd Young raised \$1 million in the quarter following GOP Sen. Dan Coats' retirement announcement in March 2015.

McConnell, conservatives in '18 showdown

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and conservative groups are headed toward a showdown over GOP primaries in 2018 (Bolton, The Hill). McConnell has voiced confidence that Republicans will nominate "electable" candidates as they seek to grow their narrow majority during an election cycle in which Democrats will be defending 23 seats to just eight for the GOP. The majority leader is signaling to conservative groups that he'll play a big role in determining whom Republicans nominate to take on vulnerable Democrats in states from Florida to Montana. "We intend to play in primaries if there's a clear choice between someone who can win in November and someone who can't," McConnell said at an April 7 press conference. Conservative groups that have frequently clashed with McConnell and the GOP establishment say they intend to back candidates that could move the party to the right. "We're looking for viable conservative candidates, and our supporters don't care whether the GOP establishment ultimately supports them or not,"



said Ken Cuccinelli, president of the Senate Conservatives Fund, which is backing Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel as the Republican candidate against Sen. Sherrod Brown (D).

4th CD: Panel for Democrats

Three Democratic candidates for Indiana's fourth congressional district will attend a panel discussion at 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 26, at the Boone County 4-H Fairgrounds (Lebanon Reporter). Candidates Joe Mackey, George Reed and Sherry Shipley intend to run in the Democratic primary election for the seat, which is held by Rep. Todd Rokita. The fourth district represents 16 counties, including the majority of Boone County. The event should give voters a chance to get to know the people who hope to run for Congress in 2018, Kristi Jones, a Zionsville-based lawyer and Voices for Change member, said in a press release. The forum is sponsored by the Democratic Party of Boone County and Boone County Voices for Change. The event is open to everyone, regardless of their county residence.

8th CD: Bucshon to seek 5th term

Opening up about a possible life after Congress, 8th District Rep. Larry Bucshon confirmed Monday that he will seek a fifth two-year term next year (Langhorne, Evansville Courier & Press). The 54-year-old Republican congressman won 64% of the vote in 2016, rolling over Democrat Ron Drake, who garnered 32%, and Libertarian Andy Horning. After his initial election in 2010, Bucshon has handily defeated GOP primary opponents in three successful nominating contests. A former heart surgeon, Bucshon said he hopes to continue working in health care after he leaves Congress. "I want to be somewhere that continues to have some input on health care-related issues, whether that's the private sector in hospitals or with the insurance industry or with other industries related to health care," he said. "I want to continue to have some impact on the national dialogue. Other than that, I haven't really thought about it."



U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon at a town hall in Washington, Ind., Wednesday night. Bucshon said that President Trump should release his tax returns.

481,000 Hoosier voters purged

Indiana Secretary of State Connie Lawson announced that 481,235 voters who have not voted since 2014 have been purged from 92 county voters lists. "When I became Secretary of State, I discovered voter list maintenance was not being done statewide and many outdated voter registrations were still on the rolls," said Lawson. "I made it a priority to ensure our state's list was accurate

and that we followed the federal law. While this federal law requires a slow process that has taken over four years, our state is finally in the rhythm of doing regular voter list maintenance and Hoosiers are starting to see the results. Updating these records will help us create a more accurate picture of voter turnout for the state, which has been reported as inaccurately low due to the large number of outdated registrations, while protecting the integrity of our elections." While removing inaccurate voter list information is required by federal law, this work was formerly done almost entirely at the county level and not all county voter registration offices had the funding to do this work on a regular basis.

Gallup finds Trump trust shaky

President Donald Trump's image among Americans as someone who keeps his promises has faded in the first two months of his presidency, falling from 62% in February to 45% in a Gallup Poll released on Monday. It pegged Trump's approval at 40%, far worse than any modern president at this point in his tenure. Pew Research put Trump's approval at 39% while Rasmussen has it at 50%. Gallup said the public is also less likely to see him as a "strong and decisive leader," as someone who "can bring about the changes this country needs" or as "honest and trustworthy." Over the past two months, Trump's ratings have declined at least marginally on all six characteristics that Gallup measured in its April 5-9 poll.

The percentages saying he cares about the needs of people like themselves and that he can manage the government effectively slipped three to four percentage points, but the changes are not statistically significant. This comes as Trump has flipped positions on an array of issues.

Trump continues to lag his predecessors in public approval and his unpopularity appears to be trickling down to other Republicans in Washington (Politico). Trump's approval rating, according to a new Pew Research Center survey released Monday, is 39% — precisely the same as two months ago. The percentage of Americans who disapprove of Trump is

virtually unchanged: 54%, compared to 56% in February. Forty-four percent of Americans disapprove of Trump very strongly, according to the poll conducted April 5-11, more than the 30% who approve very strongly. The most profound shifts in the Pew survey are in Americans' perceptions of the GOP beyond Trump. Just 40% of Americans have a favorable opinion of the Republican Party, down from 47% in January, prior to Trump's inauguration. The Democratic Party, however, isn't faring dramatically better — views of the Democratic Party also ticked down from 51% in January to 45% now. ❖

Does Donnelly's Gorsuch vote matter?

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – What difference does it make?

Sen. Joe Donnelly is the center of attention with the Senate drama over confirming Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court. Most Senate Democrats, but not Donnelly, sought to block Gorsuch.



Republicans responded to refusal of enough Democrats to join in providing the required 60 votes for confirmation by blowing up that requirement with the "nuclear option."

What difference did it make that Donnelly was one of only three Democrats to vote for Gorsuch? Well, it meant that the vote confirming Gorsuch, with one Republican absent, was 54-45

instead of 53-46.

Clearly, not enough Democrats would join with the 52-member Republican majority to provide 60 votes to end a filibuster blocking Gorsuch and confirm him. It was clear also that Republican majority leader Mitch McConnell would use that "nuclear option" to end filibusters on Supreme Court nominees and allow confirmation by a simple majority. Gorsuch was going to be on the court, no matter what Donnelly did. He was no difference-maker.

But what difference does it make for Donnelly as he faces re-election next year? He is seen as highly vulnerable in a state that Donald Trump carried by 19 percentage points. The National Journal calls him the most vulnerable Democratic senator up for re-election. So, it would seem that reaction to Donnelly's vote on Gorsuch could have a significant effect on his chances.

What difference did it make in how Donnelly is perceived by Hoosier voters? Not a lot. Donnelly is a moderate Democrat. Has been consistently so in his time in the House and now in the Senate. He is one of the dwindling number of legislators willing to reach across the aisle with a handshake on a compromise, not with a dagger to inflict damage.

He is proud of this, publicizing his listings as one of the most bipartisan members of Congress and noting that he was a co-sponsor with a Republican on two of the very few bills passed this session.

His vote for Gorsuch was not surprising. Gorsuch, though troubling to Democrats who didn't want such a conservative voice on the court, clearly had judicial

qualifications and once was confirmed unanimously for an Appeals Court seat. Donnelly stressed that he would have preferred the court nominee named by Barack Obama, a nominee also clearly with judicial qualifications and a more progressive approach. But Republicans wouldn't even give Obama's choice a hearing, hoping for election of a Republican for president.

"Elections do have consequences," Donnelly said. With those consequences certain, he asked, "Do I continue this warfare?" "No," he decided, and that meant voting "yes."

So, will Indiana Republicans thank Donnelly and concede he is a moderate? Of course not. Right after his Gorsuch vote, the Indiana Republican Party put out a statement scoffing at Donnelly's recent fundraising success as "proof positive that his liberal buddies are scared." The two Republican congressmen expected to battle for the party's nomination for the Senate, Reps. Luke Messer and Todd Rokita, no doubt will portray Donnelly as a dangerous liberal threat as they seek the chance to run against him.

There is another possible effect. An organization called the Progressive Change Campaign Committee ran a full-page ad in The Tribune and other newspapers denouncing Gorsuch as favoring death of a freezing truck driver in a court decision and asking, "So why does Senator Joe Donnelly support Judge Neil Gorsuch for the Supreme Court?"



The group calls itself "the Elizabeth Warren wing of the Democratic Party." Would they seek to keep progressive Democrats from supporting Donnelly and even run a Democratic primary opponent against him? Maybe. But how would that work with Democrats choosing ultimately between Donnelly and a Republican seeking to add to the GOP Senate majority?

What difference did his Gorsuch vote make? No difference on Senate confirmation. Perhaps not much either way in Indiana by the time Hoosiers vote more than 18 months from now. ❖

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

Trump critics should look deeper

By **TONY SAMUEL**

INDIANAPOLIS – Now might be a good time for everyone still working on last year’s presidential campaign to pause and consider what’s going on around the world. It might also be the right time for the folks in the middle that are always at the ready to jump on the bash-Trump bandwagon to take a hard look at his accomplishments in the first 90 days.



It’s easy to fall into the media trap against the president by engaging in the trivial, dwelling on the past and picking at every nit you can find or that CNN will find for you.

Should we really care if he spends his weekends in Mar-a-Lago when he also visits the Snap-On Tools headquarters

in Wisconsin to announce a Buy American, Hire American program to ensure that our federal government is putting American workers and American products first?

Do we really need to complain about his tweets when he is also handling the North Korean crisis brilliantly? Are we still going to dwell on Putin like we are back in the USSR, when the president acted boldly and decisively to use the tools of our military so precisely and effectively against Assad in Syria and ISIS in Afghanistan?

And what about protecting us here at home by following through on his campaign promises to strengthen law enforcement on our borders while going after the worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens and gangs? Is how much stuff Jared Kushner gets to do really more important than that?

By the way, I still watch Saturday Night Live and although they go too far for me sometimes, having Jimmy Fallon play Kushner was pretty funny.

My point is that there is some really important stuff going on in our country and throughout the world today that affects our daily lives and will greatly affect our next generations, and we need to focus on those rather than the inconsequential stuff being pushed by the far left.

When we face so many threats from different parts of the globe, it is finally time to rally around our American president. I am very pleased and proud that Indiana is coming through once again with our Republican State Party’s recent announcement that Donald Trump Jr. will headline the GOP Spring Dinner on May 8. These folks get it and it will be nice to have a Trump in town roughly one year after the Trump primary win where he swept all 57 delegates, resulting in the two remaining opponents dropping out and Donald Trump being propelled to the

GOP nomination.

There are plenty of reasons to follow our state GOP’s lead. No president has acted so swiftly to eliminate burdensome, job-killing regulations to allow businesses to grow and jobs to be created. He is fulfilling another campaign promise to eliminate government waste and ensure the best use of taxpayer dollars by directing OMB to submit a comprehensive plan to reorganize and reform federal government, making it more efficient.

He signed executive order strengthening and repositioning the Historically Black Colleges and Universities initiatives within the White House to foster better opportunities in higher education.

President Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau launched the United States-Canada Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders. President Trump signed into law the Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act to encourage the National Science Foundation’s entrepreneurial programs to recruit and support women to extend their focus beyond the laboratory and into the commercial world. He signed into law the Inspiring the Next Space Pioneers, Innovators, Researchers, and Explorers (INSPIRE) Women Act to encourage women to study science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), pursue careers in aerospace, and further advance the nation’s space science and exploration efforts.

He picked the right person for the Supreme Court and he’s done an outstanding job of picking his cabinet and military advisors. And we should all be proud of his pick and the great work our own Vice President Pence is doing on both domestic issues and international concerns. The list goes on, but you don’t hear of it enough because of the trivial and constant attacks.

Hopefully this changes, and I do believe that getting health care reform completed and then tax reform done will put in place accomplishments that the national media cannot ignore or trivialize. I predict both of these efforts are successful this year. I also predict that it will be easier for those in the middle to finally jump on the Trump train as this administration is now finding its footing. It has had a lot stacked up against it and never has benefited from the so-called 100-day honeymoon.

President Trump is proving to be what those of us that supported him during the campaign were sure of – a true leader that makes good decisions and can handle multiple tasks at once. He has a true vision to make America great again and has put in place the right people to make that vision a reality.

We’ll see if I’m right. ❖

Samuel is president of Samuel Solutions based in Indianapolis. He was vice chairman of President Trump’s Indiana campaign in 2016.

Ricker sees a potential cold beer political fight

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Occasionally a business leader is thrust into the political spectrum when a compelling issue comes to the fore. In the 2015 it was former Angie's List CEO Bill Oesterle with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. This year, it is Ricker's CEO Jay Ricker, who took advantage of Indiana Code to sell cold beer at two of his restaurants inside gas/convenience stores in Columbus and Sheridan.



Ricker stands on the precipice of the Hoosier policy absurdity, where his 56 convenience stores can sell cold wine, but not cold beer. Package liquor stores can sell cold beer, but not ice or soda pop. It is a notion that most Hoosiers greet with derision, and where powerful lobbyists and legislative leaders stand on political quicksand, defending a weird status quo out of sync with voters.

The widespread notion is that Ricker took advantage of a "loophole" his legal team found. But in an HoweY Politics Indiana interview at Shula's on Tuesday, a little more than an hour after he met with Speaker Brian Bosma and Senate President David Long, it turns out it was part of Indiana Code Title 7.1, which has been in place since 1935 when Indiana's three-tier alcohol distribution and tax system was installed after the end of Prohibition.

Ricker had been active in political fundraising circles, mostly with Republicans. But he now views the Republican super majorities as hostile to business, taking sides, while playing favorites to the powerful package liquor store lobby. He sees a rapidly evolving and complex business climate, creating an obstacle course for businesses like his, employing close to 1,000 workers.

In the waning hours of this General Assembly session, with legislation hanging over his business, Ricker discussed thoroughly what he has been facing and how he will respond politically over the next couple of years.

HPI: What can you tell me about your meeting this morning with Speaker Bosma and President Long?

Ricker: They are going to offer a change to the amendment, and one thing that we want to make sure stays in there is, we don't want those two licenses that we legally received – even the governor says we got them legally and both of them agree we got them legally – we

don't want that taken away from us. We're concerned about that.

HPI: Have you had conversations with Gov. Holcomb?

Ricker: No, we haven't. We intend to after the legislature.

HPI: How have your previous experiences with the General Assembly gone?

Ricker: We really haven't had any huge issues. We've had tobacco and the road tax that don't honestly affect me too much. We operate pretty much in the center of the state. People at the edge of the state tend to get hurt more with those things. I'm a Hoosier, I want to see the roads taken care of. Everything has to be measured. Do all those taxes go to roads? Alcohol has been a big sore point for everyone. This is the only state in the whole country that regulates the temperature. Nobody else does. It's just crazy. At this point, from the Facebook pages we've taken out and the comments we've gotten, it's 90% support for Sunday sales and the sale of cold beer. So I'm very frustrated. The constituents are there but the liquor lobby has just had a stranglehold for years. Business models are evolving. We have to evolve, too. Liquor stores have to evolve. They have complaints, too. They can't sell a lot of the things I sell. They can't sell ice or cold soda inside their store. That's crazy. They ought to be able to sell



that too. You have to serve your customers, even if they have to be open on Sundays. That's just part of it.

HPI: My sources are saying there are divisions even within the package store industry about whether there should be changes. So you had lawyers that went through Indiana Code and found a way to sell cold beer at your stores?

Ricker: This has been available since 1935, when they set everything up, so shame on us for not knowing

this sooner. A legal firm that analyzes a lot of licenses said, "Hey, with the kind of food you have at your stores now, I think you should look at getting a restaurant permit." So they went to the ATC without disclosing our name and said, "This is what they want to do. Are there any problems with the way they want to do it?" They said, "No." Then we had a hearing in both Columbus and Sheridan with the local ATC boards and got 100% support. We didn't have any remonstrators. That takes 60 to 90 days, so it's not like we did this in a vacuum. You have to post, you have to have a big orange sign in your window. So everybody knew what we were doing. And then we opened the store in Columbus with this and within two days the liquor lobby had complained to key legislators and all hell broke loose.

HPI: It's my understanding the liquor lobby knew about this provision for years. It's described as a loophole but it's been in Title 7.1 for decades.

Ricker: Our governor did not call it a loophole. He said we were following the law.

HPI: So walk me through this. You got a call from your legal team saying the package boys were upset?

Ricker: We heard there were issues, so we went to see Speaker Bosma and explain our side. We had a private meeting with him. He said the intent of the law is not to have gasoline and alcohol at the same spot. I've had this same conversation over the years and I think

it's ludicrous. Everybody drives to the liquor store. They drive to the restaurant. There was public testimony in the Senate telling Sen. Ron Alting this and he said, "But they can open a beer." I said, "That's against the law, Senator," but No. 2, they can do the same thing in a restaurant or a package liquor store.

HPI: Or they can go to a brewpub, get a growler and do the same thing. So what was your response to Sen. Alting?

Ricker: I thought this was going to be a big friggin' deal. We might have waited until the legislature was out but we didn't. We need to get our story across. I've been working very hard talking to people like you. It really seems to have consumers' and Indiana citizens' attention. For years they've just been throwing up their hands and now this has ignited it.

HPI: In Ohio you can drive though one of these barns to buy cold beer. You don't even have to get out of your car.

Ricker: They'd stroke out over that. We are the only state that regulates the temperature of beer. Minnesota just approved Sunday sales. I have enough trouble keeping track of our Byzantine rules and regulations. I was asked in committee by Chairman Smaltz in the House if we would not pursue any more licenses and not sell spirits. These two licenses were funky little licenses, they were two-way, and so we pulled the spirits off. We had a hear-

HOOSIERS SMOKING = \$6 BILLION IN HEALTH CARE COSTS AND LOST PRODUCTIVITY

INDIANA CHAMBER
LEADING BUSINESS | ADVANCING INDIANA

It's time to change that. | www.indianachamber.com/grassroots

ing last week telling them we would go forward on that but I said they need to have a study committee. It needs to be open to the public and they need to take testimony.

HPI: My sources are saying a study committee approved last year is examining Title 7.1 and a report is due in 2018. Is that your understanding?

Ricker: I was not aware of that. As for Title 7.1, I think the best thing they can do is start all over. This amendment is 10 pages, maybe seven pages. They could do it in two pages if they wanted to. Simplify. There are a lot of competing elements out there. If they look at protecting people alcohol is sold to, and if they look at preserving a monopoly, I think they can do that on the first part. As for the monopoly, some 500 owners of these liquor stores seem to have a vastly out-sized influence on our state government. We need leadership on both sides. I don't want to sell to anybody under age. We actually have our own sting operation in place at every store.

HPI: Talk about the protections you've put in place at your stores?

Ricker: It's been that way for years. At our 56 locations, 48 have a license to sell beer, only two of them cold. Everybody behind the food area has a server's permit, which the law doesn't require. We have cold wine, which has a higher alcohol content than beer. We can sell wine cold, which makes no sense whatsoever.

HPI: Talk about the political reaction from the general public. You mention that 90% of the people you've heard from are supportive of your position.

Ricker: It's not just me. There was a comment made by one of the leadership by Channel 8 saying, "Are you hearing back much from your constituents?" They said, "No, just Ricker employees." That's just not true. I asked to rebut that. Then I asked Channel 8, are you hearing anything? They said, "Yeah, it's a hot issue. It's a 90% issue and the other 10% don't drink at all."

HPI: This issue has surfaced with my non-political friends in a big way. Everybody is talking about it. That's why I wrote in my column last week that if this issue is framed right, it could be a big one in the 2018 cycle. Pat Tamm and his team may have blundered into an uprising here.

Ricker: I find it incredulous that Pat Tamm rep-

resents both the liquor lobby and the restaurant association because the way they are co-mingling all of this could have consequences for other trade associations. I am a member of the restaurant association. As for the uprising, I had a sitting congressman call me and say, "What can I do to help you?" I've had a mayor of a good-sized Hamilton County town call and say, "This is just crazy. What is our legislature doing?" I've had city council members call me. Then I've had notes from people, not emails – taking the time to hand write a note – and they are saying, "What are the people at the legislature thinking?" What really troubles me is that Indiana is getting a black eye in other parts of the country. They are looking at Indiana like we're a bunch of backward hillbillies. And we're trying to attract people here.



HPI: Talk about the contradiction between the liquor stores and the restaurant association.

Ricker: Rules we're operating under as a restaurant could end up being tweaked, and in some people could lose their ability to sell carryout as I do.

HPI: That's always the potential when you have a knee-jerk reaction to a topical news story. They go in, make a change, and six months later there is an unintended collateral impact. Talk about that.

Ricker: We haven't seen a copy. It's a conference committee report. I think we could lose our licenses which are only good for a year. Our license is up at the end of the year. This isn't going to be solved in a year; it's going to take years. We don't want to have a license taken away from us because we followed the rules. Another thing I'd like to clear up is that these licenses are worth \$400,000. These weren't; these licenses don't go for that. Liquor stores in a metro area do go for that. We have all these

liquor stores; a lot of them are big liquor guys. Big Red has 61 stores. Crown has got about 50. These are good-size operations. Good for them. But to portray themselves as the little guy just barely making it, and in many cases, it's a monopoly. I am told that in Bloomington, every store is controlled by Big Red. And we do not charge more for cold beer. Our beer is all the same price.

HPI: What a should reform should look like? What would be a good 21st Century distribution and regulation model?

Ricker: I don't have a problem with having licenses. And there's a finite number. It's not like everyone should have one. I don't think we need to have liquor on every corner. In my mind, spirits need to be primarily at liquor stores only. I'm not going to wade into the pharmacy end of that. I think everybody else should have wine and cold beer if there's a license available. It's as simple as that.

HPI: There's a lot of talk about how our laws are archaic and antiquated. But we have seen changes in retail alcohol sales with the craft breweries, the vineyards, where you can buy cold beer and wine on Sundays, and liquor at grocery stores. We have seen some changes over the past decade. It seems to me there is wide political support for a total revamp.

Ricker: I don't think there is any question there is. It's great to see these Indiana distilleries, craft beer and wine. But you know they are hobbling our state economically with these rules. Especially if you're on the borders and it's Sunday. People are going to say, "I forgot. I've got people coming in. So if I want cold stuff I just have to go over to Michigan or Ohio or Illinois." They're glad to have our money. That's tax money, too. It puts our businesses at a disadvantage.

HPI: Let's talk politics. Do you have a political action committee, or are a member of one?

Ricker: I've always been very focused on both the individuals, both in state and federal. I tend to be more Republican-leaning than Democrat, though when it comes to the legislature I support some Democrats in my area. I think the legislature is sending a chilling message and not just on my issue, but a lot of issues. I am hearing from a lot of people, a lot of entrepreneurs. The Republicans are supposed to be the party helping businesses, but they have been hindering us. I'm a Republican but it's the Democrats who seem willing to help us."

HPI: Here we have Democrat Gary Snyder, running in SD17, saying, "I won't tell you when you can buy beer or what temperature." That could be a potent message.

Ricker: I agree.



HPI: Do we see you get involved in some primary challenges? Or with some Democrats running for the General Assembly?

Ricker: I wouldn't want that to be the headline. But, yeah, we have to take a look at it. We're not getting any help from the people we've supported. If you are unhappy, you need to get into the political fray and that means your pocketbook, too.

HPI: Have you been approached by any potential candidates?

Ricker: I have not. We're just trying to get this focused on the legislature and see what happens, then focus on what we need to do going forward.

HPI: I was with Gov. Holcomb a few weeks ago and his basic message was, "Change or die. Change or get left behind." This wasn't one of his issues but he was drawn in to defend the ATC. I think that was another blunder.

Ricker: I agree. We want to see where the bill goes. We will if we are unhappy. I made it pretty easy, have a summer study, take testimony, and don't take away our licenses. Grandfather us in if they want to put a moratorium on licenses. I've agreed to that in our case.

HPI: This state has had a history on dragging on economic reforms, with our banking, riverboats, the lottery, and down the road, marijuana. Speaker J. Roberts Daily was defeated over the lottery issue. When it made the ballot, it passed with 64% of the vote. Leaders here get dug in when public opinion has shifted. They will stick to their guns until someone loses in a primary. A decade ago we watched Sens. Steve Johnson, Larry Borst and Bob Garton lose primaries, and then we saw the passage of right to work. So that's how change happens in Indiana.

Ricker: I agree. Those have been floated to us. You've got a lot of members who want to see change, but their committee chairs will tell them, "You're going to make me look bad. You really need to support me." They want to stay on that committee or they want to chair that committee, so they follow leadership wishes and they don't do what the public wants. Speaker Bosma told us, "We make public policy. The ATC does not make policy." But you have to listen to the constituents and be mindful that the world changes so doggone fast. It could be too late, look at all these department stores closing. I don't want to be on that list. I've got to worry about smoking, fuel, electric charging, higher mileage. I've got to have a business that's going to be there and food is part of it, food and beverage. People like to drink when they eat food. I want to have that available for them. The legislature is really handicapping me. They shouldn't be picking winners and losers when it comes to businesses as they are today. ❖

Deals coming together in methodical fashion

By **THOMAS CURRY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Moving methodically toward the last few days of session, state lawmakers made progress on a number of key issues during the first half of the week. On Wednesday, Speaker Brian Bosma told members



of the media that a consensus had been reached on the road infrastructure bill, HB1002.

Refusing to go in specific detail, Bosma revealed that the road deal was “fantastic” and that Senate and House leadership ironed out

the kinks on their differing opinions. A conference committee report on the bill is expected to be released sometime this morning or early afternoon and will include specifics on the agreement reached by the House and Senate.

Talks on the road plan had stalled on immediately shifting the revenue from the sales tax on gasoline from the general fund to road funding. The House had initially included that measure and called for raising the cigarette tax by \$1 a pack to fill the gap in the general fund.

Led by Appropriations Chairman Luke Kenley, Senate leaders were strongly against the idea and have been historically opposed to a cigarette tax increase. Kenley went so far to say earlier in the month that “the cigarette tax is unnecessary” and that “people don’t understand how important the sales tax is to the general fund.”

Wednesday, Bosma teased that the gasoline sales tax transfer “will happen” despite initial protest from the Senate. Bosma would not go into more detail at the time but did say, “The sales tax will be transferred in over five, six or seven years.” It remains unknown how exactly the hole made by transferring sales tax will be made up for in the general fund, as the speaker confirmed that the cigarette tax increase is off the table.

Progress on the road plan means discussions on the HB1001 budget bill should continue to move smoothly. The amount of money locked into the road funding plan, an average of \$1.2 billion each year for the next 20 years, surely weighed heavily on budget discussions. Besides the gas sales tax issue, the budget underwent few structural changes in the Senate, making it easier for both sides to come together.

Lawmakers are still apart on education funding, specifically pre-K, but all sides agree that there needs to be more investment in those areas. Initially, the House

gave pre-K funding higher levels than requested by Gov. Holcomb, who called for a \$10 million increase in the state’s pilot “on my way” program. In the Senate, however, funding was cut for the pilot and pre-K funding overall and the option of online schooling was introduced.

Not to be lost in the discussion was last week’s budget forecast released by the State Budget Agency. The forecast was better than expected with 201.2 billion extra dollars expected in the state’s coffers. While Sen. Kenley and House Ways and Means Chairman Tim Brown agreed the forecast wasn’t enough to move the needle on road funding, it may be able to change pre-K funding talks.

While the Ricker’s cold beer issue remains closely offshore, it’s difficult to forecast how the issue will affect the last couple days of session when it hits land. It’s been brewing for the last month but little action has occurred. On Wednesday, Speaker Bosma said that “they haven’t come to an agreement” on the issue yet and that it’s still in the works, likely coming down to the wire.

Bosma also said that he expects session to be done by Friday but that “it’s possible we are here Saturday morning for one or two bills.” Now that the road bill seems solved, if any issue were to make Speaker Bosma and his colleagues work longer than expected, watch for it to be the cold beer issue.

Let’s make a deal

Hoosier lawmakers continued working Wednesday toward final compromise proposals on road funding, the state budget and numerous other measures that passed the Republican-led House and Senate with differing provisions (Carden, NWI Times). But House Speaker Brian Bosma, R-Indianapolis, admitted that negotiations are taking longer than expected, and the lengthy process of finalizing bicameral agreements makes it likely the General Assembly will be in session until at least Saturday, instead of adjourning for the year as planned on Friday. “It’s just that time of year when there’s a logjam at the end here,” Bosma said. “All the critical items will get worked through. The items that aren’t critical may be left on the roadside.”



Speaker Brian Bosma prepares to call for the vote on HB1005, the appointed superintendent bill which passed.

Shift in gas tax

A long-term road funding deal forged by Statehouse Republicans would mean about \$870 million in new dollars for state roads and \$340 million for local infrastructure by 2024 (Kelly, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). But the proposal still must get the seal of approval from the respective caucuses and be voted on in both the House and Senate. “It’s a historic plan that recognizes states have to take care of their own problems,” said Fort Wayne

Senate President Pro Tem David Long. "We are not kicking the can down the road and dumping the problems on our kids and grandkids. We're stepping up." The plan would start shifting revenue collected in sales tax on gasoline to a special transportation fund in 2020 and finish five years later. But there would be an escape hatch for the governor to object if the funds are unexpectedly needed for health care, schools or child abuse services. About a third of gasoline sales taxes already pay for roads and the rest funds the overall state budget. By phasing in the shift the state avoids a hit on the next two-year budget and lawmakers don't need to raise cigarette taxes to fill the gap. It ultimately means an additional \$350 million for roads. "We believe we have met our mutual goals of long term, comprehensive road funding," said House Speaker Brian Bosma. "This will be the strongest road investment in our state's history, which I think is monumental."

AirBNB bill falls a vote short

Big trouble for legislators' attempt to block local governments from restricting Airbnb rentals (Berman, WIBC). The House voted for the bill 50-46, but it takes 51 votes to pass a bill. Two legislators are excused from voting because of conflicts of interest. And the House Speaker traditionally votes only rarely. House rules require the speaker to vote if asked when the yes vote is stuck at 50, but Speaker Brian Bosma says he wasn't asked -- probably because the speaker says the bill "doesn't have [his] full confidence." That leaves East Chicago Democrat Earl Harris Junior, who was back home to join Governor Holcomb and Indiana's two U-S senators for E-P-A administrator Scott Pruitt's visit to the city. Harris voted against a previous version. If Harris remains opposed, supporters can try to either change another legislator's mind or negotiate a different version before the session ends this weekend.

Lawmakers want audit of rape kits

The Indiana Senate has passed a resolution urging the state police to conduct an audit of untested sexual assault kits that may have lingered in evidence collection rooms across the state for years (Associated Press). The resolution approved Wednesday has no binding impact, but it does allow lawmakers to send a message to law enforcement. The measure by

Republican Sens. Michael Crider and Eric Houchin requests a "thorough audit" of all untested evidence gathered from sexual assault examinations in the state. The senators want state police to report their findings to a panel of statehouse leaders by Dec. 1 2017. Indiana State Police spokesman Capt. Dave Bursten says he hasn't seen the resolution yet and can't comment on any action that may be taken.

Vet employment bill heads to governor

State Rep. Jim Baird's (R-Greencastle) bill requiring the Department of Workforce Development to prioritize job and training placement for veterans and their spouses could soon be law, a news release stated (Howey Politics Indiana). This bill allows veterans and their spouses to receive preference for placement in any federal or state employment and training program offered by the Department of Workforce Development. This state department creates and administers programs on behalf of Indiana's workforce while also overseeing unemployment claims. Baird said individuals in the National Guard and their spouses currently receive this prioritization. This legislation expands the law to anyone who served on active duty in any branch of the U.S. armed forces, the National Guard or in the Indiana National Guard. If signed into law, government agencies receiving employment applications from veterans or their spouses would confirm individuals meet the eligibility requirements for the program.

Hackers seeking ransom to face penalties

Hackers who break into computer systems and



demand a ransom could face tougher penalties than initially proposed in a bill passing out of the Indiana General Assembly (Miley, CNHI). In addition, company owners who instruct employees to robocall customers could face charges. Currently, Indiana law allows only the person making the phone call to face charges. But House Bill 1444, with both provisions, passed the Indiana House on Tuesday and heads to the governor for his signature. The bill initially addressed hacking but a robocall provision was added in the Senate, said the bill's author, Rep. Christopher Judy, R-Fort Wayne.

Exempt organizations include newspapers, charitable groups, licensed real estate agents and licensed insurance agents. Under the bill, hackers could face a Level 5 felony if the ransom paid is between \$750 and \$50,000 and a Level 4 felony if the ransom is above \$50,000. The maximum prison sentence for a Level 5 felony is six years and for a Level 4 felony is 12 years.

Senate resolution in troubled districts

On Wednesday, State Senator Eddie Melton (D-Merrillville) offered Senate Resolution (SR) 56 on the Senate floor urging the General Assembly to study how school district financial conditions are analyzed and monitored, Indiana Senate Democrats announced (Howey Politics Indiana). Sen. Melton released the following statement after the resolution's passage: "I offered this resolution because school corporations across the state, ranging from urban to rural to suburban, are finding themselves in dire financial need. These districts are being forced to do more with less causing them to close school facilities and call for referendums to seek additional funding from taxpayers just to pay for essential needs such as transportation and operating expenses. It is important for the state to look into the internal and external contributing factors for why and how these school financial crises are happening in Indiana." ❖

IEDC tax credits questioned

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Grabill is only 12 miles from New Haven. Both are within Allen County. You can drive from one to the other in less than 20 minutes.

The Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly (April 7)

reports a furniture manufacturer is moving from Grabill to consolidated, larger quarters in New Haven. One reason for the short move is to keep 125 experienced workers together. They may even add 60 jobs in the future.



That sounds good to me. A Hoosier company is doing well and sees a bright future. Workers are not losing jobs. No doubt their commuting patterns will change, but not drastically and most residents of Allen County will note no differences.

It may not be good for Grabill, which will now have vacant buildings that could lead to lower property tax revenues. It will be good for New Haven because one of their vacant buildings will now be occupied, which should increase property values and hence tax revenues.

Yet, the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) has offered the company a total of \$300,000 in tax credits and \$60,000 for worker training, contingent on added workers being hired. Plus, federally funded Northwest Indiana Works will provide the firm with hiring and training assistance. So here is a thriving company making a short move with little economic impact for

Indiana, yet being supported with a combination of state and federal tax funds.

Why? Would this firm move out of state without these subsidies? Does this have anything to do with a former leader of IEDC coming from Allen County? In effect, what purpose does this expenditure of tax dollars serve?

I know \$360,000 is a small amount by government standards. But our Indiana General Assembly is winding up a session where they can't seem to find enough money for essential services. Our Congress is ready to cut everything except the military budget and the expenses of Congress and the White House. Yet, what would \$360,000 do for pothole repair in Allen County or how many of the county's children could be supported in pre-K programs for that money?

Regular readers know I'm an ardent advocate for economic development. But do we spend our money wisely? How much of Indiana's purported "boom" in recent years is due to the remarkable growth of non-durable manufacturing rather than the return of traditional metal bending? Has anyone taken a hard look at all the many economic development programs and assessed their effectiveness? Do we even know how much we have been spending on economic development?

All that must wait for the future. Right now I must correct a statement in this column two weeks ago. At that time I reported 12% of funds for Indiana Legal Services to low-income persons came from the federal government. The correct figure is closer to 65%. Thus, any cut in those funds would have an even greater impact than previously suggested. ❖

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

Indiana Democrats need to rebrand

By **CHRISTINA HALE**

INDIANAPOLIS – The Indiana Democratic Party hasn't felt like much of a party lately. More like a support group meeting, or an amateur cage match. We have a lingering case of loseritis, and it has negatively impacted our collective self-esteem. We need to remember that we are the party of fun, of cool, a party of people who are motivated about the well-being of others.



How many of us have moved on from rolling our eyes to smashing our screens when we receive those doom and gloom overly urgent political fundraising emails? It is time to reconnect to our identity, and the promise we can bring to Hoosiers around the state. We are the party that appreciates everybody, no matter

your gender, color, religion, sexual orientation, whatever. People, we like all of you! And we think it is important to stand up to bullies who don't.

We also get things done. In fact, Democratic leadership is thriving in our cities and towns around Indiana. Democrat mayors here are sending kids to college, getting the lights turned back on in neighborhoods, revitalizing town squares and incubating businesses. And they are doing it in clean, efficient and productive ways. Al Franken had it right back in the 90's. Like his SNL character Stuart Smalley, we are good enough, and we are smart enough. We just need to take back control of our story.

Somewhere along the way Republicans won the branding war in Indiana. Democrats in Indiana used to conjure up images of nice, hardworking, neighborly folk; people who took good care of their lawns and held the door open for you. People who would gladly babysit when you found yourself in a last-minute jam. That's still us.

Yet market research suggests that today, too many people now associate more negative words with our party affiliation, words like radical, angry, intolerant. And that is just not who we are.

Branding is as much about tone and voice as it is about messaging. And truth be told, our tone has been shrill. Sarcastic. Patronizing. Somehow over the past 10 years or so, we have developed a bad attitude. Rather than communicate our values, our ideas and our success, rather than cast a vision of a vision of who we are, we invested too much time in finger-pointing and complaints. And lately, when we are talking among ourselves, we can be just plain defeatist.

I hope Democrats will join me and turn out not only for protests, but to lend our best effort and to tell our

story at community clean-ups, neighborhood council meetings, at Independence Day parades, at religious observances and everywhere where people gather to do good things. We need to fly the flag, figuratively and literally, most of all because we truly are the good guys.

The opportunity before us is to remind the greater public and ourselves of our core identity. We need to set aside the snark, and cast a clear vision for how life can be appreciably better with Democratic leadership. And then we need to walk our talk. ❖

Hale is the 2016 Democratic lieutenant governor nominee and former member of the Indiana House.



Republicans grapple with social media

By **CRAIG DUNN**

KOKOMO – Since my retirement as a Republican county and district chairman, I have spent much of my free time reading social media and exploring the many interesting people who call themselves Hoosier Republicans. I recently ventured out and joined the Cripple Creek



Republican Study Group up near Goiter's Notch. We met at Elsie's Cup O' Joe and Laundromat.

I fell into a bucket of luck because the group was beginning its study of a new book by Pastor Emily Miway titled, "Free to Be, Just Like Me."

The leader of our study group, Marsha Tablelapper, is a prominent thought leader in the area and she dove right in to her analysis of Pastor Miway's

new book. "This book just reminds me why I can't stand our Indiana General Assembly. Like Pastor Miway says, 'All legislators are required to go over to the IU Medical School and have first year medical students remove all of their memory about what the good book says.'"

Being naturally inquisitive, I asked, "What exactly are you referring to?"

"You know what the good book says about the sanctity of life!" chortled Tablelapper.

"Ohhhhhh, you mean you are not happy with Indiana legislators not repealing the death sentence?"

"No, darn you, I mean that the leaders of the General Assembly didn't give our God-fearing legislators the opportunity to vote to overturn the U. S. Supreme Court

by outlawing abortion of any kind," an obviously exasperated Tablelapper replied.

"Just how could the Indiana Legislature overturn the U. S. Supreme Court?" I inquired.

Marsha quickly responded, "It's not never the wrong time to do the right thing."

Harold Hemster, the local chapter president of the If You're Gay, You Should Be Unhappy organization chimed in about his own beef with his legislators. "Why my senator, Ben Dover, not only helped block a vote on overturning the Supreme Court on abortion, but he also refused to vote for the bill confirming my 1st Amendment religious right to stand at a urinal next to a man and not some commie switch-hitter."

"Wow!" I blurted out. "I didn't know that there was either a constitutional right or a divine right to urinate next to a heterosexual man."

"Well, I was told you fellers in the Republican leadership was just RINOs, but I never guessed you'd be stupid too. It's right there in Efishings; 'Thou shall not defile the sanctity of the men's room!'" declared Hemster.

Peter "Pickle" Jackson, a retired policeman and current county inspector of weights and measures, couldn't wait to weigh in on his own political hot button, gun control. "That there feller Brain Busma promised us that if we gave the Republicans a super majority in the legislature that he'd make sure that we'd have the right to carry our assault rifles into the school auditorium when we go to watch the Christmas pageant and Live Nativity Scene.

Well, he told a big fat whopper there! They stopped me at the door when they discovered that I had a hunnerd-round clip in the magazine. Seems a bill that my Rep. Chet Niceling filed got stuffed in a drawer 'cause the Republican Caucus decided that 80 rounds was a better number."

I must admit that at this point it was a great relief when Warner Greenside, the local bank mortgage officer, told the group that he wanted to discuss an issue that got to the meat of Republican core values.

"You all know as good Christians, Conservatives and Republicans in that order, we don't believe in taxes of any kind except for the kind that buys cruise missiles. I'd like to know why the Indiana General Assembly is intent on destroying our economy and standard of living by increasing the gas tax. Our roads are just fine the way they are. Why I just told my wife about how good the roads were from Nappanee to Marion to Plymouth."

"Pardon me Warner, but why did you drive from Nappanee to Plymouth via Marion?" I asked.

"Well, my fine RINO friend, because the road between Nappanee and Plymouth will jolt the fillings out of your teeth. Why I got pulled over by a county mounthy the other day for suspected drunk driving on that road. I was weaving all over

the place avoiding the chuckholes and almost head-on collided with Elder Yoder in his buggy. Despite that, we don't need any new taxes!"

Just when I didn't think that the Cripple Creek Republican Study Group could get any weirder, a quiet and pensive man, Michael Formica, spoke up. Formica is the executive director of Citizens Against Anyone Who Doesn't Act Like Us. "I would propose that we law-abiding, Bible-loving, gun-toting and tired-of-being-taxed Hoosiers band together and send a message to our Indiana Republicans that we are going to go on strike until we're listened to. We'll not give any money to Republicans and we won't vote for them. Maybe after they lose their majorities, they'll get the message that they should listen to us."

"Whoa down, just a diddly darn minute," I shouted as I poured half a bottle of Prilosec down my throat. "Are you telling me that you'd rather see someone like Pat Bauer leading the Indiana House than Brian Bosma? On what planet are you from where it would be good for anyone who is interested in protecting life, protecting gun owner rights or controlling taxes to put Democrats back in charge of anything?"

Marsha Tablelapper quickly stood up and pushed her box of Twinkies, her Bible and a copy of Pastor Mi-Way's book into her denim purse. She snatched up her big gulp cup of Cherry Coke and let us know that this meeting of the Cripple Creek Republican Study Group was over.

She looked back over her shoulder as she stormed out of the laundromat, but as she crashed into Melvin Piffle who was folding clothes, she blurted out, "Just like Pastor Emily says in her book, it's my way or the highway and if it's the highway, don't make me pay for it!"

I think I'll miss next week's meeting. ❖

Dunn is former chairman of the Howard County Republican Party.

ANTELOPE CLUB

615 N. DELAWARE ST. - DOWNTOWN INDY
antelopeclub@hotmail.com



>> Lunch & dinner 6 days a week

>> Cigar lounge

>> Beautiful view of Downtown from our 2nd floor patio

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

Sheriff Buncich makes a risky public defense

By **RICH JAMES**

MERRILLVILLE – The case involving Lake County Sheriff John Buncich seemingly gets more bizarre by the week. Buncich, who is in his fourth term as sheriff, was indicted in November on bribery charges. His latest trial date is Aug. 7, but even that may well get continued.



The most interesting twist came a week ago when the sheriff issued a press release proclaiming his innocence. While Buncich entered a guilty plea when charged, last week was the first time he made a public comment.

The sheriff issued a press release through his attorney, Bryan Truitt. Buncich said, "I assure you that I am absolutely innocent." He went on to say, "For those of you who know me and my 45 years in law enforcement, you know I would never compromise my integrity or professionalism and cannot be guilty of these charges. Trust that I would never sell my office, not for any amount."

Why the sheriff issued such a statement five

months after the indictment has raised some eyebrows. Some say it simply is a matter of looking for support in the court of public opinion before he goes to trial. Buncich always has been a popular public figure and that hasn't been diminished much by the indictment. The sheriff said he issued the statement now because he had expected the U.S. attorney's office to have dropped the charges by now, or that he would have gone to trial and been acquitted. Neither, of course, has happened.

Because he has proclaimed his innocence, Buncich may simply be trying to reassure the public that the sheriff's department is running well. The allegation is that the sheriff took kickbacks from towing firms wanting to do business with the police department.

Buncich, of course, has two options. He can enter into a plea agreement by pleading guilty. Or, he can go to trial and either be acquitted or convicted. Therein is the rub. Those who plead guilty to public corruption charges generally receive lesser sentences. Those who go to trial and lose generally receive longer prison terms. It makes one wonder why someone who exercises his constitutional right to a trial ends up worse off if he loses. Go figure.

In the meantime, Schererville Police Chief David Dowling appears to be emerging as the leading candidate to replace Buncich at a caucus election or the next general election in 2018, whichever comes first. ❖

Rich James has been writing about state and local government and politics for more than 30 years.

Running for office?



PoliticalBank is the **only resource candidates and elected officials need** to move their campaigns forward.

"Great job on a useful and innovative website. Your site empowers candidates and helps equip voters in a new & comprehensive way."

- **Mayor Blair Milo, LaPorte, Indiana**

PoliticalBank is a **simple, interactive platform** and a powerful, cost-effective alternative to the "old way" of online campaigning, without the hassle of designing your own campaign website or the expense of hiring web developers or consultants.

- ✓ **Raise money online**
- ✓ **Increase your Name ID**
- ✓ **Connect with voters**
- ✓ **Define your own campaign**
- ✓ **Clearly convey your stance on important issues**

Get started in **less than 10 minutes** on a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Campaigns start here. Visit **www.PoliticalBank.com**

Ed Breen, WBAT: Explain to me as best you can exactly what's going on with the Great Cold Beer Debate in the General Assembly right now. Sometime this week it will be resolved. Or not. Now, back in January about the least likely person north of the Ohio River to toss a grenade into the statehouse would have been Jay Ricker, a Hoosier who owns 56 gas stations and convenience stores, mainly in central Indiana. But lob one he did, and he pulled the pin first. Under the law – a three tiered monstrosity that was built back in 1933 and was intended to make drinking more difficult than it already is – you can only buy cold beer in a package liquor store but never on Sunday. You can buy warm beer other places, but on Sunday you can't buy warm beer anywhere, but you can buy cold beer if the place happens to be a restaurant that sells a lot of food and has at least 25 chairs and tables. Same, but stiffer, rules apply to stronger spirits, but no one ever buys cold bourbon anyway. Which does leave open the question of who decided that we need to drink our beer chilled anyway? The Brits don't; a pint of stout at room temperature and they're happy as toads. And I know a couple of fellows who put in their time in Vietnam, where the temperature was terrible and refrigeration was nonexistent. They adapted. Warm brew is just fine with them to this day. In fact, a local pub keeps a couple of bottles on the shelf for one of them.

Anyway, most folks prefer cold beer and Jay Ricker didn't get rich by ignoring them. Thus did he come up with the idea of stuffing some tables and chairs in his establishments in Columbus and Sheridan, enough to seat and serve the required number of patrons to qualify him to sell cold beer. He took his plan to someone – a bureaucrat who probably wishes he had called in sick that day – someone at the Alcohol and Tobacco Commission in Indianapolis who checked the law, found that Mr. Ricker complied with the letter, if not the spirit, of the law and said, "Yeah, okay, go ahead, do it." That didn't stay quiet for very long and before you knew it legislators of all stripes were thumping the tubs and beating their breasts: No, we cannot allow this. And there are, frankly, some good reasons to not stop at the filling station, top off the tank and pop a cold brewski while you down a hotdog. But everyone, it seems, has a dog in this fight. Package liquor stores don't want Sunday liquor sales because it would force them to be open on Sunday if they wanted their slice of the business. What we call the "big box" stores – Wal-Mart, Meijer's and a bunch of others – are open endlessly anyway and they want to sell beer, wine, liquor seven days and nights a week. Political pundit Brian Howey sees all this as something that could spin out of control and trigger some sort of brouhaha. "If there's been a curve ball in this waning session of the General Assembly," he wrote over the weekend, "it's been the Ricker's cold beer controversy. And if key players aren't careful, this could signal a populist uprising in the age of Amazon, Trump and the anti-



regulation fervor that has swept Indiana and the nation." Nothing hotter than a Hoosier squabble over cold beer. ❖

Philip Gordon, Foreign Affairs: It is December 2018, and North Korea has just launched a heavy artillery barrage against targets in Seoul, killing thousands, or perhaps tens of thousands; it is too soon to say. U.S. and South Korean forces—now unified under U.S. command, according to the provisions of the Mutual Defense Treaty—have fired artillery and rockets at North Korea's military positions and launched air strikes against its advanced air defense network. From a bunker somewhere near Pyongyang, the country's erratic dictator, Kim Jong Un, has issued a statement promising to "burn Seoul and Tokyo to the ground"—a reference to North Korea's stockpile of nuclear and chemical weapons—if the "imperialist" forces do not immediately cease their attacks. Even Trump's harshest critics acknowledge that

the United States had no good choices in North Korea. Washington had expected some sort of a North Korean response when it preemptively struck the test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the continental United States, fulfilling Trump's pledge to prevent Pyongyang from acquiring that ability. But few thought North Korea would go so far as to risk its own destruction by attacking South Korea. Now, Trump must decide whether to continue with the war and risk nuclear escalation—or accept what will be seen as a humiliating retreat. Some of his advisers are urging him to quickly finish the job, whereas others warn that doing so would cost the lives of too many of the 28,000 U.S. soldiers stationed on the peninsula, to say nothing of the ten million residents of Seoul. Assembled in the White House Situation Room, Trump and his aides ponder their terrible options. How did it come to this? Even Trump's harshest critics acknowledge that the United States had no good choices in North Korea. For more than 20 years, the paranoid, isolated regime in Pyongyang had developed its nuclear and missile capabilities and seemed impervious to incentives and disincentives alike. ❖

Mark Bennett, Terre Haute Tribune-Star: The U.S. Senate used to wear the label "the world's greatest deliberative body. Joe Donnelly leaned into that deliberative, fading tradition in weighing the nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. The bitter Senate climate of the past decade called for Donnelly to vote against Gorsuch. After all, Donnelly is a Democrat, and Gorsuch was nominated by Donald Trump, the new Republican president whose election further polarized a politically divided nation. Donnelly bucked his party and voted for Gorsuch. Donnelly's reward for his bipartisanship? "That's known in the business as a 'lose-lose,'" Donnelly said, with a laugh at a downtown Terre Haute coffee shop. ❖

EPA's Pruitt at East Chicago

EAST CHICAGO — Gov. Eric Holcomb joined federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt, U.S. Senator Joe Donnelly, U.S. Senator Todd Young, U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, East Chicago Mayor Anthony Copeland, state Senator Lonnie Randolph, state Rep. Earl Harris, Jr., East Chicago officials and community leaders at the East Chicago Superfund Site. Gov. Holcomb said, "The impacts of lead contamination in East Chicago have made clear some of the most pressing systemic challenges these families face. The situation demands an unprecedented level of cooperation among state, local and federal stakeholders. That is pretty easy to articulate, but it's difficult to achieve. Today's visit by EPA Administrator Pruitt is one more example. I think it speaks volumes that he chose East Chicago to be his first Superfund site visit since taking on this new role. From our very first meeting, Pruitt and his team have demonstrated their commitment to being a partner with us, and I am profusely grateful." Pruitt says leaders talked about setting concrete steps. However, he didn't offer any details in his 90-second statement. He refused to answer reporters' questions.



IU bans athletes with sex crimes

BLOOMINGTON — Indiana athletics has enacted a policy disqualifying its programs from adding any athlete with a history of sexual or domestic violence (Osterman, IndyStar). The policy bans "any prospective student-athlete — whether a transfer student, incoming freshman, or other status — who has been convicted of or pleaded guilty or no contest to a felony involving sexual violence." It further defines "sexual violence" as

"dating violence, domestic violence, rape, sexual assault or sexual violence as defined by the Indiana University policy on sexual misconduct." Approved by the Indiana University-Bloomington Faculty Athletics Committee earlier this month, the policy is the brainchild of Athletic Director Fred Glass, and was written in consultation with a number of campus entities, including IU's Office of Student Welfare and Title IX, and its Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. "I think this will be an important policy to help protect members of the Indiana University community," Glass told IndyStar.

3 Supreme Court finalists chosen

INDIANAPOLIS — Justice Robert Rucker, a Gary native, will be succeeded on the Indiana Supreme Court by a county judge hailing from either the northeast, central or southeast region of the state (Carden, NWI Times). On Wednesday, the Indiana Judicial Nominating Commission unanimously recommended to Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb the three candidates it believes are best suited to serve on the five-member high court. They are: Clark Circuit Judge Vicki Carmichael, 54, of Jeffersonville; Wabash Superior Judge Christopher Goff, 44, of Wabash; and Boone Superior Judge Matthew Kincaid, 46, of Lebanon. Holcomb will have 60 days to decide which potential justice to put on the Supreme Court once the nominating commission formally notifies the governor of its recommendation, likely in the next week. Hoosier voters then will say at the 2020 general election whether the new justice should be retained for a 10-year term.

GOP's Parke calls on Musgrave to quit

EVANSVILLE — The chairman of the Vanderburgh County Republican Party wants Cheryl Musgrave to resign as Vanderburgh County Com-

missioner (Evans, Evansville Courier & Press). When asked Tuesday if she planned to resign, Musgrave laughed. "Wayne (Parke) doesn't speak for the party. Wayne doesn't speak for the people of Vanderburgh County. And Wayne doesn't speak for the voters in Vanderburgh County who spoke already," she said. Parke sent an email to Musgrave Monday afternoon asking for her resignation. "I do not believe you are performing your County Commissioner responsibilities in the best interest of the Vanderburgh County citizens. Vanderburgh County needs people in office that unite -- not a divider who has their own personal agenda." Musgrave and Vanderburgh County Commissioner Ben Shoulders voted to fire Jacob Murphy as manager of Burdette Park at a meeting in March. They voted to replace Murphy with Pat Tuley, a longtime Democrat. Tuley backed away from the offer in March. The position remains open. In April, commissioners voted to hire Murphy to head the Weights and Measures Department. Musgrave voted against his hiring. She said it was "good-ole-boy politics where deals are being made behind closed doors by members of the council and the commission."

Trump to sign steel exec order

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is expected to sign an executive order as early as Thursday directing the Commerce Department to investigate whether steel imports into the U.S. should be blocked on national security grounds, according to sources familiar with the plan. A number of steel industry executives have been invited to the White House for an event with Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross. Representatives from ArcelorMittal, Nucor, U.S. Steel, AK Steel and Timken are expected, along with the president of the United Steelworkers union. China's excess capacity to produce steel is seen as a long-term threat to the U.S. steel industry's viability.