

## A flush biennial budget like no other



An infusion of Biden relief funds, \$2 billion of new revenue brings a springtime Statehouse Christmas

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – The late great budget analyst Bill Styring reacted to a modestly positive General Assembly revenue forecast sometime in the 1990s by proclaiming,



“Christmas presents . . . for everyone!”

That was back in the day when “illions” were sized with “Bs” instead of “Ts” and there were two viable political parties jousting for power in the Indiana General Assembly.

Then there was Gov. Mitch Daniels who presided over the state during the 2008-09 Great Recession that nearly devoured the state’s domestic auto industry. Congress passed an \$800 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus package, and the state ended

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## Vaccine time bomb

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – The headline under LaPorte Mayor Tom Dermody’s sunny, smiling face in the Herald-Dispatch was this: “LaPorte officials urge everyone to get COVID-19 vaccine: ‘We’re not trying to be political.’”

It’s headlines like this that really make me wonder whether the human race, which has been around in our evolutionary state for only about 10,000 years, is going to last more than the next century or two.

Here we stand amidst a modern scientific medical miracle: The development, testing and implementation of a COVID-19 vaccine within a year.

And what we face as a so-



**“It is my hope now that a proper sentence is given that fits the crime committed and our entire country can use this case to transform the relationship and trust between people of color and the police.”**

- State Sen. Eddie Melton, on the conviction of Derek Chauvin.



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**Jack E. Howey**  
 editor emeritus  
 1926-2019



ciety is what is being called the "hard part," which is getting the vaccine into the arms of about 50% of the population who have yet to receive a dose.

**CDC stats reveal** that only 23.4% of Hoosiers are fully vaccinated as of today, which is below the national average of 26.4%, as well as neighbors Michigan (26.3%), Ohio (26.7%), Kentucky (27.8%), and Illinois (25.6%). More troubling is that vaccine doses administered declined by 17% in Indiana compared to last week. The ISDH dashboard reports that 1.644 million Hoosiers have been fully vaccinated.

WRTV reported Wednesday that Morgan County has cancelled a Saturday vaccination clinic due to lack of interest. Some 16,410 people out of 70,000 population have been vaccinated there, or 22%. The Washington Post reported today that there has been an 11% decline in vaccinations in the U.S. over the past week.

A Monmouth Poll last week revealed "partisanship" remains the main distinguishing factor among those who want to avoid the vaccine altogether, with 43% of Republicans versus just 5% of Democrats saying this (along with 22% of independents). This "vaccine hesitancy" demographic is poised to prevent the U.S. from attaining "herd immunity." As COVID-19 mutates and morphs, the nasty scenario is what is happening in Michigan, which has a higher inoculation rate than Indiana, but finds its emergency rooms swamped with COVID patients, becomes the norm.

**One of them is** rocker Ted Nugent, who last week released a video rant at the "COVID-19 myth." "I have had flu symptoms for the last 10 days and I thought I was dying," Nugent said. "I was tested positive today. I've got a stuffed up head, body aches. My God, what a pain in the

a--. I literally could hardly crawl out of bed the last few days. But I did. I crawled."

Nugent defended his vaccine hesitancy, saying, "I guess I would ask you, because I'm addicted to truth, logic and common sense and my common sense meter would demand the answer to: Why weren't we shut down for COVID one through 18? COVID 1-18 didn't shut anything down, but whoa, COVID-19, even though it's 99.8% survivable. Why didn't we shut down for the AIDS

epidemic or the flu or influenza every year?"

This comes as Politico reported that aides to former president Donald Trump look back at the end of his term as a major missed opportunity to encourage his supporters to get

vaccinated. "If he spent the last 90 days being the voice — and taking credit because he deserved to for the vaccine — and helping get as many Americans get vaccinated as he could, he would be remembered for that," a former senior administration official said. Trump administration officials planned for Trump to receive the vaccine on camera.

It didn't happen.

Mayor Dermody and others along the Michigan line like Elkhart Mayor Rod Roberson and Warsaw Mayor Joe Thallemer are now pulling out all the stops, working with state health officials to open up walk-in vaccine sites.

**Dermody showed** up at his board of works and city council meetings to press the urgency. "We see what's happening in the state of Michigan. We're right along the border and our numbers are going up quickly," Dermody said. "I think we've only had 25% of the county vaccinated. I want to give thanks to LaPorte County, they have done a marvelous job with their vaccination program.



LOCAL NEWS  
**La Porte officials urge everyone to get COVID-19 vaccine: 'We're not trying to be political'**



We have vaccines available throughout the city of LaPorte. If people aren't sure about how to register, we have access because we're always asked, 'Do you have some arms?'"

Reporter Steve Garbacz of KPC News, which serves northeastern Indiana counties along the Michigan line, provided the stats: Approximately 74% of Hoosiers age 80 and older have been vaccinated against COVID-19, and new cases in March and April 2021 are down 88.1% in that demographic compared to June-December 2020. For those in their 70s, vaccine uptake has hit 77% and new cases have dropped by 81.6%. In the 60s age range, vaccine uptake is 65% and new cases have dropped 70.2%; at 50s it's 47% vaccination rate and 61.5% drop in cases; in the 40s vaccines have hit 33% of the population and cases have dropped 58.4%; those in their 30s have 25% vaccinated and had a 54.6% drop in cases; for the 20s it's 19% vaccinations and 54.1% drop in cases and for those younger than 20, of which only 3% are currently vaccinated, new cases have dropped the lowest at 42.9%.

**So it's working.** The stats prove it.

On Wednesday, President Biden explained, "It's an incredible achievement, but we still have some work to do with our target groups. If you've been waiting your turn, wait no longer. Now is the time."

Why are so many hesitant to accept the vaccine?



With Black Americans, history such as the Tuskegee testing a century ago has left a legacy of distrust. The J&J suspension raised concerns, even though only one in a million reported adverse side effects. Kaiser Family Foundation surveys revealed 22% of people they polled recently are in a "wait and see" category, fearing side effects.

Stat.com reports that issues about vaccines often center more on anxieties than facts, said Heidi Larson, who directs the Vaccine Confidence Project. "This can be a messy, emotional, difficult space. There are some people who aren't going to change their minds no matter what, so focus more on the so-called movable middle. You might think of it as your swing vote — any political strategist will tell you that getting as much of the swing vote as you can is what's important. It can also make people more resilient to the predatory behavior of anti-vax groups."

Say what? Predatory behavior? Sounds like a Kremlin plot.

We've all witnessed Gov. Eric Holcomb and key members of his administration consistently stress the safety of the vaccine as well as receive the jab on camera.

What about other Republicans in the dominating General Assembly and congressional delegations? Are they going to educate and urge their constituencies to protect themselves, their families, and their communities? ❖

## Biennial budget, from page 1

up with an extra \$4.5 billion. Daniels and his congressional Republican colleagues opposed the act, but when reporters pressed the governor on whether he'd accept the funds, he responded, "We'll take it."

"You've got this gusher of so-called stimulus money which is why I keep insisting that it be spent on one-time purposes," Daniels told Howey Politics Indiana in March 2009. "If it's put in the base, people are facing a set of very, very significant and very wrenching cutbacks in two years, so we're not going to let the state get into that position."

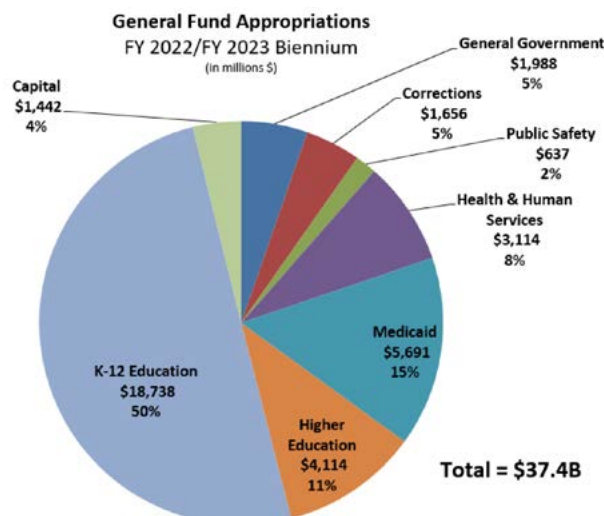
Which brings us to Tuesday, when Gov. Eric Holcomb, Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, House Speaker

Todd Huston and Senate President Pro Tempore Rod Bray gathered for a Zoom presser. While their body language was understated, Holcomb was downright giddy with his words for two reasons:

- Last week's revenue forecast was \$2 billion more than expected.

- President Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Relief Act was the source of a \$1.6 billion infusion into this biennial budget.

"I think we are living in a rare time and we're going to see that reflected in this budget," Holcomb began. "This budget is truly transformational. It's transformational in investments we're going to make in people, first and foremost obviously our state's greatest asset. It's going to allow people to have more hope than ever and realize more opportunities in their lives. This budget is going to invest not just in people, but the platform



... for our infrastructure foundation. We are able to fund some mega, transformational infrastructure projects, some of which we've been talking about for years now."

It is expected to pass later today.

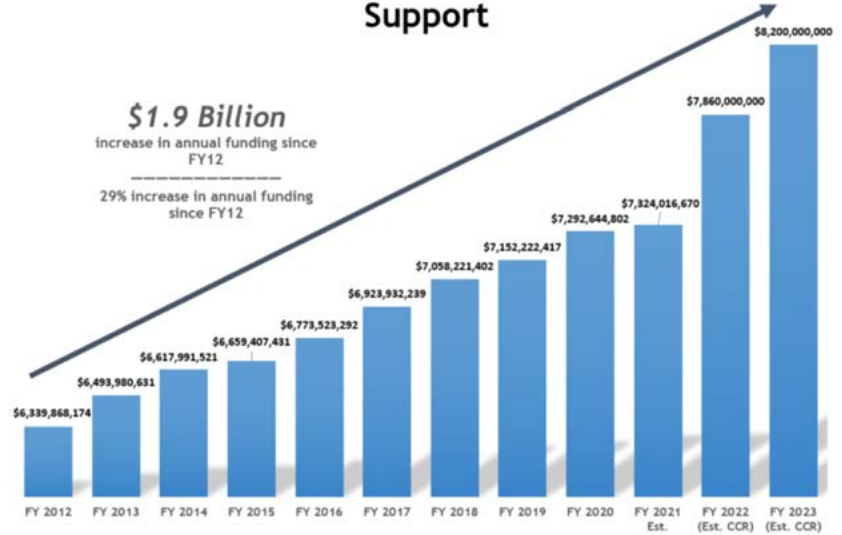
For Speaker Huston, the budget that includes a record \$1.9 billion increase in K-12 education. "This investment fulfills and exceeds the Next Level Pay Commission's \$600 million teacher pay recommendations at record levels," Huston said. The starting salary for a new teacher, Huston said, will be \$40,000. He also said that it will reduce "taxpayer debt" by \$1 billion, including paying \$600 million in pre-1996 teacher pensions. It funds \$231 million for South Shore line Westlake and double tracking projects. It earmarks \$500 million of federal relief funds for deposit into the Unemployment Trust Fund. It increases K-12 funding by \$1.03 billion, or 9.1% over the biennium as compared to FY2021 appropriation levels.

Huston will also get a school voucher income eligibility expansion of 300%, a 90% increase in all CHOICE scholarships, elements that were not in the Senate version of the budget. It will invest \$150 million in student learning recovery grants to address learning loss caused by COVID-19 closures, as well as a 30% increase for school-based social/emotional health programs.

For Sen. Bray, the budget "makes investments in Hoosier health and mental health." It appropriates \$70 million to the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy to enhance training per HEA1006. It appropriates \$30 million for state and local police body cams, provides \$5 million in annual funding for the Indiana Crime Guns Task Force, \$1,600 hazard pay stipends for State and Capitol Police, and increases the salary matrix for state, excise and conservation officers.

On the mental health front, the budget restores full funding for mental health programs, including Recovery Works, and appropriates an astounding additional \$100 million over the biennium to fund mental health initiatives. It will appropriate \$50 million in funding for the Health Issues and Challenges grant program to spur the development of innovative policies that will improve the health outcomes of Hoosiers (HEA1007), provide \$40 million each year in additional funding to increase hourly pay to \$15 per hour for direct service providers who serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and appropriates \$10 million per year to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for home health care providers and \$2 million per year to increase rates for assisted living providers. It increases funding for sexual assault victims' assistance by 33%, or about \$500,000 per fiscal year.

## Most Dollars Ever for K-12 Tuition Support



K-12 Tuition Support funding increased 15% from FY 2012 to FY 2020. Over that same period (CY 2012 - CY 2020), inflation (CPI-U) increased 12.7%.

For Lt. Gov. Crouch, there is \$250 million in federal relief funds in broadband investment, coming atop \$79 million that has been invested in connecting 22,000 homes and businesses to high speed internet. "Our continued expansion of broadband opportunities will improve healthcare services by opening more patients to telehealth services, expand education for students who are e-learning, and further support our already vibrant economy by connecting people and businesses to others across the state, nation and globe," Crouch said.

The biennial budget provides \$160 million of federal stimulus dollars for water infrastructure grants, builds a new campus for state deaf and blind schools, inns for Potato Creek and Prophetstown State Parks, and \$60 million in federal relief funds for Next Level trails expansion.

"This budget is going to invest like no other time in our local communities," said Holcomb. That was in reference to \$500 million of federal stimulus dollars in the Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) to support communities across the state and encourage innovative policies that will spur population growth and economic expansion. This was an extension of Gov. Mike Pence's "Regional Cities" initiative that he once told HPI would stand as a leading hallmark of his tenure in office. Holcomb's READI program more than doubles that one-time funding.

"When I think about what's in this budget, locals are going to love it because it's giving them more resources and partnering with them in ways that will yield great results," Holcomb said, noting that Pence's Regional Cities \$126 million investment brought about more than \$1 billion in matching funds. He also pointed to \$60 million of federal relief dollars to the Hoosier Hospitality Small Business Restart grant program to help small Hoosier businesses get back on their feet.

Holcomb added that the budget will help Hoosiers “accelerate away from 2020 at a faster pace ... as we continue to invest in Hoosiers themselves. If one thing stands out over these past four months, it’s collaboration ... to get to this day.”

This “collaboration” occurred within the super majority Republicans at the Statehouse. Democrats did not participate, even though the state will have \$3 billion in American Relief Plan funds passed without a Republican vote in Congress and signed by President Biden.

### INDems outside looking in

Indiana Democrats reminded Hoosiers that Holcomb and the GOP are attempting “to have it both ways on the American Rescue Plan’s (ARP) dollars that were provided by President Joe Biden and Indiana Democrats like U.S. Reps. André Carson and Frank Mrvan Jr.” who supported the plan. “Not one Hoosier Republican voted for the ARP, but now that close to \$3.2 billion has arrived in Indiana, they are ready to accept the cash to help our state, our budget and our communities,” Democrats said in a statement. “Hoosiers should celebrate the success – and popularity – of the ARP and all Hoosiers should feel like our country is getting back on track through vaccinations, a growing economy, and more public education investment.”

AP reporter Tom Davies asked, “What role did the \$3 billion in the federal recovery funds play in making these budget decisions? Did that make this increase in school spending possible by allowing you to have the state money to cover so many grant programs and construction projects?” Holcomb responded, “Well, it was a lot more money than we had to deal with,” before tossing the question to Speaker Huston.

Huston continued, “We obviously appropriate it, and we put it into one time uses. It’s for one time dollars. It’s funding the infrastructure. It’s funding the readiness grants. It’s doing those types of things to make investments in our community. Frankly put, the leadership of the governor, the financial shape of the state – when we – the dollars are being invested in education, those are state dollars. Those are dollars that came from the improved revenue forecast that we received a week ago. So, those are state dollars that we were both surprised but pleasantly on the amount of money.”

Holcomb added, “We wanted to make sure that anything we did was sustainable. And so, that’s our fiscal picture and this is what we were able to commit to.”

Or as Styling would put it ... Christmas for everyone.

### Political impacts

Hoosier Republicans and Democrats will both see this budget as a political win, even though the only Democrat to have a hand in it was President Biden.

While U.S. Sen. Mike Braun lamented that national Republicans were losing the messaging battle on the ARP,

it’s worth noting that a year after Hoosiers reaped a \$4.5 billion windfall in 2009 from President Obama, who in the process made multiple trips to Elkhart County to stress the importance of the investment, the trust was lost into the ether. Hoosier Republicans used the Obama stimulus as a persistent whipping boy, and in 2010 won back the Indiana House along with a U.S. Senate seat and two congressional districts. They redrew the legislative and congressional maps, and put the GOP on its path to today’s super majority era.

This week the HPI Daily Wire has been filled with links to articles of school districts, cities and counties reaping tens of millions of dollars from Biden’s relief efforts.

For new Indiana Democratic Chairman Mike Schmuhl, the messaging on this latest federal funding windfall will be crucial to any chance of a revival of the state’s competitive two-party system. ❖



## General Assembly could use new tools

By ANNE LAKER

INDIANAPOLIS – The General Assembly needs a shrink. Or at least some new tools. How about some conflict resolution techniques? Could we vow that name calling is out and mutual accountability is in? Can we return to a

time when the people’s business was conducted with the expectation of political compromise?

Barack Obama said: “A good compromise, a good piece of legislation, is like...a good piece of music. Everybody can recognize it. They say, ‘Huh. It works. It makes sense.’”

The opposite has been true over and over this session.

As Sen. Ron Alting (R-Lafayette) famously said last week: “There

just seems to be no balance anymore in this building.”

At the end of a bloody session, the concept of restoring political trust offers a glimpse into an alternative style and substance of politics. Everyone, including the media, is focused on the products of the legislative process. But what about the process itself? What if it turns out tyranny is baked into the current approach? Then we need a new one. Indulge me with a few “what if’s.”

**What if all affected** parties had to support the legislation before a chair moved it out of committee?

This way, all energy would be poured into resolution, not resistance. Brainstorming, not gamesmanship, would be fostered. And say goodbye to last minute sabotage.

What if a politician respected by both sides, per-





haps even a governor, was called on to mediate and keep frustrated parties from walking away? What a glorious art form: Building constructive coalitions from would-be enemies.

What if the energy spent tossing political footballs as part of the daily media drama was minimized? What if both parties agreed to address the media together on contentious issues?

**Such alternative strategies** for resolving public conflicts might have helped avoid tragic brawls this session, like these:

- A bill by Sen. Greg Taylor (D-Indianapolis) that would have required transparency in this fall's redistricting process was shut down. "Why is it too much to ask that elected leaders be inclusive to constituents about something as important as redistricting?" Sen. Taylor demanded. "It's shameful that Republicans in the Senate refused to even allow Hoosiers to be informed about when and where legislators are meeting to draw maps."

- Wetlands. Sen. Chris Garten (R-Scottsburg) originally proposed a wholesale elimination of wetlands. The Senate Enrolled Act sitting on Gov. Holcomb's desk still leaves most wetlands in jeopardy, including ephemeral streams. Anyone with a passing interest in or respect for nature is seeing red.

- Sen. Aaron Freeman (R-Indianapolis) is playing shark with IndyGo's financial standing. When Rep. Jim Pressel (R-Rolling Prairie) let the original anti-IndyGo bill die in his House committee, Sen. Freeman took another stab by trying to saddle IndyGo with utility costs. Did he choose to speak directly with IndyGo about his concerns?

- The now-dead HB1381 pitted towns and counties against the state on the placement of solar and wind projects. Frustrating as it must have been for both for clean energy advocates – and for lawmakers trying to assist companies poised to make big renewable energy investments in Indiana – to see the bill expire, the bill's chances weren't helped when Sen. Mark Messmer (R-Jasper) referred to the opposition as "schizophrenic."

That's no way to express respect for the other party's interests. Messmer tried out a host of amendments, such as offering financial incentives for counties to accept the state's standards. Indiana's energy future seemed to hang in the balance. Did the bill's authors ask the counties what would have made it possible or palatable to site renewable projects? Did the counties reply in good faith?

Aren't lawmakers on both sides of the aisle tired of the knock-down, drag-out? Is anyone interested in the practice of mature statesmanship? Here are some examples of calmer heads prevailing this session:

- The Indiana Black Legislative Caucus partnered with House Republicans and state law enforcement agencies to pass HB1006, which mandates de-escalation training for police and defines chokeholds as deadly use of force.

- All parties just agreed that a chunk of the sudden budget windfall will go to Indiana public schools.

- Senate President Pro Tem Rod Bray pulled the plug on the bill to abolish handgun permits.

- Senate Democrats' proposed budget increase for food banks was accepted.

Poll the people, and you'd likely find that voters want lawmakers to work together. And some remember an era when that's what happened on any given day. Lest we forget that the very structure of our government can be traced to a compromise at the Constitutional Convention of 1787. When modestly populated Delaware wanted a Senate structure and heavily populated Virginia wanted a House structure, Connecticut delegates Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth said, "Why not both?"

Gerrymandering means that trust at the Statehouse is broken daily among the two parties, and even within the outsized GOP. Voters of all parties need to stop electing flame-fanning trust-breakers, and elect more creative, sage trust-builders. ❖

**A consultant and grant writer, Laker is principal of Laker Verbal LLC.**



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# Bill would allow commissioners to overrule health officials

## Howey Politics Indiana

Indiana lawmakers voted Wednesday in favor of limiting the authority of county or city health departments by allowing local elected officials to overturn orders or enforcement actions issued during emergencies (Davies, [AP](#)). Republican supporters say the proposal is meant to provide a “check and balance” protecting the rights of business owners following complaints about COVID-19 orders closing or limiting businesses that have been imposed over the past year.



The bill would require any local public health orders more stringent than one issued by the governor must be approved by an elected county or city board. The Senate voted 37-12 and House members voted 65-29 to advance the bill to Gov. Eric Holcomb for consideration. Some medical and health organizations opposed the bill, arguing against shifting authority away from public health professionals to local elected officials who largely don't have such experience.

Holcomb has said he was concerned about the proposed limitations on local health officials and that he would “take a hard look” at the bill. The governor's office said Tuesday he would review the final bill.

Legislative Republicans voted last week to override Holcomb's veto on a bill giving themselves more authority to intervene during statewide emergencies declared by the governor. Republican Sen. Chris Garten of Charlestown said he believed appointed local health officials shouldn't have unchecked power to shut down or other restrict businesses. “We're simply saying that anyone in a position, in a democratic republic, that has that much unparalleled power should get a second set of eyes to look at it,” Garten said.

The bill also creates a procedure allowing the public to appeal enforcement actions such as citations, fines or an order to close a business to an elected county or city board. Final negotiations on the bill left out provisions from a previous version that would have allowed a business to stay open during its appeal even if it was not following health orders.

Democrats argued that the bill gives politicians too much control over public health decisions and could jeopardize the public. “I don't understand why in this bill dealing with emergency stuff we're actually hamstringing local health departments and making it harder for orders to go into effect that prevent you and me getting sick,”

said Rep. Ryan Dvorak, a South Bend Democrat. “I think this is a really dumb part of the bill.”

## Vote today on budget, voucher expansion

Indiana public school and teachers groups are cheering the education funding increase included in the new state budget plan that's poised for final approval from lawmakers on Thursday to complete this year's regular legislative session (Davies, [AP](#)). Support comes from those groups even as the Republican-dominated Legislature is set to endorse a contentious expansion of the state's private school voucher program by raising the income eligibility level for a family of four to about \$145,000 for the coming school year. The state budget agreement announced Tuesday will boost overall school funding by about 4.5% each of the next two years. That deal, however, leaves out a push to follow the federal government's lead of excluding some unemployment benefits paid last year from income taxes. It also imposes a new state tax on vaping products.

**Teachers and vouchers:** The Republican budget negotiators buoyed by a forecast of better-than-anticipated state tax collections over the next two years are allocating more than double an increase to school than what had been proposed earlier this month. That step follows several years of complaints of inaction by the Legislature concerning the state's lagging teacher pay. The budget bill directs school districts to submit explanations to the state if they aren't able to set a minimum teacher pay of \$40,000 a year. Terry Spradlin, executive director of the Indiana School Boards Association, said the funding increase far exceeded his expectations from late last year when he hoped to avoid any education spending reductions amid the coronavirus pandemic recession. “We'll give teachers a pay increase, no doubt about it, and it will be substantial and generous,” Spradlin said. Indiana State Teachers Association President Keith Gambill said “with his budget's investment, educators now have a light at the end of the tunnel,” Gambill said. Those groups had opposed expanding the private school voucher program, which could add some 12,000 students, or about one-third, to a projected 48,000 over the next two years, according to a legislative report. The program's cost could grow by about 50% to \$264 million a year. The voucher plan would raise income eligibility for a family of four from the current roughly \$96,000 a year to about \$145,000 starting this fall. It also would allow all those students to receive the full voucher amount, rather than the current tiered system that limits full vouchers to such families with incomes of about \$48,000. Spradlin said he was disappointed that the voucher eligibility was being expanded to such a high income level as already 61% of students receiving vouchers have never attended public schools. “What this investment will do is likely pay for more families that are already in the private education system,” Spradlin said.

**Taxing and unemployment:** Indiana won't

conform with the federal American Rescue Plan provision excluding the first \$10,200 of unemployment benefits accrued in 2020 from federal taxes for those making less than \$150,000. The Indiana House had backed excluding the same amount from state taxes, but Republican Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Ryan Mishler said he supported continuing the state's policy of taxing unemployment payments. Mishler said one week of the expanded \$600 federal unemployment benefits early in the pandemic would more than cover the state income taxes. A legislative report estimated that the unemployment benefits exclusion would have cost the state between \$58 million and \$97 million in tax collections. Democratic Rep. Ed DeLaney of Indianapolis said taxing those payments would unnecessarily complicate income tax filings. He said he believed it was unfair to tax those benefits while the budget plan would direct \$500 million in federal relief money toward the state's unemployment insurance trust fund that would otherwise be filled by business taxes. "We're putting all kinds of money in all kinds of reserves, paying down debt and all this other stuff, so we've basically chosen the state budget over the individual family budget," DeLaney said.

**New vaping tax:** The budget agreement imposes a new tax on electronic cigarette liquids and devices, which health groups have long sought to help discourage vaping. That tax would charge 15% on retail sales of vaping products and consumable materials and 25% on wholesalers for closed-system cartridges. A previous Senate-backed plan for lower tax levels had been lambasted by health advocates and the Indiana Chamber of Commerce as inadequate and far below the state's cigarette tax. Those groups expressed support for the higher tax as being in parity with cigarette taxes. A coalition of health and business groups pushed for a \$2-per-pack increase in the state's cigarette tax, calling it a needed step toward driving down Indiana's 21.1% smoking rate for adults, which was the fourth highest in the country for 2018, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But the Senate blocked that proposal.

**Truck weight limit bill to governor**


Thousands more overweight trucks could be headed to Indiana highways soon under legislation on its way to the governor's desk. Current law sets the weight limit for trucks at 80,000 pounds. However, if you're hauling steel, paper or agricultural products, you can get special permits to haul 120,000 pounds. Rep. Jim Pressel's (R-Rolling Prairie) bill, HB1190, would open up 120,000 pound truck weights to anyone. Pressel said it's about parity. The current system, he argued, picks winners and losers. But several law enforcement groups were opposed to the bill, arguing that overweight trucks cause more severe crashes and damage to roadways. Pressel

said there are guardrails to address that. "Gives INDOT the ability for two circumstances to completely stop the whole program: Infrastructure damage on a permitted route or the number of accidents associated with overweight divisible loads," Pressel said. Despite only narrowly clearing the House and Senate Wednesday, there was no floor debate over final passage of the measure.

**IndyGo may have dodged another bullet**

IndyGo seems to have dodged another bullet from the state Legislature, as the Indiana House approved an amended bill late Wednesday without a provision that would have financially hurt the public transit system (Berggoetz, [IBJ](#)). The House voted 61-29 to pass the new version of bill, which emerged from House-Senate conference committee. The Senate, though, adjourned for the evening before taking up the measure. It is expected to do so on Thursday, which legislative leaders have said will be the last day of the session. The IndyGo provision was earlier amended into the bill dealing with energy-related matters by Sen. Aaron Freeman, R-Indianapolis. Under his amendment, IndyGo would have had to pay public utility companies for moving utility services to make way for new transit lines and for relocation costs associated with the existing Red Line. Several Democratic senators, though, spoke against the unusual move they said will hurt IndyGo financially and its moves to expand rapid transit services. But supporters argued it's unfair for public utilities to eat the costs of relocating utility lines – and could result in higher costs to ratepayers. On Wednesday, Rep. Jim Pressel, R-Rolling Prairie, simply said the conference committee members agreed to remove all of the IndyGo language. He did not elaborate further, nor did any member of the House question why the language was dropped. Senate conferees on the bill couldn't be reached late Wednesday to ask about the IndyGo provision. ❖

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# Indy becomes focus of mass shootings

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – For most of us waking up last Friday morning, the news that eight Hoosiers had been killed in a massacre at a FedEx facility wasn't so much a surprise, as a "shock" that it had finally happened. It was the third mass shooting in Indianapolis this year (the two previous events had been "domestic" as opposed to public spates of violence).

There had been 54 mass shooting events since March in the United States, and, according to Gun Violence Archive, 147 such lethal "incidents" in 2021 alone. As this article was being written Tuesday afternoon, an "active shooter" situation was underway in West Hempstead, N.Y.

The FedEx massacre brought on a range of emotion. Gov. Eric Holcomb described himself as "shaken," Speaker Todd Huston called it "heart-breaking and shocking," while Senate President Pro Tempore Rod Bray termed it "senseless and completely shocking." Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett said it delivered a "devastating blow" and warned against "resignation and despair" while urging the community to "engage in serious conversations."

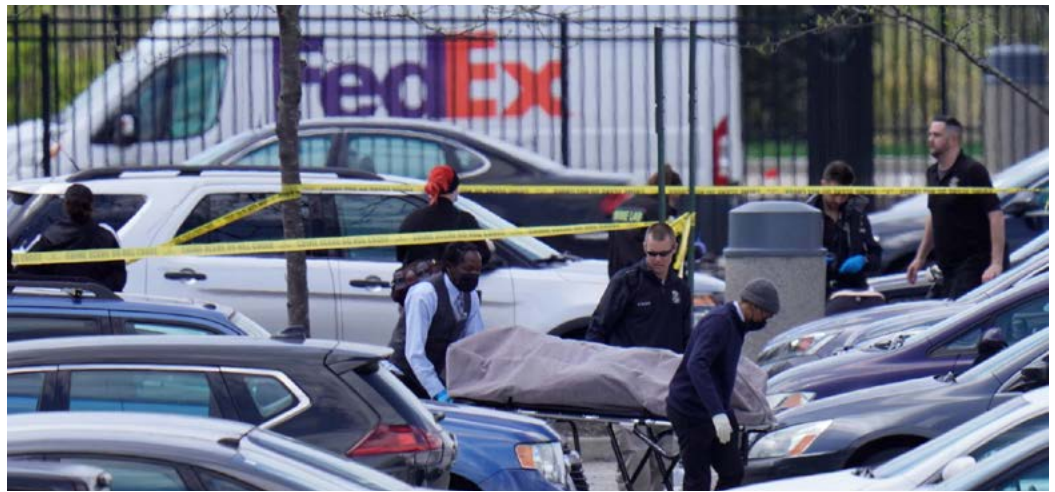
Indianapolis Democratic Councilor Ali Brown said Friday morning, "It would be absolutely coldhearted of House Speaker Todd Huston, Senate President Rodric Bray, and Governor Eric Holcomb if they failed to address gun violence as the state is currently in session and able to find a solution to this problem. The conversation will be tough, but we must get a firm grip of the situation and the collective epidemic – and if that means passing background check legislation, banning automatic rifles, and advocating for other common-sense gun control measures, let's get that done immediately."

President Biden noted "a lone gunman murdered eight people and wounded several more in the dark of night. Today's briefing is just the latest in a string of tragedies, following closely after gunmen firing bullets in broad

day light at spas in and around Atlanta, Georgia, a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado, a home in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and so many other shootings.

"Gun violence is an epidemic in America," Biden continued. "But we should not accept it. We must act. Last week, I called on the Justice Department to better protect Americans from gun violence. I also urged Congress to hear the call of the American people – including the vast majority of gun owners – to enact common sense gun violence prevention legislation, like universal background checks and a ban of weapons of war and high-capacity magazines. Too many Americans are dying every single day from gun violence. It stains our character and pierces the very soul of our nation."

Aasees Kaur of the Indianapolis Sikh Coalition spoke with a heavy heart after four members of the Sikh community were murdered at FedEx. "We must support



one another, not just in grief, but in calling our policymakers and elected officials to make meaningful change," Kaur said. "The time to act is not later, but now. We are far too many tragedies, too late, in doing so."

State Sen. Scott Baldwin, R-Noblesville sent out a press release last Friday vowing to resist any changes in Indiana gun laws. "It is the policy of the Indiana Senate that our state will oppose any correctional taxes, fines, restrictions, prohibitions regarding lawful firearms, accessories or ammunition," Baldwin said in the release. "Additionally, SR39 states that Indiana will not restrict or limit the sale, possession, distribution of purchasing of firearms and will also protect those who deal and manufacture firearm products that are protected under both the U.S. and Indiana constitutions."

Hamilton County Democrats responded, accusing Baldwin of not only being "tone deaf" but "alarmingly dangerous." They said: "It signifies an actively defiant will to ignore the voices of the citizens they are meant to represent, Republican and Democrats alike. As we approach the



three-year anniversary of the shooting at Noblesville West Middle School, which took place squarely in Sen. Baldwin's district and served as a catalyst for a galvanization of Hoosier support for gun-sense legislation, it is clear that the will of the people is still not being heard."

Baldwin said in a statement provided to HPI Tuesday morning, "The email was drafted earlier in the week, regarding pending 2nd Amendment legislation, and its release was pre-scheduled and regrettably timed. I apologize for that. Please know my family and I are praying for the victims and loved ones impacted by the incomprehensible violence that occurred in our capital city."

On Tuesday, Gov. Holcomb was asked about initiating "regulatory" and red flag law reforms during the last few days of the current General Assembly session. He said that those should come at the "local and federal levels."

"The LG and I have talked about this at a very personal level," Holcomb said of conversations with Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch. "The gut punch one feels by comparison to what those families are going through right now ... this will leave a scar both at the workplace and with their families. Our administration will be there for people who need care, both in the workplace and at home. These horrific events are obviously playing out right now at the local level. I don't think we can make policy in the next 48 hours that's worthy of this occurrence. We're watching this play out, appropriately, at the local level and the issues you've brought into question are being handled at the right place. It's an issue for law enforcement at this time, both at the local and federal levels."

### **Biden, Hogsett policy response**

Of these officials, Biden and Hogsett were alone in attempting a policy response in the current environment. Hogsett noted that he was one of 150 mayors who signed a letter asking the U.S. Senate to expand background checks and close the so-called "Charleston loophole," the flaw in the National Instant Criminal Background Checks System that allows by default a gun sale if the FBI misses a three-day window to assess the mental and legal credibility of the buyer.

Republicans, from local and the federal level, tended to thank first responders while offering "thoughts and prayers." Indianapolis City-County Council Republican Leader Brian Mowery, suggested, "This occurrence only strengthens my resolve in working with community

partners and leaders to address the rise in violence in our city and the mental health problems that so often underlie these events." Councilor Michael-Paul Hart added, "Mental illness, when left unchecked, can lead to devastation and is unnecessary. This week our city remembered a fallen IMPD police officer who lost her life one year ago to a mentally ill man with a gun."

### **Shooter red flagged**

According to multiple media reports, the FexEx shooter, 19-year-old Brandon Scott Hole, had been flagged by his mother under Indiana's pioneering Jake Laird Red Flag Law as having a "suicide by cop" desire. In a statement, the family said, "We are devastated at the loss of life caused as a result of Brandon's actions; through the love of his family, we tried to get him the help he needed."

Hole legally purchased two assault rifles in the summer and fall of 2020 after his family had sought use of the red flag.

According to Marion County Prosecutor Ryan Mears, Hole "was treated by mental health professionals. They didn't commit him. They didn't prescribe him any additional medication. He was cut loose. In this particular case, the petition was not filed, because the family had agreed to forfeit the firearm. And they were not going to pursue the return of that firearm. ... And so we were able to take a firearm out of that residence."

Mears called the 14-day window in the 2005 law "too short." While he drew national criticism for not invoking the red flag against Hole, he noted that his office had filed eight red flag petitions in court so far this year.

While this era of 24/7 cable coverage has heightened awareness of the issue and helped widen the political polarization of the topic, according to a Rand Corporation study, "These mass public shootings are rare events – they constitute less than 15% of all mass killings in the United States and are responsible for less than 0.5% of all homicides."

From 2016 to 2018, the annual rate of mass public shooting incidents was about one incident per 50 million people in the United States. "Considering the number of fatalities in these shootings, this corresponds to approximately 0.4% of all homicides, or approximately 0.2% of all firearm deaths, over that period," the Rand study explained.

The Rand study concentrates on the demographic;



the perpetrators of mass public shootings in the United States have been overwhelmingly male (98%) and are most commonly non-Hispanic white (61%). In addition, they are commonly younger than age 45 (82%). Yet, the greatest mass killer in U.S. history was Stephen Paddock, a wealthy 64-year-old Nevada man who fired on a Las Vegas music festival, killing 58 and wounding more than 500 people.

Rand adds, "Even if we did have definitive and complete data sources on the characteristics of all mass shooting incidents, it is still likely to be exceedingly difficult to identify useful predictors of mass shootings. With the exception of male sex, risk factors that appear to be overrepresented among mass shooters relative to the general population are often still uncommon among offenders on an absolute level. Thus, even if one could find a way to prevent individuals with a documented serious mental illness from committing a mass shooting – for example, developing and delivering effective treatments to more than 10 million Americans or effectively preventing their access to firearms – most mass shootings would still occur because only a fraction of mass shootings are committed by individuals with a documented history of serious mental illness."

According to a PMC article by Jonathan M. Metzler, MD, PhD, and Kenneth T. MacLeish, PhD, regression analyses . . . demonstrate that up to 85% of shootings occur within social networks. "In other words, people are far more likely to be shot by relatives, friends, enemies, or acquaintances than they are by lone violent psychopaths."

### **Predictive analytics**

Tom M. Conley, who owns a Des Moines security company, writes in Security Magazine, that 44 million American adults have a mental health condition. He observes that the rate of youth experiencing a mental health condition continues to rise. The rate of youth with major depressive episode (MDE) increased from 11.93% to 12.63%. Data showed that 62% of youth with MDE received no treatment.

"To me, any individual or individuals who carry out a mass shooting of innocent people meets the definition of being mentally ill," Conley said. "No 'normal' person would ever engage in that type of act. It is clear that adequate funding to help the mentally ill, as well as simultaneously increasing the number of professionals in the mental health workforce, is needed so there is not a shortage of help for those who suffer from mental illness."

In the biennial budget deal announced by Gov.



## **SLAUGHTER AT FEDEX TWO MINUTE RAMPAGE; 8 DEAD 19-YEAR-OLD SUSPECT MOM: HE WANTED SUICIDE ***DRUDGE REPORT*****

Holcomb, Huston and Bray on Tuesday, \$100 million in additional mental health funding was included.

Conley adds that "predictive analytics" could be a path toward a solution, though not without dilemmas. "There is merit to the government using predictive analytics to try and pinpoint individuals who are likely to carry out an act of violence, provided the constitutional rights on the part of the individual or individuals that are being investigated are not violated," Conley

writes. "The artificial intelligence component of predictive analytics supercharges this process. Predictive analytics has shown a lot of promise in being able to help avert terrorist attacks. We need predictive analytics that will find and identify evil. One of the main challenges of allowing the government to use predictive analytics is the fact that people no longer trust the government."

Conley also puts the brunt of workplace security responsibility on the employer. "While there are meaningful actions the government can take to help impact mass shootings, it was the Walmart corporation's numerous security failures, not the lack of prior government action, that was the direct and proximate cause of the mass shooting in El Paso," Conley said of the 2019 massacre at an El Paso Walmart.

"The safety and security of an organization's employees, customers and guests is first and foremost the job of the organization's leaders, and not public safety," Conley continued. "Organizations need to start taking their security seriously and the government needs to take meaningful action that it can within the Constitution of the United States of America, to help reduce mass shootings."

### **A continued perfect storm**

What the United States faces is a mental health crisis that plays out as "breaking news" on cable outlets, which tends to perpetrate copycat scenarios. Add to this fact that the U.S. is awash in weaponry, with more guns than people, with much of the Republican Party believing that the 2nd Amendment is sacrosanct and thus not to be reformed, and is committed to low tax rates that often mean that mental health services are vastly underfunded and understaffed.

This perfect storm in mass killings will likely to continue until someone who is so diabolical emerges from the shadows, killing an unfathomable number of people in a sacred place, that it tips the political and funding scales into a much more dynamic action. ❖



# A red-flagged shooter & 2 assault rifles

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – Advocates of banning sale of assault rifles to civilians always argue that nobody in the public needs one of these weapons of war.

They are wrong. Brandon Hole needed an assault rifle. In fact, he needed two.



Hole is the 19-year-old shooter who killed eight people and injured more as he fired away outside and then inside that FedEx facility in Indianapolis.

Hole needed an assault weapon to achieve his goal, a mass shooting, a massacre, capturing attention not just at the FedEx place where he once worked but throughout the nation. With so many shootings in America, you have to kill whole bunch to get

headlines nationally these days.

If the young man had only a conventional handgun, he would have failed to shoot as many, to kill as many, to become nationally known.

His mother reported to authorities in March 2020 that she feared he was planning "suicide by cop," firing a shotgun at police so that they would return fire and kill him. Police took the shotgun away. But prosecutors feared the short deadline for obtaining evidence and seeking a court order and other loopholes in the state's "red flag" law could have led to losing a case for further restrictions and forcing return of the shotgun.

Even the few laws to lessen chances of guns being obtained for evil purposes seem to be written with more concern for the would-be gun owner, nuts or not, than for the safety of the public. Thus, loopholes in background checks and "red flag" laws and scant time for checking.

So, Hole was able legally to buy assault rifles in July and September last year.

He took both to the FedEx facility. Did he really need two?

**Yes. He did, if he** wanted to be sure of achieving his goal. What if the first assault rifle jammed? What if somebody knocked the first weapon out of his hands? Why not be sure of as much firepower as possible?

By the way, Indianapolis police described the weapons as assault rifles, as they are, even though some gun lobby purists say they can't technically be described that way because of being only semi-automatic and not having all the characteristics of the military version. Semi-automatic did a darn nice job for Hole in achiev-

ing his goal. And such weapons were included officially in the one-time federal ban on such weapons. Either way, semantics don't kill people; assault rifles do.

Reaction to the Indianapolis massacre came quickly. Politicians offered the usual thoughts and prayers and, in some cases, called for doing something about the shootings in our cities.

State Sen. Scott Baldwin, R-Noblesville, immediately put out a statement.

**Baldwin hailed glories** of his Senate resolution proclaiming that it is the policy of the Indiana Senate to "oppose any punitive taxes, fines, confiscations, restrictions or prohibitions concerning lawful firearms, accessories or ammunition" and not to restrict "the manufacture, possession, sale, distribution or purchase of firearms based on their ornamentation or appearance or on their magazine or ammunition capacity." The resolution also extends the policy to refusal to "comply with or assist in any attempts, state or local, or foreign or domestic, to restrict" 2nd Amendment rights.

Guess that covers it.

Baldwin also expressed regret that the bill to do away with need for gun permits was stalled in the House.

When questions arose about his response to the actions of Brandon Hole, Baldwin told Howey Politics Indiana that his press release was written earlier in the week and a "pre-scheduled" release was "regrettably timed."

No regrets about the sentiments expressed in the resolution and widely shared in the legislature.



## Supporting Second Amendment Rights

As someone who firmly believes in our constitutional right to bear arms and as a co-sponsor of [House Bill 1369](#), I am disappointed to see the bill not move forward in the legislative process this year. In response to this, I authored [Senate Resolution 39](#) to show support for Indiana's position on the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Baldwin can seek again next session to eliminate need for gun permits and enact protections for gun sales.

It could be called the Branden Hole Gun Rights Act. ❖

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

# American dreams ... and nightmares

By **CRAIG DUNN**

KOKOMO – Like most Hoosiers, I was shocked and saddened by the senseless murder of eight Indianapolis FedEx employees last week. As a feeling human being it is natural to want something to be done so that an event like this won't happen again. After all, how can anyone look at the photos of the innocent victims and not



hope that their deaths were not in vain. "Please, dear God, do whatever you must do to bring an end to this senseless violence," we plead. Into this sea of despair enter those who never wish to see a tragedy go unexploited, the liberal gun control lobby.

One of the few certainties of life is that when any event such as the FedEx mass shooting occurs, the parade of politicians, pundits and activists roll out their incessant refrain that only outlawing what they term assault rifles will stop the violence. They are quick to exploit any gun-related headline event to strike a blow against one of your rights enumerated in the Bill of Rights. It sometimes seems like these people are happy another shooting occurred.

There is no denying that the American people love their guns. In fact, the best estimate is that there are at least 120 guns for every 100 Americans. That is a lot of guns. It dwarfs the second closest nation, Yemen, by almost a two-to-one margin. The United States is a nation of guns and that is not by accident. It is only due to the fact that American colonists possessed large amounts of rifles for both hunting and maintaining effective militias against possible Indian intrusions that they were able to band together and throw off the repressive yoke of King George III.

**The framers of the** United States Constitution, most notably James Madison, believed that the right to keep and bear arms provided the people with a vital safeguard from the threat of an oppressive and well-armed federal government. The 2nd Amendment is not to protect Joe Sixpack's ability to bang bunnies or drop deer, but to enable Joe to answer the call should his state government issue the call for the militia to come out to confront an out-of-control federal government. Our Founding Fathers loved their freedom and saw government as freedom's biggest threat.

Wow! These guys really knew what they were doing.

The typical advocates of gun control normally stress that since people don't belong to militias anymore

and that the Constitution is constantly subject to change, then it is an appropriate and constitutional action on the part of the federal government to ban any type of gun ownership that it would like to do. Make no mistake about it, these people do not believe that the Bill of Rights is inviolable. By extension, an assault on the 2nd Amendment is an assault on freedom of speech, religion, the press, assembly and a bunch of other inconvenient enumerated freedoms. While it might seem like a quick fix, to ban guns, in the face of a tragedy such as the FedEx shootings, it is a slippery slope to be sure.

**I won't discuss the** constitutional issues of gun control any further. I'll leave that to the attorneys on both sides of the issue to twist and parse the simple words of the men who crafted our precious rights. Instead, I'll focus on the impracticality of gun control.

First, there is that nasty fact that there are about 370 million guns floating around this country in the hands of law-abiding citizens, criminals and American psychos. There is no practical way to retrieve those guns in an effective manner. Gun ownership advocates, criminals and American psychos will do their level best to hide any outlawed gun where the sun doesn't shine. The people who stop at stop signs at 2 a.m. when no other cars are around will most probably comply with a confiscation order, but the serious guns will stay beyond the reach of government and only surface during the commission of criminal acts or in the defense of their homes.

Our government has a lousy track record in enforcing laws where there is a significant economic incentive to violate the law. For instance, just how successful was the United States government in enforcing prohibition? Hint: It wasn't. The booze still flowed everywhere anyone was thirsty. Liquor was either made in the United States or smuggled into the country from Canada and elsewhere. Crime empires were formed and financed by the explosive growth in prices for the outlawed liquid. Pretty much, prohibition made formerly law-abiding citizens criminals and made serious criminals millionaires. It just couldn't be controlled or outlawed and finally the federal government surrendered to that fact and made alcohol sales legal once more.

More persistent and yet just as unsuccessful have been our laws against the possession, distribution and use of narcotics. It is the same argument as the one for banning alcohol sales, but this time the massive profits from the illegal trade generally flow south of the border. One could argue that a majority of the murders committed in the United States result from the trafficking in outlawed narcotics.

**If it was possible** to outlaw anything, we would see fewer drugs on the street and no one getting killed for a drug deal gone badly. Alas, outlawed drugs bring big prices. Better law enforcement drives up prices further. High profitability brings the criminals out to play. Any law enforcement officer will tell you that absolutely nothing can be done to control illegal narcotics.

That brings us to our immensely unsuccessful effort to control illegal immigration into our country. Let's face it, if you can walk a two-year-old and a five-year-old for 500 miles through a blazing hot desert and then drop them 15 feet over a border wall, then you are not going to be able to stop those same people from dropping assault rifles and hand guns over those same walls into the hands of bad men. We learned this reality when the Obama Administration ATF sold guns to Mexican drug traffickers and the guns showed up in Atlanta, Ga., during the commission of felonies.

**It is estimated that over 3,000 people die each year from auto accidents caused by distracted drivers using cell phones.** Accordingly, most states have outlawed the use of handheld phones while the car is in use. I ask this rhetorical question: How many potential murderers have you seen ignoring this law? Plenty!

I wish that I had a good idea for how we can keep guns out of the hands of criminals and mentally disturbed people without infringing on the constitutional rights of

law-abiding citizens, but I do not have a clue what needs to be done. One thing is for certain, anyone who thinks they have a foolproof plan fails to give our Creator credit for allowing the creation of better fools.

**My gut feel is that** we have a society that is largely broken and out of control. We have a mental health crisis that needs to be addressed. Penalties for the commission of crimes while in possession of a gun should be severe. Issues involving poverty, poor education, and the breakdown of the nuclear family will all need to be addressed. I am not sure that there is enough time nor enough money to successfully deal with this problem.

It is time that we put the kneejerk political rhetoric aside and work together as a society to tackle gun violence. We owe it to those innocent folks who went to school or to work in pursuit of the American Dream and had their dreams snuffed out by the American Nightmare.

❖

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

## Polarization of jobs and places

By **MICHAEL HICKS**

MUNCIE – One feature of the past two or three decades is what economists call the polarization of labor markets. This is a fancy way of saying that we are seeing growth in high- and low-wage jobs, but a decline in middle-wage work. By any definition, the U.S. still has a large middle class, but three decades is a long time to be in decline, and there is no evidence that this trend is about to turn around.



There is growing concern about this phenomenon, and much of the COVID relief and infrastructure proposals hold policies designed to bolster middle-wage jobs. Unfortunately, there's little reason to hope that short-term

spending policies will have much long-term effect on this trend. The reason for this is that the root cause of these problems is not likely to respond to direct subsidies or stimulus.

**Over the short run,** say a few months or even a few years, an economy can experience too few jobs of one sort or another. For example, during COVID the declining demand for restaurants, hotels and recreation caused a big decline in low-wage work. During the financial crisis, there was a big decline in higher-wage financial services. Still, over the long term, the mix of jobs and salaries are

almost wholly caused by the mix of workers and skills in a region. So, the types of jobs and pay in jobs in your town is mostly the result of who lives and works there. Nationally, the consumer demand for goods also plays a role, but it is secondary to the available workforce.

This means that the growth in high- and low-wage jobs is generally caused by an expansion of available workers in both categories. This can be attributed to a couple different factors — automation and changing consumer demand. These two factors are connected because automation reduces the price of some goods relative to others. This causes consumers to spend more in one area and less in another.

**Automation is the most** obvious of the two factors leading to job polarization. Most people develop useful skills over a work life. But, if those skills can be replicated more quickly by a machine, the demand for employees with those skills will disappear over time. Most of us experience change incessantly over our careers. But, over the past few decades, the jobs most susceptible to automation are those involving routine tasks, like assembly plants or warehousing.

The second cause is the significant shift in consumer spending from goods to services. Over the past half century, this shift has involved more than 30 percent of household spending. This is a massive adjustment that won't reverse itself in the coming decades or even centuries.

Service sector jobs are not low-wage jobs. In fact, almost all the growth in high-wage jobs is in the service sector. But, unlike manufacturing of a half century ago, wages in the service sector are closely connected to education. In highly capital-intensive jobs, like those in a large auto factory, the variation in wages between workers were



modest compared to their skill differences. The assembly line cancelled out any individual ability to do more or less on the job, thus erasing pay differences. It wasn't unions that built the middle class, rather it was the huge factories of post-war America.

In today's labor-intensive jobs, individual skill and talent drives wages far more than occupation. The wage variation among actors, physicians or financial advisors are mostly determined by how good they are in that job. This holds even in construction trades and in jobs like food servers, chefs or yoga instructors. These are market outcomes, not primarily the result of government policies or business practices.

**The combination of** automation and changing demand has proved especially good for well-educated workers in service sector occupations. Technology tends to complement the skills of better-educated workers. But, for less well-educated workers, the results have been poor. Technology is typically a substitute for the skills of less well-educated workers. For example, better computing has boosted wages for accountants, but it has clobbered the demand for bookkeepers.

There are many factors at work in altering labor market outcomes, such as regional monopolies, rapid urbanization and occupational licensing. But, the large and persistent polarization of labor markets is incessantly re-making the American economic landscape. This issue isn't necessarily good or bad, just different from what we have been accustomed to experiencing.

Along with the polarization of jobs, regional economies are also polarizing. Since the 1980s, metropolitan areas and states have become less alike in productivity and wages. The rich places are growing richer and the poor places have stagnated, or even declined. More than 70% of the wage differences between states is explained solely

by the share of adults with a college degree. Regional economic prospects in the 21st century will be almost wholly caused by differences in educational levels. Labor market polarization will amplify regional polarization.

I write this again because too few really understand that this one single factor drives almost all regional growth. Individually, college graduates have enjoyed three decades of wage growth, an unemployment rate that is half that of high school grads, and a labor force participation rate 25% higher. There are many more adults without a college degree than those who have them, yet 80% of all job growth for three decades have been among those with a college degree.

Labor market polarization will continue, and we will observe three important trends. The first of these will be increasing adoption of technology to cut workplace costs. The second will be loss of jobs in easily automatable occupations, such as warehousing, transportation, manufacturing and construction. An astute reader will identify this as most of the workforce training Indiana offers.

**The future will also bring** continued growth in job openings for both high- and low-wage workers. However, the demand for these jobs will vary across location according to how many workers of each type are available in each region. The most jobs will migrate to places that are better educated, which in turn will attract better-educated workers. Of course, this trend won't continue forever, just another 50 to 100 years. ❖

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

## Summing up democracy

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – It's so easy, in the course of our day-to-day lives, to get caught up in the political preoccupations of the moment. What's the Senate going to do about the filibuster? How should infrastructure money be spent? Is the country going to come out of this year as badly divided as it started? These and many other questions matter a lot—but sometimes, it's helpful to step back and take stock of what we've learned over the course of our history.



I've been thinking about this because I've been reading Jon Meacham's 2018 book, "The Soul of America: The Battle for

Our Better Angels." In it, Meacham notes that we've been badly divided and knocked back on our heels in the past but have always managed to work our way through those difficulties.

**He cites a variety of writers** and speakers, and a number of them have stuck with me — because they're both reassuring and a challenge. They remind us that sustaining our democracy is hard work and that its vitality depends on each of us — not just to participate, but to make the effort to understand and talk to people we don't agree with, and to do our best to discern the facts on which all genuine progress relies. Here they are, with a couple I've added on my own that speak to the same issues:

■ "Do not expect to accomplish anything without an effort." Teddy Roosevelt said this in an 1883 speech called, "The Duties of American Citizenship."

■ "The first duty of an American citizen, then, is that he shall work in politics." This is Roosevelt again, in the same speech, making the point (in the language of the time) that being an American citizen means being willing

to engage in the work of democracy.

"Speak up, show up, and stand up." That's Georgia's Stacey Abrams laying out, in concise form, the basic challenges for anyone trying to affect the course of public life.

**"Progress on this journey** often comes in small increments." This is Meacham himself, with a reminder that progress comes slow and hard.

"Nowhere is the rule of public opinion so complete as in America, or so direct." This was Englishman James Bryce, writing in *The American Commonwealth*, which appeared in 1888.

"People are responsible for the government they get." Harry Truman summed up our core responsibility: we have to choose our political leaders wisely.

"It is not only important but mentally invigorating to discuss political matters with people whose opinions differ radically from one's own." Eleanor Roosevelt wrote this in a book published when she was seventy-six, *You Learn by Living: Eleven Keys for a More Fulfilling Life*.

"The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them." I include this remark by George W. Bush, in a speech he gave to a joint session of Congress follow-

ing the 9/11 attacks, because it's a cogent reminder that keeping our eye on the target matters in public policy.

"The people have often made mistakes, but given time and the facts, they will make the corrections." This was Truman again. I like his confidence.

"America of the 21st century is, for all its shortcomings, freer and more accepting than it has ever been." Meacham makes it clear that our nation, despite its many stumbles, has moved toward progress, in no small part because the American people, as Truman suggests above, have set it on that course.

**"It is in order that** each one of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence... The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel." Abraham Lincoln said this in 1864. His words remind us that safeguarding a freely chosen, democratically elected government that creates the conditions for each of us to succeed by dint of our efforts is what engaging in politics is all about. ❖

**Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.**

## Crass commercialism

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – When did it all start? Who can say? Not I. My earliest recollection was of a sugary breakfast cereal for children advertising the radio broadcasts of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Up to that time, Gem razors and Shaefer beer, along with Abe Stark's clothing store, were acceptable commercial elements in my life.



This past weekend, as I watched both the Chicago Cubs and the Cincinnati Reds emerge victorious from conflict, I could not escape intrusive advertising. At one time, commercials were reserved for periods between innings. Then, following the fashion of professional football, commercials were inserted when play stopped for other reasons.

Now commercials are dribbled into baseball broadcasts and present in most shots on TV. It might be a Nike swoosh on a uniform. Ads appear on the backdrop behind the batters as they await the next pitch. At the home of the Reds, there is now a changing ad superimposed on the edge of the pitching mound.

Commercials adorn courtside panels at college basketball games. Not just fixed signs, but electronic

billboards that change during the course of play. Perhaps worse, if such is possible, are the established TV timeouts, set to stop play, if action on the field or court has not stopped of its own accord.

It's not sporting events alone. PBS and NPR seem to be increasing their appeals for money as well as their "acknowledgments" of funding by for- and not-for-profit organizations. The seasonal "pledge weeks" are now daily reminders of our obligations.

**Where once ambulance** chasers debased themselves, now hospitals and physicians are doing likewise. In the past, snake oil remedies were marketed with tales of heart-felt tragedies averted by remarkable potions. Today sudden death, or less social embarrassment, will be averted by a timely question asked of your doctor. The latter is to oblige with a prescription for the advertised product.

The survival of the U.S. Postal Service seemingly depends on the extraordinary needs of worthy causes. Environmental calamity is assured, if your funds are not received in time to be matched by a generous contribution. Thousands, nay millions, of persons afflicted with cruel diseases will suffer unless your contribution for research and education is sent today.

Business schools once taught accounting, production, management, real estate and some communication skills. Today they teach marketing, finance, business law, and entrepreneurship. Given such a curriculum, it is no wonder they also teach ethics. ❖

**Mr. Marcus is an economist.**

# It's time we treat politicians like dogs

By PETE SEAT

INDIANAPOLIS – “You can do so much better than running for office.” Aspiring candidates, especially those with immense talent, hear it all the time. Why would anyone subject themselves to the rigors of the campaign trail, let alone the constant onslaught of negativity that comes their way after the ominous black-and-white television ads come off the air?



Service is, I hope, the driving factor in the decision to put one's name forth. I know some people get involved in this business of politics for the perceived power and prestige that comes with having a title before their name. But for far more, it's about something other than the title.

It's about service to others. It's about helping family, friends and neighbors live better lives. It's about growing a community and leaving the world a better place than the one we inherited.

And yet, our present political system has incentivized dysfunction and procrastination. Rather than encourage progress and reform, we incentivize the status quo of inaction and outrage. The crazier the quotes, the less palpable the idea, the higher the margin of victory. The less work done, the longer someone is given the honor of service. Is that an incentive structure to be proud of?

**Instead of** rewarding bad behavior, to get better outcomes, we should treat politicians like dogs. And no, not in the context of what that phrase usually means. What I mean is we should put our elected officials on a short leash that gives them just enough room to experiment and explore, but still offers us the flexibility to gently correct bad behavior.

This is called oversight and accountability and each of us is charged with paying close attention. When politicians start sniffing around in the wrong places, sure, yank them back on track.

But when they do some-

thing right, we should reward and praise the same way we train dogs to sit, stay and roll over. If the only time politicians hear from their constituents is when someone is upset, how do you think those officials will react? They need to hear from us when we are happy with their words and their deeds.

Recently I spoke to a state senator who shared with me all the incoming they received from Hoosiers angry over mask-wearing requirements and extended health emergencies ordered by the governor. In response I asked how often this lawmaker heard from constituents who were happy not just with those decisions, but with their representation in general.

The response? Crickets. The senator does a fine job, but no one takes the time to say so.

**As with many of the** ills of politics today, both sides perpetuate a perverse incentive structure. The Republican base, at least nationally, incentivizes strict opposition to progressive Democratic policies. Don't get me wrong, I stand in opposition to those policies, too. But where are the alternatives?

Modern Democratic politics, on the other hand, incentivizes the pursuit of a policy agenda that affects the smallest number of people yet somehow the base is convinced this is in their interest.

The best analogy here is gluten-free eating. We have entire aisles of gluten-free offerings at supermarkets despite the fact that about 1% of Americans actually suffer from celiac disease. To sustain the economics of this model, marketing maestros have worked hard to convince all of us that cutting out the gluten is the way to go.

My call to action then is to take a moment, when appropriate, and thank elected officials for the work they do. Don't take it for granted when they do something that is right in your eyes. Give the dog a treat and tell them you appreciate the efforts and hope they continue to fight the good fight. Then, maybe then, they will stop tearing up the carpet and chewing on your shoes – figuratively speaking, of course. ❖



**Pete Seat is a former White House spokesman for President George W. Bush and campaign spokesman for Dan Coats, former director of national intelligence and U.S. senator. Currently he is a vice president with Bose Public Affairs Group in Indianapolis.**



**John Krull, Statehouse File:** In the end, it was the man's humanity that mattered. The trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin for the killing of George Floyd had become one of those symbolic moments in American history. The desperate minutes captured by police body cameras and bystanders' cell phones could have served as an encapsulation of much of the tragedy of American history. A Black man, supine, hands cuffed behind his back, calls out for both mercy and his mother as the breath is choked from his body. A white man, clothed with both the tokens and the equipment of authority and legitimacy, kneels upon the neck of the Black man, oblivious to — and maybe even uncaring about — the suffering and misery brought about by his unrelenting weight and force. A crowd of horrified bystanders witness and record the events as the minutes of misery and dread unfold, their rage, fear and frustration mounting with every passing moment. If that's not an efficient summary of America's misbegotten narrative of race, ruin and regret, I don't know what is. ❖



**Gary Truitt, Hoosier Ag Today:** The Kobayashi Maru is a training exercise in the fictional Star Trek universe designed to test the character of Starfleet Academy cadets in a no-win scenario. Indiana Senate Bill 303 puts Indiana corn farmers in such a no-win scenario. The bill, passed this session by the Indiana General Assembly, would clear the way for year round sale of E-15 gasoline in Indiana but would also require label on all pumps that could potentially scare motorists with a bunch of unnecessary warnings. The bill now sits on the Governor's desk waiting for him to sign or veto. For Holcomb, what makes this a no-win is that the ethanol industry wants him to veto the bill while the powerful ag lobby, including Indiana Farm Bureau, are urging passage. Indiana's ethanol laws need to be updated. We still have laws on the books that referred to the fuel as "gasohol". Several fuel retailers in the state said it was embarrassing that they could not sell e-15 fuel while several states around us could. The legislation started out to make the changes needed to bring Indiana up to the modern era and permit the sale of the fuel with 15% blend of corn-based ethanol a reality. Along the way, amendments were added by lawmakers to protect consumers. These uninformed legislators failed to understand that ethanol does not pose a danger to motorists and is not a source of concern by most motorists. Motorists have been filling up with fuel made up of 10% ethanol for over a decade. The increase to a 15% blend requires no change in their fueling habits and has been proven to pose no problem for nearly all cars on the road today. Thus, the ethanol industry argues that a warning label is unnecessary. Yet, the Indiana General Assembly, which often places politics above sense, refused to pass the bill without the label requirement. The Indiana ag lobby wants to see the bill signed into law, even though it is not to their liking. The ethanol producers want the bill

trashed and to try again next session. Meanwhile, Indiana corn farmers, heading to the field to plant another crop, are stuck in the middle. Whatever the Governor decides, corn farmers will see an impact on the demand for corn in Indiana. Ethanol accounts for over 40% of the corn demand in our state. Ethanol refiners say, if the bill becomes law, they will produce less ethanol. Fuel retailers say, without the bill, they will not be able to sell E-15 thus reducing the demand for ethanol. Politically, the Governor is facing a Kobayashi Maru. Either way he alienates a key agricultural constituency. Signing the bill would be the politically expedient move, and that is most likely what he will do. Yet, signing a bill you know is bad policy is never the right thing to do. Lawmakers need to wake up to the fact that motorists are not worried about ethanol. Price is on their minds when they pull up to the pump; and e-15 will cost less. Consumers are also worried about the environment; and increasing the level of ethanol in our fuel supply will reduce greenhouse gasses and help combat climate change. In the Star Trek series, the only person to beat the Kobayashi Maru test was James T. Kirk. He did this by reprogramming the computer to give him a third choice that was a win. Unfortunately, Governor Holcomb does not have this option and neither do Indiana corn farmers. They will have to wait and see what happens and figure out how to "live long and prosper." ❖

**James Briggs, IndyStar:** Ryan Mears is oddly defensive for someone whose record is defensible. Perhaps that's because Mears, the Democratic Marion County prosecutor, felt which way the wind was blowing and decided that even if his office appropriately handled a March 2020 case involving the teenager responsible for the FedEx Ground massacre, saying so would be insufficient. No one would accept that. The horrific outcome necessitates that blame be assigned. Despite his best effort to point elsewhere, though, Mears' jittery Monday news conference has intensified scrutiny of the prosecutor's office, even as he has sought to assert his own prescience in warning about the risks of people with known mental illnesses obtaining weapons. Mears has spent more than a year criticizing the Indiana law that lets police seize guns from dangerous people. Mears, for example, told Fox59 in February 2020 that a loophole in the so-called red flag law enables mentally unstable people to purchase firearms even after they have encountered police. He urged state lawmakers to "have the courage" to strengthen the law. Now, he's suggesting lawmakers are at fault for the mass shooting. Mears pointed to his loophole critique in the wake of the April 15 attack that left eight victims dead, plus the shooter. "I think it's important to note that this case does illustrate some of the shortcomings that exist with this red flag law," Mears said. Actually, this case represents a missed opportunity for Mears to put that theory to the test. ❖

## 135K fans allowed at Indy 500 in May

INDIANAPOLIS —The Indianapolis 500 is set to be the largest sporting event in the world since the start of the pandemic with 135,000 spectators permitted to attend "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing" next month (AP). Indianapolis Motor Speedway said Wednesday it worked with the Marion County Public Health Department to determine that 40% of venue capacity can attend the May 30 race on Memorial Day weekend.

The speedway is the largest sporting facility in the world with more than 250,000 grandstand seats and the ability to host close to 400,000 on race day throughout the entire property. The attendance figure was determined after Indianapolis hosted the NCAA men's basketball tournament through March and into April with limited attendance. The NCAA allowed 8,000 fans at Lucas Oil Stadium for the April 5 men's championship game. Roger Penske, in his second year as owner of Indianapolis Motor Speedway, had hoped for full attendance, but IndyCar and speedway officials are taking pride in the upcoming milestone. "This event and this place means so much to everybody we see every day and we hear from every day, whether they are Hoosiers or race fans from around the world," Mark Miles, president and CEO of Penske Entertainment Corp., told The Associated Press.



## U.S. daily vaccine rate falls 11%

WASHINGTON — Daily coronavirus vaccinations have slowed significantly for the first time since February, a sign that demand is slipping even though every American adult is now eligible for the shots (Washington Post). About 3 million Americans are getting vac-

inated daily, an 11% decrease in the seven-day average of daily shots administered over the past week. The unprecedented drop is rivaled only by a brief falloff that occurred in February, when winter storms forced the closure of vaccination sites and delayed shipments nationwide. The downturn hits as half of all eligible Americans have received at least one vaccine dose. And it coincided with the pause last week of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which is under review by a panel of experts following a handful of cases of severe blood clotting. Public health officials say the interruption of the J&J vaccine probably played a role in the downturn, with the shortfall on certain days this week roughly equivalent to the number of J&J doses reported on the equivalent day a week ago.

## Rokita, Box warn of vaccine scam

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita and State Health Commissioner Dr. Kristina Box are warning Hoosiers of a new scam targeting consumers who have received their COVID-19 vaccine (News & Tribune). The Office of the Indiana Attorney General and the Indiana State Department of Health have recently learned that consumers are reportedly receiving unsolicited emails and text messages asking them to complete a survey about the Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca vaccine. In exchange, consumers are offered a free product, but asked to pay shipping and handling fees. Instead, the scammers bill them and never send the product. "Hoosiers should keep their guard up, safeguard their personal information, and take steps to avoid becoming victims of a scam," Rokita said. "If you receive an unsolicited message offering money or a reward related to the COVID-19 vaccine, we encourage you to file a report with our office's Consumer Protection Division. Our office relies, in part, on consumer complaints to conduct

investigations into scams and scammers."

## Pompeo, Banks pressure Iran

WASHINGTON — Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Wednesday he was on Capitol Hill as a "private citizen" to throw his support behind Republican-led legislation aimed at maintaining the former Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign of sanctions against Iran (The Hill). Pompeo joined GOP lawmakers from the Republican Study Committee to preview the legislation in a press conference outside the Capitol building, as protesters shouted across the street for the former secretary to "go home." "I'm here in my status as a private citizen. As a private citizen, I care deeply that Iran never has a nuclear weapon and when I saw this legislation forming, I talked to Congressman [Jim] Banks [R-Ind.]. I said I wanted to be part of making sure that this is successful," he said. The legislation, called the Max Pressure Act, was introduced by Banks, chairman of the Republican Study Committee.

## Trustee terminates full time firefighters

LAFAYETTE — The Wabash Township Board passed resolutions on Tuesday supporting a retirement and benefits plan for the three paid fire department employees (WLF-TV). As we previously reported, the 1977 Retirement Fund is similar to 401(k) and 403(b) retirement plans. In an email chain anonymously shared with News 18, Trustee Jennifer Teising tells Board President Angel Valentin that she is terminating the full time positions due to a lack of public interest in a fire district. Her full email response said, "I'm terminating the full time positions due to a lack of public interest in a FPD. How sad for the firefighters that we didn't do this in January, it would have been a great benefit to them searching for new employment."