



Garton's Hope defense wins alpha showdown

So much for those BMV 'reforms'

By BRIAN A. HOWEY in Hope, Indiana

A year ago, during the 2004 Indiana Republican Convention, Senate President Pro Tempore Robert D. Garton stood at the rostrum and said, "Our ship of state needs a new set of hands that would set an example for all states to follow."

Garton called for "major reform, from BMV to FSSA," and said electing Mitch Daniels was the only way. "Who's going to lead that charge?" Garton asked. "Mitch Daniels. I pledge the state Senate will support that vision and with a Republican House will make it happen. This is the year."

Now it is 2005 and the ship of state appears to be in old hands. Bob Garton's hands. The major reforms at BMV were stymied when they arrived on the doorstep of the tiniest BMV branch of them all in Hope, Ind., in Sen. Garton's district. With the exception of California (with 10 times the population) and Texas (with five times the population), Indiana has more license branches than any other state in the union, more than New York, Florida, Illinois and Ohio. Indiana has more elected officials than almost any other state in the union. Gov. Daniels was elected vowing to reform Indiana government, weed the garden, and make Indiana competitive in a 21st Century economy. But when it comes to a small sliver of state government reform, the Daniels administration has lost face.



Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Garton had Hope to tell. (HPR Photo)

If the closings of these small Bureau of Motor Vehicle branches become the public policy story of the summer, God help poor ol' Indiana.

The state is on the brink of a property tax meltdown that will become fully apparent by Labor Day (see page 8). It is sliding dramatically on the No Child Left Behind front. And both General Motors and Ford Motor Company are poised to close plants and send the manufacturing of many automotive components to China.

But it is the BMV that has taken up the news hole slack from DST (Daylight-saving time).



"I'd like to tell you we've fixed all these problems already, but we're nowhere near fixed. It will take us at least four years to fix these problems."

— FSSA Secretary Mitch Roob, to the *Indianapolis Star*

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And, ultimately, this has become the Daniels administration's first public policy fiasco.

It has become a whine fest for state legislators seeking to defend these small branches at a time when the focus of governor and legislators should be repositioning the state for a 21st Century economy that seems to be zipping off to foreign ports.

From the get-go of the Daniels administration, the word was that the message would be crafted and emanated from the governor's office. "We've asked him to build a better, more effective BMV," Gov. Daniels said of Silverman (*Linton Daily Citizen*). "Change always brings discomfort."

Or as Silverman put it on the BMV website with presumably no pun intended, "Hopefully, you will see us occasionally rather than yearly, as our BMV Express online and mail-in services will allow you to conduct your business on your time without setting foot in a license branch."

But the May bombshell from BMV came from down the food chain, right after legislators left Indianapolis. It prompted Democrats and Republicans to accuse Silverman of a "sneak attack" in Garton's words. They rallied their small town populations, the very people Gov. Daniels so extensively courted in 2003-04 to "aim higher" and stop thrashing around the same rut.

"I didn't quite expect this response," Silverman told the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette* after the former Galyan's executive was excoriated for the 12th time by the friendly folks of Butler, Ind. "I didn't expect people would care so much about a license branch."

By the time he announced the Hope reprieve, he was feasting on a St. Elmo's sized portion of crow. "There's only one president pro tem," Silverman said. "It required diplomacy and compromise, which I am coming to understand. There is no denying the political landscape played a role. We realize the BMV does not operate in a vacuum."

Silverman added, "I once heard the definition of insanity is doing the same things you've always done and expecting different results. At the end of the day, we just can't fix the BMV without closing branches."

Small towns such as Butler and Hope long ago lost their high school basketball teams. The factories are pulling out. The kids are moving away. Meth is cooking in the back alleys. Much of their populations now work in nearby Fort Wayne or Columbus or Indianapolis. The BMV branch has

become one of the last storefront status symbols next to the antique store. The folks in the big city might be inclined to say, "Hey, get a life. Get your plates via mail, or the internet."

But the fact is that Silverman and Daniels botched this effort from a public relations standpoint. A case in point comes in this morning's *Muncie Star Press*, where it was reported: The Bureau of Motor Vehicles never made local officials or some lawmakers aware of plans to build a new license branch in Muncie. "I was not aware," said Mayor Dan Canan. "They certainly should have notified elected officials."

The bad information flow put them in conflict with Sen. Garton, who angrily vowed "I represent these people. And you are not going to close this Hope branch." It set up a month's worth of speculation as to whether Daniels would defy Sen. Garton or back down. This is not a showdown that can have any benefit for a freshman governor. It came a week after the governor had to stump the "doughnut counties" around Indianapolis pushing tax increases for a new Colt stadium and Indiana convention center.

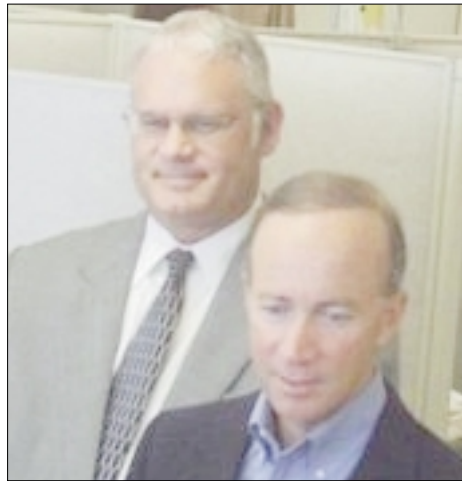
The administration acknowledged this week that pleasing Garton was a priority. Garton helped the governor get an ambitious agenda through the legislature this year, and Daniels wanted to help him, said the governor's press secretary, Jane Jankowski (*Louisville Courier-Journal*).

"Keeping the branch open is obviously very important to the senator," Jankowski said. "Senator Garton has served Indiana well for three decades. The senator's leadership will be crucial to the governor's future plans for growth and reform."

At least give the governor good marks for candor

In a place where the perception of power is critical, the fact of the matter is that Sen. Garton not only played the alpha role in limiting the governor's budget and stadium options, but he now can threaten, throw tantrums and get his way over minor reforms. True, unbridled power, it now seems, resides on the third floor of the Statehouse. Anything that needs passage in the Indiana General Assembly will need to pass muster through the ancient Garton filter.

And it could have been different. Gov. Daniels and Silverman could have initiated the closings while revealing the options that could have given Indiana a 21st Century auto licensing system. On the campaign trail, Daniels talked about being able to buy multiple years worth of plates, or doing the registering and plating at auto dealerships. It could have been



BMV Commissioner Joel Silverman with Gov. Daniels last December. (HPR Photo by Brian A. Howey)



couched in the notion that "We'll make it easier for you to get a license. You won't need the old storefront BMV."

State Sen. Vic Heinold urged registration and titling at auto dealerships and explained, "We need to get those things in place first before we start taking away the service" (*South Bend Tribune*).

Rep. David Wolkins, R-Winona Lake, who initially applauded Silverman for having the political courage to close branches, said that he is "a little disappointed" (*Louisville Courier-Journal*). "As long as they're doing it simply on the numbers, I could support him all the way," said Wolkins. "But if we're going to start picking and choosing, depending on which districts they're in, I think that's wrong, absolutely wrong."

The response from the Indiana General Assembly, a place so lacking of statesmen that it has produced only one governor since 1988, has been shrill and regressive.

"Outrage is putting it mildly.... There is truly a paralysis of analysis there," state Rep. Charlie Brown, D-Gary, said (*Post-Tribune*) of BMV plans to close the Gary branch. Gary has a population of 102,000; Hope, Ind., has 2,138. "It makes absolutely, positively no sense."

It makes no sense because the story line completely got out of control of the governor before it was detailed (*See page 8*). A legislative study committee will be formed.

And it left the administration open to threats, from freshman legislators preening as visionary statesmen.

"The legislature, when it reconvenes in January, is going to have a lot to say about this," said State Rep. Billy Bright, R-North Vernon, whose district does not include any targeted branches (*Louisville Courier-Journal*). "This is far from the end of it."

Uh-ohhhhhh. ❖

Peterson in 2008?

By BRIAN A. HOWEY

INDIANAPOLIS - Last winter, key lieutenants of Mayor Bart Peterson went out of their way to insist that the mayor was planning to seek a third term in 2007. He was not planning a challenge to Gov. Mitch Daniels in 2008.

But HPR has noticed a perceptible change in that dynamic since the end of the Indiana General Assembly, when House Republicans stuffed the mayor on the Indy Works government reforms and Gov. Mitch Daniels wrested control of the Colts stadium/Indiana convention center construction.

So did new *Indianapolis Star* columnist Matthew Tully, who quoted Mayor Peterson at a recent Jackson-Jefferson Day event. "We have a secret weapon here in the Indiana Democratic Party, and that secret weapon is Mitch Daniels and the Republican-controlled legislature," Peterson said. Peterson added the GOP had "declared war on local government" and explained, "The crew that has taken over the Statehouse wants one thing, and that is power for its own sake."

Some of the same people who insisted Peterson wasn't interested in the 2008 election are now changing their tune. They are telling HPR that several dynamics are in play. The obvious is Indy Works, which is about to force Peterson into a series of budget cuts, tax hikes and layoffs.

The second is the stadium deal. This is a situation fraught with danger for the Daniels administration. Its ability to come in on time and on budget lies largely with the building trades unions (*pssst... go research this at the downtown*

Indianapolis library). These are the same guys who were crying foul after Gov. Daniels pulled collective bargaining status in the first hours of his administration. Will Daniels be defending stadium cost over-runs and blown deadlines as his '08 re-elect gears up?

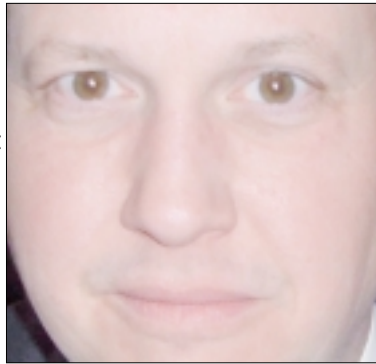
Finally, there is the Bayh factor. If Sen. Evan Bayh is on the 2008 national ticket, he is going to want to carry Indiana. Having Peterson, the most popular Hoosier Democrat next to the senator himself, shores up a local liability. Even if he loses, he would be in the driver's seat for 2012 or Bayh's Senate seat (in the election to fill the rest of his term) if the senator ascends to the White House.

Said one prominent Democrat, "The key is whether Mayor Peterson can wait in the wings until early 2008."

In the first edition of HPR this year, we asked, "Will Gov. Daniels and Mayor Peterson work together, spending the next two years radically reshaping Indiana for the next couple of generations? Or will they butt heads and produce a bitter rivalry that might culminate in a 2008 showdown?"

The answer today is that the Daniels administration and House Republicans have sewn the seeds for the second scenario. A case could be made that had some accommodations, particularly in Indy Works, been made, the mayor's 2008 option would have been little more than a flicker of the imagination.

How damaging to the GOP was the Indy Works rejection? Our sources tell us more than 150 Republican business leaders attended a fundraiser at the offices of Sease-Gerig earlier this month ... for Bart Peterson. ❖





Cook analyzes Bush polls

Trendline: Political analyst Charlie Cook offers this analysis of President Bush's sagging poll numbers: Let us say, hypothetically, that the United States was pretty evenly divided between the two major political parties and that a president had only reached a job approval rating of 20 percent among members of the opposite party in just three out of 37 Gallup polls conducted over the last year, the highest being 24 percent, the lowest 11 percent.



The inescapable conclusion would be that, short of a war or another tragedy of 9/11 proportions, that president would never have a particularly good job approval rating.

Now let us say that among members of his own party, that same president never dropped below 85 percent approval, and that in 21 out of the 37 Gallup polls, his approval rating was in the 90s, peaking at 96 percent. In that case, he would have a very high floor, and unless his fellow party members began

to abandon him, there is no way he could hit the historic low job approval ratings that Presidents Richard Nixon (24 percent), Gerald Ford (37 percent), Jimmy Carter (28 percent), Ronald Reagan (40 percent), George H. W. Bush (29 percent) and Bill Clinton (37 percent) received when they were in their worst shape. This is exactly the situation that Bush finds himself in now. Of the 76 relevant national polls listed on realclearpolitics.com since the start of the year, all but eight have his approval ratings between 44 percent and 52 percent. In 44 of those surveys, his rating is less than 50 percent.

Welcome to polarized America! Sure, the polls look bad for Bush, but that high floor, supported by steadfast support levels among his own party members, prevents his numbers from getting down into that basket case level that each of his

predecessors reached. As long as he enjoys the support of that 85 percent or so of Republicans, his numbers almost can't drop down to that 24-37 percent range visited by Nixon, Ford, Carter, Clinton and his father. Another thing working in Bush's favor here is that the lack of competitive Republican-held House districts and states with Republican Senate seats up in 2006 make it very unlikely that the GOP will lose control of either chamber next year.

Indiana 2006 Congressional

U.S. Senate: Republican: U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar. Democrat: 9/11 Commissioner Tim Roemer. **1988 results:** Lugar (R) 1,430,525, Wickes (D) 668,778. **1994 results:**

Lugar (R) 1,039,625, Jontz (D) 470,799, Bourland (L) 17,343, Barton (A) 15,801. 2000 Results: Lugar 1,425,150, Johnson (D) 680,046, Hager (L) 33,896. **2006 Forecast:** Roemer says he hasn't made up his mind about running for the U.S. Senate against Richard Lugar next year but expects that decision "will come pretty quickly" (James Wensits, *South Bend Tribune*). Roemer also acknowledged he "may have a race or two in me" and still possesses a political competitive streak. "Yes, I may well want to run for the Senate or statewide in the future," Roemer said. "Or the PTA."



Sen. Lugar visits with actress Angelina Jolie at his Washington office earlier this week. (Photo courtesy of Sen. Lugar)

Or governor? "I wouldn't rule anything out." Lugar's campaign released internal poll numbers Monday that sharply contrast with those leaked by Indiana Democrats last week. An American Viewpoint Poll has Sen. Lugar ahead of 9/11 Commissioner Tim Roemer by a 58-24 percent margin. The poll had Lugar polling 23 percent of the Democratic vote. A Garin-Hart-Yang poll last week had Lugar leading Roemer by a mere 41-39 percent margin. The polls were about the same when it came to the American "right track/wrong track" question. In the Viewpoint poll, 37 percent of Hoosiers said America was on the right track and 52 percent said wrong track. Lugar's favorable/unfavorable rating was 71/14 percent compared to Roemer's 14/6 percent. The Viewpoint poll also had President Bush's fav/unfav at 51-44



percent. With no firm opponent, we move Lugar's status ...
Status: *SAFE LUGAR.*

Indiana 2006 House

House District 17: Republican: State Rep. Steve Heim. Democrat: Nancy Dembowski. **2004 Results:** Heim 14,100, McLiver (D) 8,321, Foley (I) 854. SD5 Results: Heinold (R) 24,753, Dembowski (D) 24,398.

2006 Forecast: Heim has joined the chorus of legislators decrying the closing of BMV branches, in this case Walkerton. **Status:** *LEANS R*



House District 45:

Republican: State Rep. Bruce Borders Democrat: Allen Chowning. **2002 Results:** Chowning 9,627, Borders 9,337. **2004 Results:** Borders 13,878, Chowning 10,643. **2006 Forecast:** Borders was quoted in the press saying he was "pressuring" Gov. Daniels and House Speaker Brian Bosma to keep the Bloomfield BMV branch open. It obviously worked as it was announced Monday that it was getting a reprieve. Some observers believe Commissioner Silverman decided to leave it open along with Senate President Bob Garton's Hope, Ind., branch as recognition of political realities. **Status:** *Leans R.*

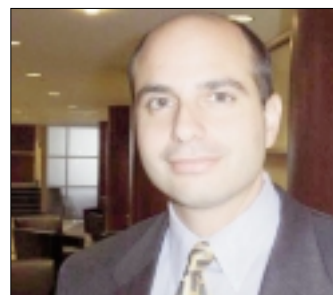
House District 88: Republican: House Speaker Brian Bosma. Democrat: Open. **2004 Results:** Bosma 23,289, Gordon (L) 2,132. **2006 Forecast:** Democratic sources tell HPR they believe the Speaker's district is "too gerrymandered" to offer any realistic chance of an upset, even if 2006 turns into a Democratic tidal wave. **Status:** *Safe R.*

House District 89: Republican: State Rep. Larry Buell. Democrat: Indianapolis Councilwoman Mary Moriarty Adams. **2004 Results:** Buell 15,391. **2006 Forecast:** Both Republican and Democratic sources are telling us that they believe Rep. Buell's district is becoming significantly more Democratic and they believe Buell could be vulnerable in 2006. Marion County Democrats are trying to woo Moriarty Adams into this race. She won her 2003 council race with an extensive door-to-door campaign. Democrats believe Buell will be the most vulnerable Republican in the wake of the Indy Works government reform issue. **Status:** *Safe R.*

2006 Local Races

Marion County Prosecutor: Republican: Prosecutor Carl Brizzi. Democrat: Open. **2002 Results:** Brizzi 103,478,

Osborn (D) 89,541, St. Angelo (L) 4,997. **2006 Outlook:** State Republicans and the Daniels administration are signalling this will be their top priority in 2006. The office is always important to the party of the sitting governor since it is the Marion County prosecutor that addresses the legal transgressions of state government. A prosecutor from the other party can potentially be a thorn in the side of a governor. Republicans face some significant hurdles. The county is trending Democratic and the party carried the county ticket in 2004 for the first time since Unigov, despite President Bush and Gov. Daniels on the ticket. Brizzi will have to defend his office, where two high-ranking aides have recently left under an ethical cloud. Brizzi will almost certainly be confronted with fallout from the Republican legislative hijinks on Indy Works, particularly in the context of today's story about a lack of resources. A Democratic challenger has not emerged, but a number of sources keep hinting it will likely be a female. The first name that comes up in our institutional knowledge is Annette Biesecker, a brief contender in 2002 and who is currently executive director of the Protective Order Pro Bono Project of Greater Indianapolis, Inc. In today's Indianapolis Star, a preview of this coming, intense battle was aired. Brizzi called a 22-year-old man an "urban terrorist" in charging him with two shooting deaths last week. Terrance Anderson killed Thomas Edmondson, 21, on Thursday and Tyric Rudolph, 16, on Friday because they were on his turf, Brizzi said. "Terrance Anderson is the poster child for why criminals can not be released from the Marion County Jail," Brizzi said. But



Prosecutor Brizzi

Marion County Democratic Party Chairman Ed Treacy disputes that Anderson was on the streets due to crowding. He says Anderson was free because Brizzi's office dismissed charges after his last two arrests. "This is clearly an attempt for (Brizzi) to cover up his staff's mistake," Treacy said. "We've got a system that for

sure is broke and needs to be fixed, but we also need to be leveling with each other about it and not try to lie about it." Treacy said Brizzi has blamed Mayor Bart Peterson, a Democrat, and the Democrat-controlled City-County Council for the problems with jail crowding. Brizzi, said he is not blaming anyone; all he wants is "resources allocated to fix this problem. (Ed Treacy) is not even a lawyer, much less a prosecutor. This is a blatant attempt to politicize a public safety issue." **Status:** *LEANS R.*





My Amnesty International sticker

By BRIAN A. HOWEY

INDIANAPOLIS - I have an Amnesty International sticker on the bumper of my F-150.

When I slapped it on, I didn't realize that it would identify me as a ... liberal. Or it would make me a marked opponent of the Bush administration.

I actually donated some money to Amnesty International because of President Bush.

As 2002 drew into 2003, I was conflicted about the looming war with Iraq. I wasn't sure I believed all the hype about the weapons of mass destruction, or that failing to act, as Condoleezza Rice suggested, would result in "a mushroom cloud."

My most important guide on such matters was (and is) Sen. Dick Lugar. And as the country was gearing up for war, Lugar was questioning whether the Bush administration had the end game figured out; how we would fare after Saddam's forces were routed.



It was Amnesty International that convinced me to support the war in Iraq. I went to its website and read the annual reports dating back to 1997 on Saddam's regime. Amnesty International convinced me that Saddam ran a genocidal operation. The annual reports were absolutely gruesome, with explicit accounts of rapes; the beheading of a woman in front of her family (with a sadist's bare hands).

I supported the war because I remember a PBS series back in the 1960s on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. I remember as a young kid vowing that genocide should never happen again; that I would do anything I could to oppose it. In my lifetime, I have witnessed a number of genocidal flare ups, from Cambodia, to Rwanda, and, of course, Iraq.

In hindsight, the Iraq War is extremely troublesome. We picked a fight for reasons that proved to be untrue. The evidence was hyped. When Secretary of State Colin Powell showed us mobile labs and tanks and we heard audio clips of Republican Guards transporting WMD during his United Nations presentation, I believed him.

Now we know it wasn't true.

There were no WMD. Just the genocidal regime of a madman. It's good he was captured. But what have we

replaced him with?

This past month, Amnesty International has drawn the verbal wrath of President Bush, Vice President Cheney and Rush Limbaugh for calling our terrorist detention center at Guantanamo the "gulag" of our time.

Bush, Cheney and Rice have hyped the war in Iraq. Amnesty International is now hyping the conditions at Gitmo. It is nothing like the Stalinist gulags, where millions of Soviet citizens were forced into labor, executed, starved and humiliated. There aren't knocks on the door at midnight and we are not witnessing our relatives disappearing. There are not mass graves out beyond the mango groves.

Still, Gitmo is troubling to me as an American. While I am offended at the term "gulag," (Webster's defines gulag as an acronym "for Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps in USSR, the agency of Soviet secret police that administers forced labor camps") what deeply concerns me is that we are holding people without charges, access to lawyers, and without trials, some for three years.

I don't care if they are terrorists, or common criminals. In the America I grew up in, you were guaranteed the right to a trial by jury in a speedy fashion. In the America I remember, this applied to citizens and foreigners.

The difference is that President Bush and the Pentagon sees these detainees as battlefield combatants. In past wars, our enemies were part of armies or navies and were released at the end of war or tried for war crimes.

Today's al Qaeda terrorists are essentially mercenaries. The reports out of bloody Iraq today are telling us that the latest wave of suicide bombers there are mostly foreigners carrying out jihad.

The distinctions are relevant.

But this is America. These combatants should be charged, given legal access, and tried. They should be sentenced, or set free.

We are sending a terrible message to the rest of the world. We are telling the world that in America, if we capture you, we will just keep you and throw away the key.

In the wake of 9/11, we rounded up all sorts of people, including an Evansville restaurant owner. These people were thrown into detention, kept in cells with a bare lightbulb burning 24/7. They were denied legal access for months. Their guards treated them as if they were guilty. When that reactive chapter of our history was over, most of these people were freed. Innocent.

But it was an ugly, ugly chapter.

We have dark forces and impulses in our society. We are displaying them front and center to the rest of the world. Gitmo is now its stage. ❖



Matthew Tully, Indianapolis Star - (Mayor Bart Peterson's) words were tough. But what must alarm Republicans is that he can deliver them in a smiling, likeable way -- without breaking a sweat, embarrassing himself or even raising his voice. Howard Dean, take note. So is the mayor blowing off steam, or hinting at a run for governor? That's a tantalizing question for many Democrats who know Peterson is their most attractive potential candidate -- unless Danica's a Democrat and decides to give politics a try. With his political radar, high-profile office and ability to raise Big Money, Peterson has the look of a stellar statewide candidate. He may have something even more important -- a motive -- thanks to the actions this year by Daniels and the GOP. First, Statehouse Republicans killed his Indy Works program, blasting him at every turn. Then Daniels ripped the Colts stadium out of his hands, suggesting the mayor and his folks padded the cost and weren't up to such a big job. People around City Hall are puzzled by the friction between the governor and the mayor; many thought they'd at least be able to work together in a non-election year. But things have indeed soured. And the governor is willing to talk his own trash. The mayor, he said, "didn't have the courage" to sell the Colts plan in the suburbs and shouldn't "pout and whine" about losing control of the stadium. Friends and allies say the tension has Peterson closely eyeing state politics. He is eager to whack Republicans who have taken so many smacks at him. So does this mean a run for governor? The mayor hasn't ruled it in or out. For now, he's pondering a third term as mayor. . ❖

Rich James, Post-Tribune - What is it about Republicans? They've got all the money in the world but haven't spent a dime on social graces. Take last week, for example. Any Republican who could scrape together \$500 gathered at the Innsbrook Country Club — yeah, the one that used to be called the Gary Country Club until it became unfashionable. It was a love-in, assuming you believe Republicans are capable of heartfelt thoughts. What the GOP was doing was raising big bucks — stocking the war chest in preparation for keeping the majority in the Indiana House next year. I say they were raising massive amounts of money because word has it — although I can't confirm it — that this high-testosterone event included a cash bar. The \$500 entry fee was chump-change compared to what the high rollers had to shell out to get listed as co-hosts on the invitation. Yep, it cost \$10,000 for a co-host to let the others know they are swimming in money. But \$10,000 was practically a deal considering it was casual business attire and no one had to rent

a tux. Oops, I forgot, only Democrats don't own tuxedos. There were a dozen of those co-hosts, meaning they had \$120,000 in hand before the first hors d'oeuvre was served. It's important to know who these co-hosts were, not because we need to know who has money, but because of the aforementioned social graces. Anyway, the co-hosts were headed by Dean V. White, who despite shunning the limelight, has the most recognizable name in Northwest Indiana. The others were David Lasco, Dan and Dana Dumezich, Dave Van Dyke, Bill Wellman, Jim Gagan, Illiana Medical Institute, Rusty Bucko, Ron McColly, Christopher Morrow, Suheil Nammari and Crown Point Mayor Dan Klein. Dan Klein? Wonder if his \$10,000 was pocket money or came out of his campaign fund. Hey, you Crown Pointers thought Jimmy Metros was the only one who flashed money around town. ❖

Jack Colwell, South Bend Tribune - Thankless though it may be, somebody's got to do it. Could that somebody be Tim Roemer? Roemer, the former congressman from South Bend, has been in the national spotlight as a 9/11 Commission member. Now, he ponders a possible candidacy for the U.S. Senate in Indiana next year. Roemer is a Democrat with the centrist record and rhetoric that a majority of Hoosiers find appealing. He is similar in that respect to Sen. Evan Bayh. Roemer would be an ideal senatorial candidate. But the odds are that he also would be a losing senatorial candidate. That's why the race -- for Roemer or any other Democratic nominee -- could be a thankless task. The Republican Roemer would oppose is Sen. Dick Lugar, long found in polls and at the polls to be the most popular political figure in Indiana. Chances of any Democrat defeating Lugar appear to range from a smidgen to none. Thus, there has been speculation that Democrats would once again send a sacrificial lamb to run against Lugar -- a challenger who would receive little funding, with the party instead targeting spending and effort where there could be a real chance to win. Throwing the senatorial game that way also would tend to neutralize Lugar. Roemer would be a challenger who could raise significant money and wage more than a token campaign. And still lose? That's something Roemer must consider. Is Lugar likely to be so popular with Hoosier voters that even a quality challenge by a quality candidate would still bring defeat? Lugar won with two-thirds of the vote in his last three senatorial campaigns -- 66.56 percent in 2000, 67.35 percent in 1994 and 68.14 percent in 1988. In each of those races, he carried 91 of the 92 counties in Indiana. Thankless race for Roemer? One would think so. ❖





FSSA rife with problems, will take four years to fix

INDIANAPOLIS - The new director of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration says a \$400,000 audit shows the giant agency is more troubled than he first realized, plagued by everything from poor record keeping to inadequate patient supervision (*Indianapolis Star*). "I'd like to tell you we've fixed all these problems already," said Mitch Roob, secretary of the FSSA, after releasing the 181-page audit Wednesday. "But we're nowhere near fixed. It will take us at least four years to fix these problems." The audit, done by the New York firm of KPMG, outlined 185 problems. About half of those were identified as high-risk situations that need to be addressed as soon as possible. Roob said he was struck by "the breadth of the brokenness. Almost every place we looked in the agency there was something fundamentally flawed."



Hamilton Southeastern chief eyes property tax hikes

FISHERS - Although the state's next two-year budget will help ease the money strain in Hamilton Southeastern Schools, Superintendent Concetta Raimondi said it doesn't go far enough (*Indianapolis Star*). As a result, Raimondi told those who attended Wednesday's Fishers Chamber of Commerce luncheon, local taxpayers will be asked to do more. "The tax rate increase is not due to any changes locally," Raimondi said during her annual State of the Schools address. "This is beyond the town's control and beyond the schools' control."

Mount Vernon 'stunned' over BMV branch closing

MOUNT VERNON - Rumors had swirled, but when the official word came that Mount Vernon's Bureau of Motor Vehicles branch could close, town residents and the branch's five employees still were saddened and stunned (*Evansville Courier & Press*). They didn't understand the state's rationale of cost savings and more efficient customer service statewide. Closing local branches, according to residents, will mean longer lines at remaining branches and the inconvenience of driving longer distances. "Where are these people going to go," asked Bertha Ricketts, a customer service representative at the Mount Vernon branch. "A lot of people who come in are elderly." Mount Vernon, for example, already has started what amounts to a "save our branch" campaign. The Chamber of Commerce is encouraging its members to write letters and send e-mails. Posey County Commissioners President Scott Moye said a resolution opposing the closing will be drafted for consideration Monday.

GM tax break will cost Allen County

FORT WAYNE - The Allen County commissioners voted unanimously on Wednesday to increase their pledge of income tax money to cover a loan they want to take out, but they still might not get the desirable interest rate on the \$7.2 million in bonds (*Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*). Despite stating it would be a "moral obligation" to make the loan payments, the county could pay \$3million in additional interest over the life of the loan unless a rating agency upgrades the bonds to "investment grade" – a sign to people who buy the bonds they are a safe investment. Last month, the Allen County Council approved a package of proposals to

borrow \$7.2 million to refinance a 1997 bond and buy \$2 million worth of equipment for General Motors.

Legislators urge cherry masters organization

FORT WAYNE - Area tavern and social club officials should mount an organized campaign now to build support for legalizing electronic gambling devices next January in the General Assembly, two state legislators said Wednesday (*Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*). Sen. Robert Meeks, R-LaGrange, and Rep. Win Moses Jr., D-Fort Wayne, spoke to about 100 representatives of alcohol-serving businesses during a hearing sponsored by the Indiana Licensed Beverage Association at Peanuts Too, 1455 Goshen Ave. The burgeoning interest in electronic gambling devices, commonly known as Cherry Masters, has been spurred by a flurry of enforcement actions by Indiana State Excise Police. Since late March, excise police have cited 62 northeast Indiana establishments on suspicion of possessing the machines, disabled 351 machines and confiscated \$26,888.

Daniels says Ohio River bridges a 'high priority'

JEFFERSONVILLE - When Daniels eventually arrived at the restored train station at Preservation Park for his first public forum in the region as governor, Catherine Goforth couldn't wait to ask him: What do you think of the proposal to build two new bridges from Southern Indiana to Louisville? "A high priority," Daniels told her (*Louisville Courier-Journal*). "It's in the top handful of projects in the state." Daniels answered more than a dozen questions for about 60 residents and local officials packed standing room only in the small building in downtown Jeffersonville. ❖