

GOVERNOR ERIC J. HOLCOMB
2021 Next Level Agenda
December 17, 2020

Toby, congratulations to Dentons Bingham Greenbaum on hosting yet another legislative conference for those interested in a look ahead and the direction our state leaders seek to steer Indiana.

It's this very conference that annually reminds us, that after this huddle and the holidays, we launch right into session.

Well, at least that *annual certainty* used to be the case.

This past year has been one like no other.

Daily predictability and certainty have been replaced with hourly adjustments and audibles.

But as unprecedented as this year has been, it also provides for those who keep their wits about them, who “keep calm and carry on” so to speak, an unprecedented *opportunity*.

And that's what my and the lieutenant governor's 2021 legislative and administrative agenda will be all about: making sure Indiana remains “*a state of opportunity*” to live, work, play, study and stay – for all.

Now, to best do that, we must keep our eye on the ball and manage our way through the world's worst pandemic in over a century.

Managing through the surge and safely accelerating out of this pandemic will remain priority number one.

Our response and recovery efforts are all geared toward protecting lives and livelihoods by testing, tracing and treating those who are in need of care – and yes – that finally includes our vaccination protocol, which is rolling out as we speak.

Never in the history of our state have we rolled out a vaccination process on this scale, and the more who participate, the swifter and safer we'll get through this – and lives will be saved.

Now, having said that, our agenda will be based on the same 5 pillars that have put our state in a position of strength, just like over the last 4 record-breaking years.

Those pillars being: our Economy, our Infrastructure, our Education, Training, and Workforce Development, our Public Health, and our commitment to providing Good Government for our citizens, all of course, based on a Foundation of Civility.

So let me take them one by one, and then I'll lateral it to our lieutenant governor to elaborate on some specific initiatives.

First, our economy, or more specifically, how we cultivate our ecosystem to help others grow.

We'll do that by passing a balanced budget, which will be 9 straight if you're keeping score at home!

And we'll make sure we carry a prudent reserve balance to help us get back to where we were pre-pandemic, something many states won't be able to do for years to come.

While a return to employment for many impacted by the pandemic slowly continues, I'm pleased to report, by the end of this year, the Indiana Economic Development Corporation is on track to attract an all-time record number of new job commitments, coming to Indiana in the coming years, which will lay the foundation for a sustained recovery (over 31,000 new job commitments already – that average is over 28 dollars an hour, with over 5.6 billion dollars of Capital investment just this year).

Let that settle in. We're bringing in more new jobs this year compared to last year, and soon, we'll set the all-time record even during a pandemic. Companies are choosing to grow in Indiana, which grows more opportunities for Hoosiers.

To keep the momentum going, as the number one manufacturing state in the nation, per capita, we'll seek to enhance our status by expanding our manufacturing readiness grants to enable companies to modernize their operations.

We'll stay focused on tripling our defense investment in Indiana by 2025, by growing in areas of production and manufacturing as well as in areas like microelectronics and hypersonics.

And we'll share *Indiana's Good News* through the Indiana Destination Development Corporation, which Lt. Governor Crouch will elaborate on in a few minutes.

Our second pillar is our infrastructure platform, and how we leverage our superior, "Heart of the Heartland" location and quality of place.

In today's uber-competitive climate, the states that provide the safest, most secure, and speediest modes of mobility and connection have a huge advantage to people and the businesses they represent.

We seek to not only be known as the "Crossroads of America," but also as the "Cross-CyberSpace of America," and the lieutenant governor will also talk about how we're going to take our nation-leading broadband internet program to the Next Level and reach more unserved and underserved Hoosiers with higher internet speeds.

We'll also make sure we're living up to CNBC's #1 State Infrastructure ranking, as in, The Best State in the Nation, by maintaining what we got, finishing what we've started and building the new road projects we need, in all 92 counties.

Like, completing I-69's Section 6 before I leave office and finishing the process to obtain a record-of-decision for a new Evansville I-69 Bridge and making progress on a Indy to South Bend "cruise control" on U.S. 31 and major corridor improvements on U.S. 30.

We're full speed ahead on building out two of America's biggest public transit rail projects.

We'll be well over a billion dollars invested up in Northwest Indiana on the West Lake Corridor Expansion and double tracking the South Shore Line Rail projects.

In addition to rails, we also looking to make good on being one of the most trail friendly states in the nation.

We've got the tenderloin trail, the glass trail, the bourbon trail, the golf trail, we've got some of the best hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails at our state parks.

And, we'll look to restart our \$90 million dollar state investment in community trails, to move us toward an even more interconnected system of trails throughout all of Indiana.

And, as you're blazing your personal trail of preference you just might see some of the 1 million new trees we committed to planting at our parks or near our parks over the next 5 years.

And lastly, speaking of our 92 counties, Lt. Governor Crouch will share another exciting initiative she'll be heading up to inventory our housing needs in our urban, rural, and suburban neighborhoods.

Our 3rd Pillar is all about Education, Training, and Workforce Development.

How we prepare, recruit and retain talent in Indiana.

That of course starts with ensuring 100% funding for our K-12 schools for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year, just as we've insisted to date throughout the adverse effects and challenges of COVID-19.

We'll also seek to Increase K-12 funding in the next biennial budget in an amount to be determined after analyzing the revenue forecast that was just released yesterday morning, and we'll likewise seek to at least Restore the higher education funding that was impacted by the 2020 spending reductions caused by COVID.

I'm passionate about putting Indiana's first Secretary of Education on the road to success by moving the focus on "compliance" to the focus on "outcomes" with an emphasis on lifelong learning opportunities. There are so many.

After all, it's a fact: the more you learn, the more you earn.

To help Secretary Jenner do just that, we'll seek to move the operations of the State Board of Education and the state Charter Board to the Department of Education and we'll use the legislation enacted last year to help schools obtain waivers for unfunded mandates to analyze how it might be applied to all school corporations.

Dr. Jenner will be evaluating ways to expand early learning, and ways to improve on the accountability and transparency fronts, we'll examine virtual learning, especially with all of the adjustments that COVID has forced.

We'll all be looking for ways to champion the education profession by attracting top teacher talent and building capacity, which will include designing a minority teacher recruitment plan and reviewing for action all recommendations included in the Next Level Teacher Compensation Commission Report.

This includes publishing the teacher compensation dashboard, which goes live today!

Understanding "life is a pathway", we'll be working to connect every Indiana higher education program, or major, to a work experience and incentivize more of those experiences to be with Hoosier companies – to increase the potential for future employment.

We'll work to increase minority participation in our Workforce Ready and Employer Grant programs.

Since 2017, we've seen 40,583 Hoosiers enroll in our Workforce Ready Grant Program – almost 20,000 – with 19,916 completions, with a Median wage gain of 6,800 dollars, annually for credit bearing students.

And, since 2017, when we started these programs, we've seen 26,172 individuals trained at 1,850 participating employers around the state take part in our "Employer Training Grant Program" with an average wage gain of over 5,900 dollars annually!

These programs are going a long way to helping us as a state reach our goal of at least 60% of Hoosiers with a quality credential by 2025.

Just FYI, we're currently at 48.5% versus the National Average of 51.3%. Keep in mind, in 2008, we were at 33%. So, we've made progress but there is more to go.

In addition to preparing and retaining our workforce of the future, the lieutenant governor will talk about some cool ways we're out to recruit veterans and service

members who are concluding their military service to enroll in Indiana training opportunities to become public safety officers and first responders throughout our state.

Our 4th Pillar revolves around Hoosier health.

Just like “the more you learn, the more you earn,” we also know, health is wealth, no matter who you are or where you are in the world.

“Everybody,” includes women in the workforce.

That’s why we’ll be back, working to pass a Workplace Pregnancy Accommodations Bill.

We’ll be working on Long Term Healthcare Reform, moving to a system that focuses on outcomes and quality for Medicaid eligible elderly citizens.

And we’ll initiate a comprehensive review of our local health departments and state delivery of public health services based on what we’ve learned together over this last year.

And, finally, our 5th pillar to supporting a strong Indiana is providing good government and maintaining the public trust.

Responding to a global pandemic has caused us to rethink how we’ve done business during a public health emergency and just as importantly, how we do business post-pandemic.

So, we’ll look to, expand telemedicine services, make virtual meeting options permanent and provide businesses and schools COVID liability protections.

We’ll seek to ease restrictions to obtain a driver’s license reinstatement and Remove “failure to appear” as a reason for license suspension.

We’ll be getting our State police officers outfitted with body cameras, our Diversity Data Dashboard up and running as well as completing the outside review of our state’s law enforcement academy and agencies.

And lastly, I’m excited to welcome aboard, Indiana’s first-ever Cabinet level, Chief Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity Officer to improve diversity outcomes across state government.

As I mentioned at the outset, we’ll do all this based on a foundation of civility and lead by example.

I’ll now pitch it over to my partner to elaborate on a few of her personal passions as next year unfolds. Partner, over to you!

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR'S REMARKS

Thank you, Governor, for this opportunity to address our fellow Hoosiers about the important work we are doing in Indiana at this unprecedented moment in our state's history.

As Hoosiers know, Gov. Holcomb and I have invested in expanding broadband throughout Indiana.

Through the creation of the Director of Broadband Opportunities, as well as the Next Level Connections Grant Program, we are meeting Hoosiers where they are in order, to assist them with expanding broadband.

The Next Level Connections program has awarded nearly \$80 million toward broadband infrastructure helping more than 21,000 locations. This includes homes, businesses, farms, schools, health centers and other key anchor institutions in our communities.

COVID-19 has brought to light how critical access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet is for e-learning, teleworking and telehealth. That is why we will be looking to raise the minimum speed to at least the federal standard (25/3). This threshold provides opportunity for more Hoosiers to access high-speed internet and enable them to address the key areas needed to work, learn, play, study and stay

Broadband expansion will continue to be an important part of our administration for the next four years.

Broadband will also be an important piece to expanding our state's workforce in Indiana, particularly with public safety.

Recruitment of qualified, prepared men and women to join Indiana's fire and law enforcement ranks continues to be a priority of this administration.

Through our INVETS initiative, we will begin marketing these opportunities to men and women transitioning out of the military. as well as veteran police officers and firefighter candidates from other states. Now more than ever, we need to continue to attract the best and brightest to our frontlines.

As we continue to build our workforce, housing stock is of critical importance. Therefore, our IHCD is creating a public-private partnership to develop a comprehensive overview of our state's housing supply and needs on a county-by-county basis. It will be our goal to develop a Housing Market trend analysis and a Web-based Housing Report Platform. The IHCD will maintain this database and mapping tool to ensure that real-time, consistent information about Indiana's housing market is available.

This online interactive tool will be used by developers and builders; employers; local and state government officials; and service providers who serve specific populations to help determine where the needs and gaps exist and how we can address those

Indiana is great state to live, work, play, study and stay. As the Governor mentioned, we are working hard at the IDDC to continue to tell the authentic story of Indiana. This entails highlighting the quality of life that exists throughout this beautiful state. Retaining our own and attracting new talent is essential and the IDDC will continue to pursue this throughout the pandemic and beyond.

The pandemic has challenged every Hoosier in unique ways, and it has certainly shed light on the very real needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities – Hoosiers with autism, Down Syndrome and cerebral palsy. In light of COVID, we will continue to review our work related to employment, technology and workforce support.

Our goal is to prioritize specific improvements related to employment, use of technology, social connectivity, and direct workforce support for our Hoosiers dealing with intellectual and developmental challenges.

Mental health has been a specific area of focus for this administration. Now more than ever, we must be vigilant in caring for those who are affected by depression and other mental or behavioral health challenges.

This will require the same all hands-on-deck approach that has characterized our response to the COVID 19 pandemic. Employers, neighbors, faith groups, schools and Hoosiers of all backgrounds must work together to address these challenges. My agencies will continue to partner with FSSA to help in every possible way.

From the frontlines of public safety to the halls of our schools and hospitals we will work towards a common goal of lifting up every Hoosier. This agenda aims to do just that as we approach the coming year.

Thank you for your time, now let's get to work making this agenda a reality.

GOVERNOR'S CLOSING REMARKS

Thank you, lieutenant governor. Well said. And with that, here's to wishing you all happy and safe holidays. We look forward to seeing you in the new year as we all work together to continue taking Indiana to the Next Level.