



Messer poised for Trump era Senate run

5th ranking House Republican prepares for Sen. Donnelly, health reform, Trump drama

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

SHELBYVILLE – About the time House Republicans were releasing the long awaited Obamacare repeal/replace plan, the fifth-ranking Republican joined Howey Politics for a beer at the Riverfront Brewery in the heart of the conservative 6th CD.

U.S. Rep. Luke Messer didn't have a recent town hall during the last recess, but he consistently talked about the attitudes and perceptions of 6th CD constituents, and there is no doubt in his mind that they are firmly in President

Trump's corner. "Back home, people are excited by Trump's leadership, they're willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, and they are waiting to see the results from his promises," Messer said.

While he has some concerns about Trump's rhetoric and wants to answers to the Kremlin ties to the Trump campaign, Messer is preparing to latch his political career



through the prism of Trump. By May, he is expected to announce he will challenge U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly. He will not make the final decision by guessing what the mid-term

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Repeal in 2nd, 6th CDs

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – When it comes to the long-awaited Republican repeal and replace of Obamacare, my stare is transfixed on two Hoosier environs, the 2nd and 6th congressional districts.



Up in the 2nd, U.S. Rep. Jackie Walorski seemed to exult in the imminent repeal of Obamacare. "We're doing exactly what we said we would do," Walorski told the South Bend Tribune. "It's what people have been asking for." And from the Indiana perspective, she is right. Obamacare has never been popular here and President Trump's vow to repeal and replace it with something "ter-



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- South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg



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rific" that will provide "good coverage at much less cost" and "a much better healthcare plan at much less money" resonated with voters here in 2016 in emphatic fashion.

In January, Trump explained, "It's going to be – what my plan is is that I want to take care of everybody. I'm not going to leave the lower 20% that can't afford insurance. So I want to make sure that nobody's dying on the streets when I'm president. We will unleash something that's going to be terrific."

The American Health Care Act unveiled on Monday is full of promise but won't have a Congressional Budget Office score for weeks well into the process. And on Tuesday, Walorski told the South Bend Tribune that she could not guarantee that no one would lose coverage under the plan, saying, "Folks that need coverage and access to coverage will absolutely have it," she said. Well, doesn't that cover all Americans? And she didn't yet know how Republicans would pay for it. "We're still working on the details of that," she said before voting for the plan in the Ways & Means Committee early today.

Walorski represents the most competitive congressional district in Indiana, at +6 Republican on the Cook Partisan Index gauged in 2014. But we are heading into the fourth election of the 2011 maps, and the district appears to be trending more Republican. She lost to then Rep. Joe Donnelly 49-48% in 2010 after he voted for Obamacare, won the seat 49-48% in 2012 over Brendan Mullen, shel-lacked Joe Bock 59-38% in President Obama's final mid-term election in 2014, then smothered Lynn Coleman 59-37% in the Trump Hoosier 2016 landslide.

Walorski appears to be getting a break in that the most potent Democrat challenger, South Bend Mayor Peter Buttigieg, is passing on a 2018 challenge, telling the Huffington Post, "I don't think that's going to be me. Congress has become less attractive for people. I think a lot of emerging leaders take a look at opportunities to run for Congress and decide it

is not for them."

But 2018 appears to be a vastly different beast than any of the other cycles of this decade. This is the first with a Republican president, and the 2nd CD over the years is much more competitive in mid-term elections under GOP presidents. Just ask former congressman John Hiler. How President Trump will be perceived, and whether he has coattails or becomes a millstone, is impossible to forecast. Just six months ago, Trump was supposed to be a burlap sack of cinder blocks for Republicans and he turned out to provide Red Bull wings.

In the 2nd CD, there are 18,900 people who have accessed health coverage via the federal Obamacare exchange. Of the 420,000 Hoosiers on HIP 2.0, while exact statistics are not available, somewhere around 50,000 have coverage in the 2nd CD. So what happens to upward of 60,000 to 70,000 of Walorski's constituents is to be determined. Logic says that if you take away a benefit, those folks might be motivated to vote against those responsible.

Perhaps.

The 6th CD has become a microcosm of the Republican stew on health care. There was Vice President Mike Pence, who represented the 6th CD for 12 years, who declared of RyanCare that "This is the plan," though conceding that it faces a "very open process on Capitol Hill." Pence's friend and CD predecessor, Club for Growth's David McIntosh, panned the plan, saying, "If this warmed-over substitute for government-run health care remains unchanged, the Club for Growth will key vote against it."

On MSNBC's "Morning Joe" today, McIntosh said agreed that the process hasn't been marked up and is being rammed through. "What I think they can do is open up this process, take the RyanCare version, put in about five or six changes," McIntosh said. "Cut all the taxes immediately, block grant Medicaid, allow insurance sales across state lines, then they could get a bill that could be solidly supported by the Republican base. Our friend Paul Ryan did it like a think

tank. They cooked it.”

Asked how a poorer person could be covered, McIntosh said, “We’ve got the best answer. When you start competing across state lines, they will have affordable health care. The rates will go down. With the Ryan bill the rates won’t go down. They’ll have a lot better options than either under Obamacare or RyanCare.”

And Pence’s successor, U.S. Rep. Luke Messer, told Howey Politics on Monday that he believes there will be Republican consensus, saying, “There is a legitimate debate within the Republican Party and our caucus about which way is best. But I think there is consensus we’ll be on the same page and pass a repeal that meets the four principles I described.”

Messer went on to say, “My sense is that President Trump will be the tie-breaker here.”

But President Trump was all over the map on Tuesday, telling the House GOP Whip Team that he was “proud to support” the bill and wants it to pass “largely intact,” which is really an absurd thing for a rookie president to say. He obviously doesn’t have a handle on the legislative process. His “friend,” U.S. Sen. Rand Paul, was declaring it “Obamacare Lite” and a non-starter. To which Trump tweeted, “I feel sure that my friend @RandPaul will come along with the new and great health care program.”

So this is where Trump’s legacy of lies becomes a big problem. Do you believe him? Or, when do you believe him? And will he throw you under the bus on a Saturday morning whim? Will he show up in your district?

The rest of the Indiana delegation appears to be taking a wait-and-see approach. U.S. Sen. Todd Young is studying the plan. U.S. Rep. Jim Banks has expressed concerns about costs (no one knows what that impact will be), the repealing of the medical device tax and the “creation of a new entitlement program.” The doctor in the House, U.S. Rep. Larry Bucshon, said at a House hearing on Wednesday, “If we don’t act now, the law will almost certainly collapse and leave patients across the country with nowhere to go. As a physician who spent my career caring for patients, I firmly believe that inaction would be irresponsible and immoral. So we’re on a rescue mission” said Bucshon.

Economist Steve Rattner observed of the House plan, “At the heart of that approach would be providing tax credits to all individuals without other coverage to buy insurance, in place of the tax credits and subsidies that Obamacare affords lower- and middle-income Americans. That may sound like not much of a difference, particularly when wrapped in the Republican mantra that it would be a simpler, fairer approach. Simpler? Perhaps. But not fairer. The Obama subsidies and credits are tied to an individual’s income, the lower the income, the larger the benefit. In contrast, in the Republican formulation, the size of the tax

credits is coupled only to the age of the recipient; older Americans get more, on the principle that the cost of insurance is higher for those of more advanced years.

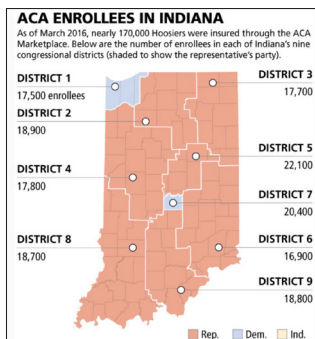
Rattner adds, “Lower-income Americans of all ages and older ones in middle income brackets would receive materially less in government support. Meanwhile, higher income earners, who currently get no subsidies, would find themselves with a windfall.” Of the former group, Rattner is essentially describing a classic Trump supporter. Therein lies the political danger of an issue that has surprised President Trump for its complexity.

Conservative New York Times columnist Ross Douhat writes about the GOP dilemma: “Those internal tensions ... have given us the botch that is the House GOP’s Obamacare alternative. It’s a piece of legislation caught betwixt and between. It includes enough in the way of tax credits and regulation to be labeled ‘Obamacare Lite’ by the party’s would-be ideological enforcers, but it also promises to throw many people off the insurance rolls – many Trump voters included – for the sake of uncertain policy goals. Its outline bears some resemblance to what the smartest conservative health policy thinkers favor, but it doesn’t want to spend the money (whether on risk pools or pre-funded health savings accounts or income-linked subsidies) that would make that approach politically viable. And its desire to spend less while keeping Obamacare’s most popular regulations (the ban on discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, above all) promises to make the risk of an insurance death spiral that much worse.”

Douhat adds, “So it’s a bill that nobody on the right much likes; not libertarians and not reformocons, not right-wing donors and not mushy moderates, not the Tea Party senators who promised full repeal, and not the swing-state senators who well know that their own voters want the coverage expansion to endure. As for Americans who aren’t ideologically committed, forget about it; passing the bill would be an invitation to a political beheading..”

The ramp up to passage of Obamacare in 2009 and 2010 was volatile and helped move competitive Indiana into extraordinary Republican super majorities as well as congressional dominance. The next 21 months could be equally volatile, and not without precedence. In 1988, Health and Human Services Sec. Doc Bowen convinced President Reagan to back and sign a catastrophic health plan. It was killed by a fearful Congress under President George H.W. Bush a couple of years later, setting up a generation of health-care-driven spasms. The Clinton health reforms of 1993 roiled politics here with no tangible results. During the Bush43 era, when Republicans had control of the White House and Congress for six years, nothing happened, setting the stage for Obamacare.

What happens next is anyone’s guess. To recycle a phrase I often used in 2016, well, anything can happen. Anything. ❖



Messer, from page 1

political environment will be like. "Political calculations will have nothing to do with my decision," said Messer, who succeeded Vice President Mike Pence in the 6th CD. "I'm just trying to figure out if this is the best way we can serve the state."

Not only could Messer be facing a popular Democratic incumbent, he might also face a Republican primary field that could include U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita, State Sen. Mike Delph, Kokomo attorney Mark Hurt, former Indianapolis mayor Greg Ballard, and Evansville Mayor Lloyd Winnecke. The political environment is far from stable. Democratic sources tell HPI that forces in the Bernie Sanders wing of the party are seeking a potential primary challenger to Donnelly, who has been a moderate to conservative Democrat.

Messer talked about the U.S. Senate race, the emerging American Health Care Act, Trump's actions and rhetoric, and the coming Trump infrastructure plan. Here is our interview with Rep. Messer:

HPI: Your name is coming up in the context of the 2018 U.S. Senate race against Joe Donnelly. What should we expect?

Messer: Ahhhh, let me start by saying this. It really matters who we elect as our next U.S. Senator. I think it's important that person be somebody who represents everyday Hoosiers. I've been disappointed by much of what I've seen from Joe Donnelly in the weeks right after the Trump presidency. I just mentioned Rex Tillerson, a Fortune 2 CEO who left his career to serve as secretary of state. He's extraordinary and there wasn't one Democrat vote for him. Tom Price was a 10-plus-year member of Congress, was the budget chairman, not one Democratic vote for Tom Price. And there are others. It will be interesting to see what happens with the Gorsuch vote. I have every expectation that Joe Donnelly will vote for Judge Gorsuch for the Supreme Court. Donald Trump ran for president, saying he would nominate a conservative justice. Hillary Clinton ran saying she wouldn't. Donald Trump won Indiana by an overwhelming margin and there is no question that Hoosiers would expect their U.S. senators to confirm Judge Gorsuch, who has a very distinguished career.

As far as the campaign goes, we're probably a couple of months away from making a final decision. I've been encouraged by a number of Hoosiers to take a hard look at it. Our family is prayerfully considering it and from my perspective, the decision won't be based on political considerations about the 2018 environment or a particular vote by Joe Donnelly. It will be based on what our fam-



ily is called to do. It's a decision we'll make in the coming weeks.

HPI: You're in leadership in the House. You're on a leadership track. You're in a safe House seat. Conceivably in the next 10 or 15 years, you could be speaker. How does that factor into your decision?

Messer: Almost not at all. Here's why. In my career, I've always tried to make decisions based out of calling, not fear. What do I mean by that? We try in every circumstance to ask, what's the right thing to do? For example, when I became executive director of the Republican Party, Joe Kernan looked like the overwhelming favorite to be elected governor. With Jim Kittle we were able to get Mitch Daniels elected. When I came to run School Choice Indiana and Hoosiers to Economic Growth, school vouchers were a long shot. In the end, we worked hard, were able with all kinds of friends and allies to get that legislation passed. Now 35,000 kids have an opportunity to go to school where they want. When I ran against Dan Burton, who by the way is now my friend, everybody told me it was

a long shot and I thought it was the right thing to do, I thought he needed to be challenged and I lost that one by 2,000 votes. So I've never been afraid to do something hard if it's the right thing to do. That's the way I'm trying to look at this. I think it's important we have a Republican majority and today with the nomination of a Supreme Court justice, there is no question that without a Republican majority you'd have a different nominee. So to me, that would be an important part of the role. The other thing I would say about Joe Donnelly is that he's a nice man, he just doesn't vote right for Indiana. Too many of his votes are out of step and Hoosiers deserve a senator who votes their values.

HPI: I know you're saying you're not looking at political calculations, but if Hillary Clinton was president, 2018 would look to be a bad scenario for Sen. Donnelly. Now with President Trump, that could be a real mid-term challenge for a Republican.

Messer: Just to say those kind of political calculations will have nothing to do with my decision. I'm just trying to figure out if this is the best way we can serve the state. I say we, because I mean our family. If this is the best way for our family to serve the state, we'll step into it and if we determine not, we won't.

HPI: Last year we saw two members, Marlin Stutzman and Todd Young, go after a Senate nomination. What's the likelihood of that happening against with say, Todd Rokita?

Messer: I hope it doesn't because I'm friends with all members of our delegation, but it will have no bearing on my decision.

HPI: Give me your impressions of one of the most surreal political environments we've ever seen.

Messer: Fair enough. The election of 2016 was like none of us had ever seen. The last several months have been a transition in power unlike anything we've ever seen. I really was impressed with President Trump's speech. I think in many ways he became president of the United States that night. He was classic Trump. To me maybe the most fascinating part of where we are is the extraordinary disconnect from the way folks feel in Washington and with the media here in Indiana and what I hear when I'm around everyday Hoosiers back home.

HPI: What are the Hoosier folk telling you these days?

Messer: Back home people are excited by Trump's leadership, they're willing to give him the benefit of the doubt and they are waiting to see the results from his promises. They are excited by many of the executive orders that have already come. They almost like the way he's sparring with the media. When you talk to the media, when you talk to the most establishment folks back home, there is, of course, a lot of consternation and concern because Trump conducts himself in very untraditional ways.

HPI: Do you think as a reporter, I'm an enemy of the American people?

Messer: No. I never thought I'd be quoting Chuck Woolery, but on TV last week he said two things. First, the media didn't elect Trump, he doesn't really need them. And secondly, he said the 1st Amendment works both ways. The media is certainly entitled to criticize Mr. Trump and President Trump is entitled to criticize them back. The 1st Amendment is not for the faint-hearted. No, you specifically, I do not think you are the enemy of the state.

HPI: He's got that 42% of his base. I don't see them as a basket of deplorables, but his base is going to stay with him for a long time. Can he make inroads with independent voters where he's not doing so well?

Messer: In the end, Donald Trump will be judged by the results of his presidency. Let me give you an Indiana analogy. When Bobby Knight was throwing chairs and yelling at referees and winning national championships, everybody loved him. When the championships ended, the show wore folks out. I think the same with Mr. Trump. If the results are positive for our country, people will look past his style. But if the results are not strong, they won't.

HPI: So President Trump tells the governors how surprised he was how complicated health reform is. Doc

Bowen had to be spinning in his grave over that one. Did that comment surprise you?

Messer: I've learned not to be surprised by Donald Trump's comments. First, a shout-out to Doc Bowen. It is remarkable that Indiana's malpractice reforms from over 40 years ago still have not been adopted by the rest of the country. My hope on malpractice reform is we'd take the Indiana model and make it national. He was really an extraordinary leader, way ahead of his time.

HPI: I believe if Doc's catastrophic health reforms President Reagan signed in 1988 had been defended and preserved, that could have been the basis to build a new system and would have prevented a generation of divisive politics.

Messer: It would have changed everything.

HPI: So Doc was an extraordinary visionary.

Messer: He was a physician elected governor way before other doctors were elected to office. Now to your point about health care, yeah, it's complicated. Also, over a period of years, our promises have been clear. Now is the time to deliver.

HPI: Obamacare put some 20 million people into coverage. HIP 2.0, arguably Gov. Mike Pence's best policy work, now insures 420,000 Hoosiers. Most are very satisfied. Do those

420,000 Hoosiers stay on the HIP plan? Will most of the 20 million people still have access under the Republican plan?

Messer: First let's talk about the 420,000 Hoosiers, because that's closest to my heart. The proposals that will be launched this week are designed to give states flexibility and encourage more states to use a plan that resembles the Healthy Indiana Plan. I believe the Indiana members in the congressional delegation will work to make sure the Healthy Indiana Plan continues and becomes the model. Second, folks with pre-existing conditions will continue to be insured under the law. It's not right for someone not to be able to get insurance because they are sick. Under the Affordable Care Act that was positive, and we're going to try and keep that. Third, among people transitioning under the workforce, those 26 and younger who are on their parent's health plan are going to continue to be on their parent's plan. By the way, the private sector will continue to do that anyway, because the private sector learned after the law was passed was it was beneficial to include these young people. Fourth, we want to continue to give states flexibility and encourage states to help step up to the challenge. Indiana is unique under the Affordable Care Act ... Obamacare was passed



differently, and it allowed every citizen a plan. States could create their own plan; states that didn't were on the federal exchange. After a period of years, Obama reached out to states like Indiana, allowing their own approach, with the medical savings accounts and the co-pays. The consumer-oriented focus on the Healthy Indiana Plan is unique.

HPI: The figure I saw with the Healthy Indiana Plan, \$16.5 billion out of the \$18 billion between 2015 and 2021 was paid by the feds. Are we going to see a block grant for states of similar size?

Messer: Those specifics I have not seen. We're going to launch the plan this week, but as I understand the original architecture of the ACA, those state moneys were going to decline over time. That's why some states chose not to participate at all because they were worried that over time the federal percentage would decline.

HPI: Or as Gov. Pence used to say, the baby elephant would grow up to be a big elephant.

Messer: Yeah, the federal percentage would go down. So that's always been part of the architecture of the ACA. One of the things we're trying to do with our plan is to block-grant back those monies and create better state flexibility. There's a debate even within our own caucus whether funding should come on an individual basis or whether it should be kind of a traditional block grant, where a large chunk of dollars come back to the state and

the state budgets them.

HPI: So what happens to the tax credits and the individual mandates?

Messer: Again, the details will be released this week, but there is every expectation the tax credits will be part of this plan. There will be some changes in the way those changes will be applied to broaden the base of people eligible for tax credit benefit. Part of the problem with the ACA was it was a particularly bad deal for middle class families.

HPI: My monthly premiums went from \$444 to more than \$700 and this year to \$681. That's just for me.

Messer: And many of the tax credits weren't available for middle class families. I think you will see changes to that tax credit that make it apply there.

HPI: In some Republican circles the word is this is just going to be "Obamacare Lite." How do you combat that? Or is it?

Messer: My sense is that President Trump will be the tiebreaker here. There is a legitimate debate within the Republican Party and our caucus about which way is best. But I think there is consensus we'll be on the same page and pass a repeal that meets the four principles I described.

HPI: Will the White House come up with its own plan? Do you guys know?

Messer: My sense is there will be a consensus

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leadership plan where the White House is working in conjunction with the House and Senate leadership.

HPI: Are any of your Democratic colleagues going, "Psssst, we're all ears?" Or is this going to be more social engineering by partyline vote? In the Senate, you're going to need Democratic votes, right?

Messer: Not if it's passed by reconciliation. Most of us believe there won't be any Democratic votes for repeal. But then my hope is we can do more. I would like to see us pass cross-state competition. That would be one of the best ways to drop mandates and lower prices. That policy can't be passed with reconciliation, so that would require some bipartisan consensus. Association plans are another idea that shouldn't be partisan at all. The idea that you can be part of a media association and be a part of a larger group, or the farmers could pool together with the Farm Bureau or the Indiana Manufacturers Association. Those should be legal again.

HPI: Anything else on Obamacare?

Messer: I think we'll have an initial bill pass this Spring, maybe next month, and then hopefully we'll have more bills pass over the coming months, my hope in a bipartisan way.

HPI: What do you know about the Trump infrastructure plan?

Messer: It's \$1 trillion.

HPI: Are you concerned about it blowing up the deficits?

Messer: The details will matter. But it was one of the few bipartisan clapping moments of the night. I think it would be wise to invest in our infrastructure. It would be great to create many, many more jobs. But we can't do that by running up another trillion dollars on our national debt. The details will matter. It's a big idea, it's certainly exciting and I look forward to seeing the debate.

HPI: Are you concerned about President Trump's temperament? It's 10:30 on a weekday morning and the leader of the free world is tweeting about Nordstroms and Ivanka's fashion line.

Messer: (Long pause). Not yet. I have the benefit of meeting him multiple times. Every time I've talked to him personally, he's been very affable. I do admit he's unconventional. He's not a Hoosier. He speaks in ways I don't speak. He says things I wouldn't say. Many everyday Hoosiers in my district love it. They appreciate he's pushing the status quo and the media, standing up to political correctness. I think ultimately he'll be judged by his results.

HPI: Saturday he accused his predecessor, basically, of a felony. Does that bother you?

Messer: I've seen no evidence suggesting President Obama wire-tapped Trump Tower.



HPI: Does the president telling the truth matter? Politifact and other media organizations have caught President Trump in more than 100 lies in his first weeks in office.

Messer: That bothers me. I've learned to hit the pause button and let a few days pass before I bring judgment. Let's go to a story from a few weeks ago. CNN alleges that Trump campaign officials colluded with Russians. The FBI Director Comey calls the White House saying that's not true, we have no evidence of that. There were stories for two days saying that it happened, the FBI director says it didn't happen. He contacts the White House chief of staff, who asked him, "Are you willing to release the information publicly to set the record straight?" And then the media attacks Reince Priebus for pressuring the FBI. That kind of double standard leaves Hoosiers yawning at the source of the story of the day about Mr. Trump's latest antics.

HPI: There seem to be a growing number of Trump campaign contacts with Russian intelligence. Does that bother you? Are the House and Senate intelligence committees the correct places to investigate this, or should there be a special prosecutor?

Messer: I think it's serious business and we need to get to the bottom of it. I am concerned to know what really happened.

HPI: Particularly when the French and German elections are facing the same thing. The same thing could happen here again in 2020.

Messer: For example, there's no question the Obama administration attempted to interfere in the Israeli election. They were actively campaigning against Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, funneling campaign dollars to his opponent. These things happen and we need to figure precisely what happened in America. I prefer to start that conversation with what we already do know, for example, there are no allegations the Russians released any information that was false. For example, when the Clinton campaign emails indicated Donna Brazile gave Hillary a heads-up before the debate with Bernie Sanders, it turned out that was true. When her campaign officials said arrogant things, it turns out those things were true. Also, there are no allegations in any way the Russians interfered with ballot boxes or vote totals. To say that Russian influence changed the result of the election is to say that Americans can change their mind. We need to get to the bottom of it. Now the problem with the special prosecutor is that we have decades of seeing special prosecutors being used for political reasons. It's very hard to look back at any time in modern American history and say, "Man, I'm really glad a special prosecutor happened." It's important we get to the bottom of it; we should do it through proper channels.

HPI: As opposed to channeling Ken Starr?

Messer: It's very different than what I've seen. But there's a bond between Donald Trump and the American people. I think ultimately he'll be judged by his results. When this starts to impact results, then it will be a much different question.

HPI: Are Joe Scarborough and other sources correct when they say that your Republican colleagues are freaking out about Trump and there's palpable fear?

Messer: I've not heard any expression of fear from anyone who didn't run against him in a primary.

HPI: The North Korean thing is alarming.

Messer: It's a really big deal.

HPI: This thing dovetails into the temperament thing, too. Does an unstable president have the nuclear codes at his disposal?

Messer: That little dictator is acting like a thug. He was acting like a thug long before Trump was running for president. I've been to Seoul. You can imagine Manhattan on a river 50 miles from that communist dictator with nuclear weapons, regularly firing off missiles, that threatens the world. It's a very big deal and has the potential to be an enormous humanitarian tragedy. We can't let that happen. How do you best work your way through it, through strength or through weakness? I prefer America



having a strong posture.

HPI: Will Dan Coats have the wherewithall and leverage to do his job as director of national intelligence?

This is another temperament issue. If I'm president, or I'm a new president, I want the intel services on my side.

Messer: He has surrounded himself with extraordinary people. Two are prominent Hoosiers, Mike Pence and Dan Coats. Rex Tillerson is a Fortune 2 CEO. I think it speaks well of Donald Trump's leadership. The question now is he going to allow all these generals to do their job? Initial few weeks ... makes it appear that he will. If he does, he's going to have a successful presidency. I have all the faith in the world with Dan Coats and (CIA Director) Mike Pompeo.

These are extraordinary people. Hardworking, integrity, experience. It gives me comfort.

HPI: How often are you in touch with Vice President Pence?

Messer: We text each other. He's got a really big job (laughing). I saw him last week at the Trump address to Congress. He talked before he went up there and put his poker face on for an hour. Before the speech Paul Ryan said his poker face was going to have to change from a slight frown to a slight smile because of the change in the presidency. ❖

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Trump's empty chairs

By MARK SOUDER

FORT WAYNE – As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump promised change, just as his predecessor Barack Obama had done. People generally want someone to blame for their problems, and we all choose different targets. I, for example, prefer to blame liberals.

"Draining the swamp" in a non-Washington context has historically meant the draining of swamps to control mosquito populations to combat malaria. Ronald Reagan is often credited with using the term in the political way to refer to the concentration of power in Washington, thus combining the historical swampy conditions of the governmental area of original Washington and likening the overuse of power to malaria. But he was not the first to do so.



Winfield Gaylord, a Milwaukee socialist politician, wrote in 1903: "Socialists are not satisfied with killing a few of the mosquitoes which come from the capitalist swamp, they want to drain the swamp."

Fellow socialist, journalist and politician Victor Berger of Milwaukee wrote in his *Berger's Broadides* (1912): "We should have to drain the swamp – change the capitalist system – if we want to get rid of those mosquitoes. Teddy Roosevelt, by starting a little fire here and there to drive them out, is simply disturbing them. He is causing them to swarm, which makes it so much more intolerable for us poor, innocent inhabitants of this big capitalist swamp." Hoosier socialist Eugene Debs credits Berger, the first Socialist member of Congress, with recruiting him to socialism.

Neither Reagan nor our current president meant draining the nation of capitalism. The problem with such aggressive attacks on the "establishment" is that the slope to the "swamp" becoming the institutions of our nation – a republic, capitalism – is very slippery.

Populism can quickly morph into calls for pure democracy (current attacks on the Electoral College by those who don't understand the difference between a democratic republic and a democracy) and advocating destruction of our economic system. Hence the fluidity of many Sanders-Trump voters in the past election. Anger and distrust carried to extremes unites the far left and far right. Both can promote concentration of power in a chief executive.

Matthew Continetti described the Trump approach well in *National Review*: "Rich as he might be, Donald Trump's candidacy was an exercise in populist confrontation and polarization. He ran against the Eastern establish-

ment of both parties with his opposition to comprehensive immigration reform, criticism of global trade, and repudiation of the foreign policies of the last two presidents. His blunt, uncouth, dramatic, untutored, brash, politically incorrect manner was about as far as one can get from elite habits of deference and groupthink. For decades, the nation's cultural and political elites treated him with disdain, disgust, or ironic fascination. Trump was the original deplorable."

In other words, three things defined Trump as the anti-establishment candidate: A few issues that defined his campaign; his style; and established Republican political leaders opposed him.

Trump confidant Roger Stone has released a new book titled, "The Making of the President 2016: How Donald Trump Orchestrated a Revolution." Stone is not a friend nor ally of mine, to say the least, but he is a brilliant strategic thinker and always a provocateur. Stone writes that Trump "understood that politics is about big issues, concepts, and themes, and that the voters didn't really care about wonkish detail. If they had, then Newt Gingrich would have been president."

The universe of different "selected facts" that many of the Trump core live in – some alternative facts and other "alternatives to facts" – is not the traditional supplement to the establishment media.

Human Events, a small conservative newspaper, was my first exposure to Barry Goldwater, Young Americans for Freedom and right-wing politics. William F. Buckley, Jr., *National Review*, and Conservative Book Club membership soon followed. Liberals had a similar world of left-wing publications and writers.

One of my mentors, M. Stanton Evans, wrote a book titled, "The Liberal Establishment." Vice-President Spiro Agnew spoke the words of speechwriters William Safire and Pat Buchanan that captured the views of millions of Americans, then and even more today. The memorable phrases included "the nattering nabobs of negativism" and "the hopeless, hysterical hypochondriacs of history." Even better was my favorite: "A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete core of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals." I believed it then and I believe it now, but I also realize that it was exaggerated for effect.

Brilliant rhetoric aside (no one has accused Safire or Buchanan of not being great writers), those of us in the alternative media universes still had enough faith in the facts behind the selective editing of traditional media that our preferred sources were supplemental, clarifying and correcting the establishment bias.

However, for a variety of reasons including the increasing slide of traditional media into the world of left-wing captured alternative media, much of the core Trump world has a worldview that has confused wishful thinking and rhetoric with reality. For those who actually hope that President Trump will succeed, this is the alarming fact: As of Feb. 27, of the 1,212 jobs that require Senate confirma-

tion, 14 had been filled. Few of the 4,000 other political appointed jobs have been filled with allies. His cabinet officials have a government mostly staffed by those who are hostile to implementing his executive orders and statements of principles.

His supporters, and perhaps the president himself, continue to confuse signing executive orders, making speeches, and tweeting with governing. They believe he has “accomplished things” already. But if he does not rapidly accelerate the pace of filling the government with

experienced allies – people who may not share all of his goals but will commit to helping him far more than those whose tactics will be to stall him for four years – not only will he fail to implement his agenda, but the blowback could actually put into power the populists who view our political and economic system as the problem.

In America, government is not done by a king. It is a team game. ❖

Souder is a former Republican congressman.

Watching 2 different countries on cable

By **TONY SAMUEL**

INDIANAPOLIS – We really are living in two different countries, if you watch the cable television shows every night. The good thing is most people have better things to do. When I got home Wednesday night, Fox News showed the headline, “FBI on Hunt for CIA Mole after Secrets Are Leaked.” At the same time, CNN’s headline read, “Pence Dodges Questions on Trump’s Wiretapping Claims.” The contrast in stories tells the story right there.



A few minutes later, Fox ran a report of an illegal immigrant who had been deported five times with over 20 arrests since 1990, who was intoxicated and smashed the car in which he was fleeing another accident. He also crashed into the car driven by Sandra Duran, a California woman who was a mother, daughter and sister, killing her instantly. This five-minute story could never paint the true tragedy so many family and friends must now live with forever.

Flip the channel and you would have found CNN covering the “A Day Without a Woman” event, like there is now a national holiday to bash the president. I couldn’t even bring myself to switch over to MSNBC. By the way, when is the “A Day Without Men” and can I pick the theme and events please? I can guarantee you we won’t be marching anywhere except to the best bars with the biggest big screens.

If you’re paying attention to most of the national media’s focus on tearing down the president, and all of the Russian talk amid all of the leaks, and now the bickering over the new health care plan, your mind is pretty boggled and you’re only getting a sliver of real news.

I did, however, catch a couple of interesting stories in the last week that actually made some sense of what we are witnessing. The Indianapolis Star reported on

the arrest of an Avon man, “Authorities say Avon man was a drug kingpin.” This was real news. Rafael Rojas-Reyes of Avon was one of the leaders of a ring that shipped drugs through Indiana to several states, according to the U.S. attorney’s office.

Sixteen members of this operation were arrested for delivering drugs to Indianapolis from Mexico and then to Lufkin, Texas; Reading, Pennsylvania; Queens, New York; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Columbus, Ohio; and Omaha, Nebraska; at times traveling with more than \$1 million, up to 50 kilograms of cocaine and up to 32 pounds of meth. They acquired the meth and cocaine from Mexico and arranged for it to be smuggled over the border, according to the indictment.

Federal and local law enforcement, including the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, the Carmel Police Department and the Indianapolis Metropolitan Drug Task Force worked together to bust the gang, which also had deadly violent encounters with a rival cartel.

So this was Indiana in the middle of a story of drugs being shipped over the border and distributed to small and big towns alike throughout our country, causing death and ruining lives. This report really hit home. This is the kind of story that doesn’t get the attention it deserves but it is about real life that affects us all – our friends, our neighbors, our children – and it is happening everywhere.

This is why President Trump recently signed executive orders to hire 5,000 additional border agents and 10,000 additional ICE agents, empowered state and local law enforcement to support federal enforcement of immigration law, and ended “catch and release” among other steps to secure our borders and stop the flow of drugs, gangs and violence. We’re hearing so much noise about the illegal immigration debate, but this story made it all make sense because this was in our back yard, straight from the border and with national implications. I for one appreciate that we now have a president who wants to take this issue head on and support law enforcement, and they appreciate that support.

The other story made sense to me because it supported what I’ve been saying and writing. The other morning, I watched a report on Morning Express where they interviewed four guys at a baseball bat factory in Plain

City, Ohio, on how President Trump was doing. They all had voted for him. The comments from the first guy were, "He's making a lot of progress. He's fulfilling a lot of his campaign promises so I'm encouraged that he's following through when most politicians don't."

The next guy said, "I feel like the Republicans in Congress aren't real happy because now they have to do something. They've got a president from their own party that's pretty driven to get his agenda and you know, they've been making excuses for years that they couldn't do it and couldn't do it and I think they're gonna have to put up now." They all supported his efforts.

This renewed my faith that most of real America – and how much more real America can you get than guys making baseball bats in a factory in a small town in Ohio – don't pay attention to the Oscars or the actors or the national media. Most Americans are watching the results and not the commentary. Those results are what matter for the families of victims like Sandra Duran and to Hoosiers and all Americans fighting to stop the scourge of illegal drugs in our communities. ❖

Samuel is president of Samuel Solutions and was vice chairman of the Trump Indiana campaign.

Mayor Buttigieg's political future

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg raised a half million dollars in six weeks for his campaign for chair of the Democratic Party. He received widespread favorable news coverage. Then he dropped out before the first ballot. Here are some questions about that, with what Buttigieg and others say about his bid to lead the party.



Q. Why did he drop out?

A. "If either of the others (frontrunners Tom Perez and Keith Ellison) was going to come in shy of 200 (votes) on the first ballot, then even with a very modest total, there would be a path for us," said Buttigieg. "When we saw that wasn't going to happen, I certainly didn't want to prolong it, create

multiple rounds for my own benefit."

Q. Was he offered a deal?

A. "Early on, people would kind of sniff around about what I really wanted, some kind of deal that would convince me to step out," Buttigieg said. "But I think over time we made clear that I was simply in this because I thought it was the right thing for the party. So, there was no deal at the end. I didn't do this because I needed a job at the DNC. I have a perfectly good and compelling day job right here in South Bend."

Q. What did national pundits say?

A. Chris Cillizza of the Washington Post, in picking winners and losers, cited two winners: Perez, who was elected chair, and Buttigieg, described by Cillizza as the "most dynamic candidate in the race."

Q. But how can you win by dropping out?

A. Dropping out was smart, Cillizza theorized, because Buttigieg "wasn't likely to come close to either Perez

or Ellison, and that might have slowed the momentum and buzz he clearly built in the race."

Q. Momentum for what?

A. There is speculation that the mayor could run for governor or the U.S. Senate and some day for even higher office.

Q. So, what will he run for?

A. Buttigieg says that he has no detailed game plan but responds to situations as they develop. For example, neither he nor anyone else thought just months ago that he would run for national Democratic chair. Governor isn't up until 2020. A Senate seat without a Democrat already there isn't up until 2022. He won't run for the House. So, who knows?

Q. Could he use what's left of that half million in running for a third term as mayor?

A. "I don't know," Buttigieg says. He isn't sure how much is left and whether it could be used in a local race. "But we've raised money into the mayoral re-elect campaign," he quickly adds. "And that's got a pretty healthy amount in the tank. We're certainly prepared for 2019."

Q. Would he really consider a third term?

A. "Some said I wouldn't finish my first term," Buttigieg said. "They don't realize how compelling this job is for me. It's my hometown. It's a really extraordinary moment in the life of our city. I mean, this decade is going to go down in the history of South Bend and be really special."

Q. Were all of his South Bend constituents pulling for him to be elected chair?

A. No. Most were hoping for his success. But many weren't because they want him to stay as mayor.

Q. Which wing of the party was Buttigieg with?

A. He sought a stance between the Obama/Clin-ton side and Bernie Sanders supporters, hoping for a path up through the middle. That path just wasn't there in a Democratic Party still divided over what happened in 2016.

❖

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

Holcomb resists raid of rainy fund for roads

WEST LAFAYETTE – There was a lot of talk Wednesday about the future of the state’s infrastructure at the Purdue Road School. Purdue President and former Gov. Mitch Daniels spoke alongside current Gov. Eric Holcomb about the issue (Hardin, WLFI-TV). Many people want to know how Indiana is planning on beefing up infrastructure, and more importantly how they are going to pay for it. “We’re talking about a 20-year plan, and it’s more than a \$20 billion question,” Holcomb said. One of the options that has been on the table this legislative session is increasing the gas tax. Another regards spending the massive surplus Indiana has built up during both Daniels and Mike Pence’s time in office. Holcomb said using that to fix roads is not an option right now. “I am not one who wants to raid our rainy day fund for a one-time high and jeopardize our AAA credit rating,” Holcomb said. “I’m not one who wants to borrow and bond, and simply tax someone else in the future.



Purdue President Mitch Daniels and Gov. Eric Holcomb discuss long-term road funding at the Purdue Road School on Wednesday.

it does. It does not expand anymore,” he said.

Senate kills farm feeding bill

A controversial confined animal feeding bill has hit a wall in the state Senate (Kelly, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). Fort Wayne Republican Senate President Pro Tem David Long assigned the measure to the Rules Committee - a place where legislation generally is sent to die. “It’s where I parked it for now. It may stay there,” he said. “I think it’s just bad legislation.” Rep. Dave Wolkins, R-Warsaw, authored House Bill 1494 and has called it a streamlining of the regulatory process for factory farms raising hundreds or thousands of animals. But confusion reigned in committee and on the House floor about what the bill actually does. It just passed the House chamber 66-25. Opponents argue it limits notice to neighbors for expansions of a confined animal feeding operation, as well as other changes. “I don’t see the value in that at all,”

Behning, ISTA differ on voucher impacts

Testimony on a proposed expansion of state-funded pre-kindergarten took center stage Wednesday at the Statehouse (McGowan, Inside Indiana Business). Most participants were in favor of a heavier investment into pre-k. Some, including the Indiana State Teacher’s Association called for removal of measures involving school vouchers. ISTA Public Education Advocacy Coordinator Roni Embry argued that some language amounts to a voucher expansion, which would be “fiscally irresponsible.” During his closing statement in the Senate Chamber, Representative Bob Behning (R-91) attempted to clarify some of the discussions about voucher provisions in House Bill 1004. “I think there’s been a lot of misinformation from some of the people that came up and testified. Where they would say that this opens it up to lifetime voucher access. This does not open it up. If the income level continues to be eligible as current law says, in terms of income eligibility, that’s all

Long said, noting neighbors deserve notice and the chance to be heard during the permit process.

House panel weighs Gary School takeover

State representatives appeared likely to support a financial takeover of the Gary Community School Corp. after learning firsthand Wednesday the depth of its seemingly insurmountable budget crisis (Carden, NWI Times). State Sen. Eddie Melton, D-Merrillville, led off a three-hour discussion at the House Ways and Means Committee by explaining that the district has \$100 million in debt, including \$30 million borrowed from the state’s Common School Fund, and expenses are on track to outpace revenue every year going forward. Melton’s Senate Bill 567, which passed the Senate 49-0, would give a state-appointed emergency manager near-absolute authority to reduce spending, rewrite contracts and oversee all financial matters for up to five years, or until the school district no longer is distressed. The committee chairman, state Rep. Tim Brown, R-Crawfordsville, and state Rep. Hal Slager, R-Schererville,

also suggested the measure might need to be revised to set definite financial targets for the emergency manager to meet.

Unable to pay critical bills and facing a potential long-term payroll shortage, Gary schools is expected to seek a \$14 million loan from the the Distressed Unit Appeals Board on Friday (Colias, Post-Tribune). The cash-strapped district is hoping to get some temporary relief from its dire financial status to cover payments to its more than 700 employees through the end of the year and critical vendors including the Internal Revenue Service, NIPSCO, the Illinois Central Bus Co., and insurance providers. In a letter addressed to DUAB chairman Micah Vincent dated on Feb. 24, state-appointed district fiscal manager Jack Martin wrote he believed that it faced few choices after its recent setbacks of a failed \$8 million November referendum, declining enrollment and a \$1.5 million drop in property tax revenue in 2016 from the prior year. If approved, nearly \$12 million would be used to cover payroll and vendors from March to June.

Solar bill draws heat

Legislation that threw shade on homegrown solar power energized Hoosiers so much that the bill's author

stripped its most politically charged provisions, but even the rewired bill left some solar advocates hot (Stafford, Indiana Lawyer). "I've had more constituent contacts on this bill this session than any other bill," Senate Minority Leader Tim Lanane, D-Anderson, said during a Senate Utilities Committee hearing Feb. 23 on Senate Bill 309. In its original form, solar users said they would have been required to sell all the power generated by their solar panels back to their utility company, from which they would have to repurchase the power at retail cost. Sen. Jim Tomes, R-Wadesville, said a standing-room-only crowd greeted him at a town hall meeting, largely because of SB 309. A revised SB 309 that conditionally grandfathered current users passed the Senate 39-9 on Feb. 27. Sen. Brandt Hershman, author of the bill, said in an email that he told stakeholders after the bill was introduced that he intended to amend it to address concerns, and he did so.

Lawmakers build Habitat home

Lawmakers are doing some heavy lifting at the Statehouse today, but it has nothing to do with any bill (Rader & Milz, WTHR-TV). The first-ever Habitat for Humanity build on the Statehouse grounds took place Wednesday. ❖



Indiana's road funding dilemma over time

By **CRAIG DUNN**

KOKOMO – Please forgive me for being Mr. Obvious here, but Indiana's highways didn't just begin to crumble last year and our bridges didn't just start falling down at the same time. The deterioration of infrastructure



begins the day a new highway is completed or a new bridge erected. Anyone driving around the Hoosier State over the past 10 years knows that roads and bridges have been getting progressively more in need of repair.

Why then, in the name of Harold Handley's ghost, did we just notice last year that we had a problem? Well, sure, there was the impending collapse of the bridge on I-69 at

Lafayette to focus attention on the issue, but surely someone in the Indiana Legislature had to notice the potential problem before then.

One would have expected Dolan Dirtdragger, Indiana Highway Department employee for the Pulaski County district, to have gone to his boss and told him, "Hey, Earnest, you know that bridge out on 250 West and Sewer's Creek has got this darn blamed gigantic crack in it. You better tell your boss to go see Gov. Pence and have him send us \$457 for an extra-large bucket of Bondo!"

Let's face it, not every road and bridge went to pot at the same time. Somebody knew something at some time and failed to tell someone about some things.

The ugly truth about the infrastructure repair legislation slowly making its way through the Indiana General Assembly is that if the governor and the Indiana Legislature had not eliminated Indiana's inheritance tax, cut corporate tax rates and cut personal income tax rates over the past five years, there would currently be no need for a new source of revenue to pay for repairs to highways and bridges. In retrospect, the tax cuts seem short-sighted.

Make no mistake about it, I love a good tax cut. I don't like government sticking their greedy little mitts in my pocket any more than the next guy. It just doesn't make sense to me to cut taxes, brag about it, cut taxes, brag about it, cut taxes, brag about it and then jack up taxes and try and explain it away. I'm sure the voters liked it in 2014 and 2016, but based on the social media that I've been reading, they are fit to be tied about a prospective inflation-adjusting gasoline tax increase and an increase in the cost of acquiring COPD.

Well, that's all water over the dam as they say in Oroville. We can't go back and change things now, even

though it may look silly to taxpayers to be getting a miniscule tax cut on personal incomes in 2017, only to see it whisked away by an increased cost of driving, courtesy of our elected public servants.

Just shuffling around our state budget in an effort to find \$1 billion for highway and bridge repair is not an option as offered up by the "never tax me again" coalition. I'm pretty confident that most of the wasted spending of past Democratic administrations has been flushed out. Gov. Daniels did a great job of taking a meat cleaver to a lot of sacred spending cows. No, Republicans have cut things pretty much down to the bone. Unless we want to see Indiana University try and replicate this basketball season with a coaching staff paid less, we better leave current spending levels alone.

Spending has to go up if we want to drive without finding our vehicles and ourselves fighting to get out of a pothole near Plevna or one of Indiana's enchanting little streams, creeks (that's crick to those of you south of U.S. 40) or rivers. Come to think of it, and this might really appeal to Eric Miller, we could change the name of the Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge in Pike County to the Baptism Bridge. Any increase in autos dropping into the White River due to the deteriorating bridge could then be attributed to the Rapture. But I digress.

My only problem with an increase in the gasoline tax is that it will hit lower-income Hoosiers much harder than the affluent. I'm pretty sure that I won't much notice the tax increase nor care much about it if I do. However, there are many Hoosiers living on the cusp of poverty who will feel the sting of a gas tax increase. A \$5-a-week increase in gasoline cost means quite a bit to someone who doesn't have the five bucks.

I will forever remember the man whom I wrote about last spring, who was getting gas next to me at Kroger and could only put \$10 worth in his tank, who wondered out loud why President Obama wouldn't open up the Keystone Pipeline. I would rather forgo my income tax cut and keep that money in the state till.

Unfortunately, Indiana Republicans have made so much political hay by touting tax cuts over the last five years that it is not politically feasible to just say "Oops" and restore taxes to their previous levels. Thus, in that massive legislative sausage grinder in the State House, a big tax increase becomes a use fee. Ah, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet!

I'm proud that our Indiana Legislature is fiscally responsible. I'm happy that they have erred to the side of cutting taxes in the past. I just wish our state government, as well as all levels of government, would begin to take the strategic long view and avoid future short-term politically expedient gestures that make for great bumper stickers but questionable public policy. ❖

Dunn is the former Howard County Republican chairman.

Teaching sex through lens of abstinence creates problems

By **CHRISTINA HALE**

INDIANAPOLIS – People from the beginning of recorded time have noted that human intercourse, sex, can feel really good. It usually doesn't cost anything, and people have been doing it for years, in fact, this is how we have populated the planet. It is going to continue to happen, even when circumstances are less than ideal. Yet our attitudes toward it can be very impractical and public policy can actually bring harm. In Indiana, sexual education can only be taught in public school through the lens of abstinence. Abstinence only for disease prevention. Abstinence only for pregnancy prevention.



While well-intentioned, this strategy leaves out a great deal of necessary information, like how to protect yourself from or get help after violent encounters in an age-appropriate way.

These good intentions, intentions presumed to cut back on promiscuity, lead to all kinds of problems.

To be fair, we do need to do something. Eighty-two percent of teen pregnancies are unplanned. The Guttmacher Institute claims that in spite of improvements over 20 years, the United States still has the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates in the industrialized world. In fact, rates of teen pregnancy in the United States are two to six times higher than those in most of Western Europe, including France, Holland, Denmark, and Sweden.

In South Carolina, State Rep. Mia McLeoda just filed a bill that got my attention. Rep. McLeoda wants to do something about promiscuity in her home state. She suggests that a man seeking Viagra, Cialis or any other drug intended to treat ED would have to cool his heels for a 24-hour waiting period, submit a notarized affidavit from at least one sexual partner affirming that the patient has experienced symptoms of ED within the last 90 days, be examined by a state-licensed sexual therapist to make sure his ED isn't "attributable solely to one or more psychological conditions" and attend three sessions of outpatient counseling within six months, "including sexual counseling and resources for patients to pursue celibacy as a viable lifestyle choice."

Others have suggested that single men should not be eligible for such medications, and that married men should obtain the written permission of their wives.

A recent study in Indiana conducted by the IUPUI

School of Global Public Health Communications tells us that two-thirds of the time, sexual violence happens in a child's household. Evidence is also clear that those that have experienced this kind of violence in childhood tend to be more promiscuous in early adulthood. For these and other good reasons, perhaps we should acknowledge that it is beyond time to develop more thoughtful and realistic public policy that will truly address these kinds of problems.

Rep. McLeoda is getting cute but she makes a great point: The practical costs of promiscuity are everyone's problem, and thinking in creative ways are worth considering. We also need to be thinking in particular about challenged populations like children in foster care. As high as the rate of unintended pregnancies (and sexual transmitted infections, for that matter) is among American teenagers in general, it is far higher among the subset of youth who age out of foster care.

A staggering 71% of the young women in the University of Chicago's "Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth" reported having been pregnant by age 21. Further, "Repeat pregnancies were more the rule than the exception. Among those who had ever been pregnant, 62 percent had been pregnant more than once. By comparison, only one-third of the Add Health females (the comparison group) had ever been pregnant and a majority of those who had been pregnant reported they had been pregnant only once."


Even more concerning, half of the young men in the Midwest study reported that they had gotten a female pregnant, compared with 19% of their comparison group counterparts.

Let's begin an adult conversation about how we can do better by our young people in trouble here in Indiana. They deserve better information, and taxpayers deserve public policy that will save both the human and financial costs of naivety. ❖

Hale was the 2016 Democratic lieutenant governor nominee and a former state representative.

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

Buncich-McDermott feud elects Wieser

By RICH JAMES

MERRILLVILLE – Lake County Sheriff John Buncich and Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. don't especially like each other. That's not about to change any time soon.



That disdain was emphasized in the days leading up to last Saturday's election of a new Democratic county chairman. The two candidates for the job were Hammond's Mike Repay, a county commissioner, and Schererville attorney Jim Wieser. Wieser and Repay campaigned for more than two months to win the favor of 523 precinct committeemen and their vice committeemen.

But the campaign came down to the final three days.

On Thursday, Buncich, the outgoing chairman, sent a letter to the committeemen and their vices. In the letter, Buncich essentially said he had been the only effective county chairman in recent years and said the party should elect Wieser as his replacement. The only problem is that Buncich replaced McDermott as chairman, and the

Hammond mayor took that as an insult.

The timing couldn't have been better for McDermott, who has a show on local radio every Friday morning. McDermott used his time on the radio that morning to slam Buncich. And the Hammond mayor also lashed out at Wieser for accepting the support of Buncich, who is under federal indictment. Wieser was born and raised in Hammond and was counting on a good bit of support from there, even though Repay is a Hammond resident and comes from a long line of Hammond politicians. McDermott's radio tirade worked and swung most of the Hammond vote to Repay.

What McDermott ultimately did was throw the caucus into a tie vote at 305 each. Buncich had the last laugh and cast the tie-breaking vote for Wieser. Wieser said he and Repay departed the convention as friends and pledged to work together for the good of the party. Wieser took it a step further and said he will name Repay the 1st District representative to the Indiana Democratic Central Committee.

While Wieser will serve a four-year term, Repay's day will come. At 41, he represents the future of the party. At 69, Wieser has 50 years of knowledge to rebuild the organization. ❖

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

Rankings aren't often worth much

By MORTON MARCUS

INDIANAPOLIS – When I first came to Indiana, nearly a half century ago, I found a study in the IU library declaring South Bend as the best place to live in the Midwest. It wasn't surprising, since the author was a professor at a campus in South Bend. That's what it is about rankings. Pick your criteria carefully and you can make Hell the most desirable location for permanent residency.



Last week, several Hoosier newspapers carried a story from U.S. News & World Report ranking Indiana's government first among the 50 states. Actually, it wasn't government, it was state government finance, but that could not stop some headline

writers. The governor was pleased by this national recognition and promised to keep up the good work. We could not expect him to say otherwise.

Four factors gave us these laurels. First, fiscal

stability was worth 50 percent for low pension liabilities, high state credit ratings, and revenues exceeding expenditures in the state budget. No mention of local government finances for cities and towns, counties, and schools. We ranked eighth in this factor; North Dakota was first. In contrast, a report from the Mercatus Center at George Mason University ranked Indiana 17th in fiscal solvency.

Second, worth 17 percent in the scoring, was budget transparency or the ease with which the public may find the state budget on line. Indiana ranked first, but tied with Ohio, Michigan and Oregon.

Third, was digitization or how well a state uses technology to reach policy goals and expand capacity. This also was weighted at 17 percent. Five states tied for first place. Indiana was among the next four states, each of which tied for sixth place.

Finally, we tied with four other states in 25th place for state integrity, which includes "electoral oversight, public access to information, lobbying disclosure, state civil service management and ethics enforcement agencies." This factor too was worth 17 percent in the rankings.

Are these four factors what you think is important about state government? To me the outputs of government are more important than the inputs. Yes, transparency is desired, but not nearly as much as quality in education where we ranked 27th, with pre-K to 12 ranking 11th

and higher education 47th. We were 20th in infrastructure and 41st in health care.

Indiana's overall ranking was ignored until further down in the articles. Then we learned Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Minnesota were the top three states, with Indiana coming in 22nd place. Flanking us was Ohio (11th place) and Illinois (47th). On the bottom of the stack were Arkansas, Louisiana, and finally, Mississippi. However, all this can be put aside now as dozens of colleges and universities battle for the title "Number One" in basketball. Naturally, the Hoosier state will be "Number One" when Butler, Indiana, Notre Dame and Purdue all make the final four. ❖

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

Harder to be a citizen

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – Many sources of information today cater to a narrow political view, making no pretense of objectivity. Their goal is to incite, not inform. What's needed is a common base of knowledge we can use to forge agreement.



The job of being a citizen, and being a member of Congress, has gotten much harder of late. As sources of information proliferate and "news" not actually grounded in fact grows common on social media, Americans have to work to sort reality from fiction and insight from disinformation. This is a challenge for our representative

democracy. And we've only begun to grapple with it.

Why should too much information be a problem? Let's start with what I consider to be the most important skill in a representative democracy – not just in government, but within private organizations as well – building consensus. Without forging agreement among people who see the world differently, it's difficult to move governments and organizations forward.

The first step in arriving at a consensus is agreeing on the relevant facts. If you've ever watched your city council at work, or served on a civic committee, or even lobbied to get a stop sign put in or the speed limit changed on your street, you know this is the case. Without a common base of facts on which everyone agrees – the nature and extent of a problem, whom it affects and how – it's almost impossible to arrive at solutions that will be widely accepted.

This came home forcefully to me after the Sept.

11 attacks, when I was vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission, which was expertly chaired by Tom Kean, the former governor of New Jersey. There were 10 of us on the commission, five Republicans and five Democrats, and though we were not a highly partisan group, in those highly charged times the potential for crippling disagreement was always there. So Chairman Kean and I got in the habit early on of asking the highly competent staff to provide us with the main facts on every issue we confronted. It was only by working hard to get agreement on those facts that we could move toward an agreement on recommendations. But that was a small and, by today's political standards, relatively homogeneous group; building consensus was challenging, but not impossible. The larger and more diverse the institution – the United States Congress, for instance – the more difficult the task becomes.

Think for a moment about today's information/misinformation environment. Citizens look everywhere for news. They get it from teachers, religious leaders, and special interest groups. They hear it from friends, family, and neighbors. They find it on TV, talk radio, at the movies, and on late-night comedy shows. In other words, news does not just come from the news media.

Too much of what citizens hear or read today is incorrect or incomplete, and even the most "objective" of sources has a bias. A member of Congress meeting with a group of constituents might find that each comes to the table with deeply held beliefs based on "information" from completely different, conflicting sources.

Then, too, plenty of sources today cater to a single, narrow political view with no pretense of objectivity. Their goal is to incite, not to inform. They drive the American people apart, rather than giving us a common base of knowledge we can use to forge agreement.

So what's to be done? I confess, I don't know. The moves made by some social media platforms and news organizations to fact-check stories and public claims are important. Relying on the work of credible, non-partisan organizations is also helpful; for federal tax and spending issues, for instance, the work of the Congressional Budget Office comes to mind. Broad public awareness that we have a problem to overcome and encouraging critical thinking in schools and in public discourse also matter.

Still, solving the problem will take a concerted effort. Learning how to seek more diverse views, restoring confidence in public dialogue, finding sources and platforms that win broad acceptance as grounded in reliability and reality, all these will be important.

We live in a time of excessive polarization, mean-spirited politics, and invasive partisanship. Working within that environment to solve these problems is a challenge. I don't see an answer, but I do see and applaud the individuals and groups beginning to work on it. The future of our representative democracy rides on their success. ❖

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Matt Tully, IndyStar: It seems quite reasonable to consider the possibility that Donald J. Trump will leave the presidency at some point before the end of his current term. Will he quit in a historic huff? Will he be pushed out by Congress? Or will he be lured away to host a reality show on Russian TV? I don't know. For now, the last line of this book seems easier to imagine than all the pages before it. And while I don't dispute the possibility that I could be wrong, the increasingly paranoid, reckless, authoritarian and generally unstable behavior of our new president makes it hard to see how the country or his own party sustains four years of this. With that in mind, I've been thinking a lot lately about the president Mike Pence would be. As the great actor Albert Brooks put it on Twitter over the weekend, amid Trump's latest conspiracy theory outburst: "President Mike Pence. The president, Mike Pence. President Pence ... I was just practicing."

It's probably something worth practicing, and pondering. Seriously, is it really that hard to imagine a scenario in which Trump, who long ago lost his grip on facts and calmness, loses his grip on or interest in the presidency? Not for me. President Pence — hey, who knows? Now I'll never argue that I know the vice president in any significant way — he never even sent me an email from his famed AOL account. He was the kind of guy who would invite media types like me out for breakfast or lunch to chat one on one, and then stick pretty close to his political shtick while occasionally giving you a glimpse of a real person. I never left thinking I knew him. He seemed far too polished for that. But those of us who toil in Indiana politics were able to see the nation's number two up close when he was a candidate for governor and then governor. At his best, we saw him forge impressive deals, such as his Medicaid agreement with the Obama administration and his push for the state government's first investment in preschool. And we saw him at his ideological worst, such as when he killed a federal preschool grant application or when he signed an abortion bill everyone knew would be struck down. Obviously, the Mike Pence story was thoroughly debated and discussed last year. In recent weeks, though, amid various Trump meltdowns and mistakes, it seems like conversations about Pence have centered on one certain question. It's a question that has been posed to me by several people, and debated by many more on social media. Would a President Pence be any better than President Trump? Excuse my language but ... hell, yes. Here's the bottom line: Whether you reside on the political right or the left, or anywhere in the middle, Pence would be an upgrade. ❖

Josh Rogin, Washington Post: The role and influence of the vice president, not enshrined in any law, is determined in any administration by three things: His direct relationship with the president, his building of a per-

sonal portfolio of issues, and the effectiveness of his team. When it comes to foreign policy, Vice President Pence is quietly succeeding on all three fronts. Inside an administration that is characterized by several power centers, Pence must navigate complex internal politics while serving a president who has an unconventional view of foreign policy and the United States' role in the world. Pence, a traditional hawk influenced heavily by his Christian faith, is carefully and deliberately assuming a stance that fits within the president's agenda while respecting the prerogatives of other senior White House aides who also want to play large foreign policy roles, according to White House officials, lawmakers and experts. But Pence's growing influence on foreign policy is increasingly evident.

The vice president was deployed to Europe last month to reassure allies that the United States will stay committed to alliances such as NATO, despite President Trump's calls for Europeans to pay more for common defense. During Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's recent visit, Trump announced that Pence and his Japanese counterpart would lead a new dialogue on U.S.-Japan economic cooperation. "The vice president seems to be building on his foreign affairs experience, finding a niche in that arena," said House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Tex.), who served with Pence in Congress. "He brings a level-headed steady hand to the foreign policy of the administration. He's also building up his own team." Inside the White House, Pence is in the room during most of the president's interactions with world leaders. He receives the presidential daily brief. As head of the transition, he was instrumental in bringing several traditionally hawkish Republicans into the top levels of the administration's national security team, including Director of National Intelligence-designate Dan Coats, CIA Director Mike Pompeo and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley. ❖

David Horsey, Los Angeles Times: The Europeans have good reason to be freaked out by Donald Trump. And they aren't the only ones. The toughest job facing America's new foreign policy team is explaining away the impulsive and impolitic musings of our country's tweeter-in-chief. Donald Trump appears unable to summon the self-discipline needed to keep himself from saying things that make other nations nervous. Europeans, in particular, are alarmed by Mr. Trump's recent characterization of the European Union as a mere "vehicle for Germany" and his unchecked enthusiasm for Brexit which he sees as a not-unwelcome sign of a disintegrating EU. At the recent European security conference in Munich, Vice President Mike Pence assured U.S. allies that American support for Europe remains as strong as ever and that Mr. Trump was not about to abandon America's commitment to NATO in favor of his bromance with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Nevertheless, one reporter asked the logical question: Who should be believed, Mr. Pence or Mr. Trump? ❖



Randolph will challenge Zody

INDIANAPOLIS — Citing that his party needs to a better job with diversity on its statewide ticket, State Senator Lonnie Randolph announced today he was challenging incumbent Jon Zody for Chairman of the Indiana Democratic Party (Abdul, IndyPolitics). The East Chicago Democrat says his party ignored calls for a more diverse ticket in 2016 and cited how Republican Attorney General Curtis Hill, an African-American, was the highest vote-getter on the ballot. In the last six statewide elections, Democrats have only nominated one African-American on the statewide ticket. Randolph also says the party ignored Democrats who had new and fresh ideas. Randolph faces somewhat of an uphill battle as Zody enjoys the support of U.S. Senator Joe Donnelly, Congressman Andre Carson, and Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett.



Hill predicts drug crisis will worsen

INDIANAPOLIS — Problems with drugs and related crimes are not going to get any better in the near future, Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill said (de la Bastide, Anderson Herald Bulletin). Hill spoke Tuesday at the annual Republican Lincoln Day dinner in which former Indiana State Police Superintendent John Shettle received the club's Lincoln Award. The attorney general, who took office in January, said he planned to be engaged daily with what is taking place in the state. Hill was critical of efforts to legalize marijuana in Indiana for medical use. "People are saying it's time to legalize marijuana," he said. "Do you want more children smoking dope?" Hill said the argument that legalizing marijuana will increase tax revenues has not proven to be the case in Colorado where there is a huge black market in the dealing of the drug

to avoid paying taxes. "People that start on marijuana progress to more dangerous drugs," he said. "There is opiate abuse and the overprescribing of pain killers which is leading to an increase in heroin use." The state needs a comprehensive plan to stop the flow of drugs into the state, treatment programs and, most importantly, prevention, Hill said. Vanderburgh County Coroner Steve Lockyear told the Evansville Courier & Press, that he investigated 29 heroin deaths in 2016. "It's unbelievable," Lockyear said. "It has not appeared to slow down at all. I regretfully am concerned that we're going to exceed that number this year."

Huntsman tapped as Moscow envoy

WASHINGTON — A White House official says former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. is President Donald Trump's choice to be the next U.S. ambassador to Russia (TIME). Huntsman will be nominated for the diplomatic post as senior members of Trump's administration face questions about their contacts with the Russian government.

Mayors push for broadband

BLOOMINGTON — Mayor John Hamilton recently joined 64 other mayors and city officials in signing a letter to the president and Congress about the importance of broadband infrastructure in communities across the nation (Bloomington Herald-Times). Next Century Cities, the letter's architect, is a bipartisan organization that seeks to support community leaders in establishing community-wide access to fast, affordable and reliable internet. Addressed to President Donald Trump, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan, the letter outlines three priorities for a federal infrastructure plan including broadband service: access, affordability and local solutions for connectivity.

"As we continue the process of bringing Gigabit-class fiber optic broadband to Bloomington, I am proud to be a part of this national commitment to the importance of broadband infrastructure nationwide," Hamilton said in a release. The press release also said the 65 signatures from community leaders across the nation represent nearly 16 million Americans. Indiana signers outside of Bloomington include Mayor Norm Yoder of Auburn, and Town Manager Bernard Doyle of Chesterton.

Muslims threatened at Indiana State

TERRE HAUTE — An email sent to the campus of Indiana State University from the office of Public Safety reports police are investigating threats made to the Muslim community (WTHI-TV). A report was made to Indiana State University Police. The threats were written by an unknown email source threatening Muslim faculty.

Pivotal groups oppose RyanCare

WASHINGTON — Pivotal industry and consumer groups mounted intensifying opposition to the Republican health care bill as GOP leaders labored Wednesday to rally a divided party behind their high-stakes overhaul drive (Associated Press). Lawmakers cast Congress' initial votes on the legislation as House Speaker Paul Ryan praised the proposal as "what good, conservative health care reform looks like." The American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association and AARP were arrayed against the GOP measure. Seven years ago their backing was instrumental in enacting President Obama's health care statute. The hospitals — major employers in many districts — wrote lawmakers complaining about the bill's cuts in Medicaid and other programs and said more uninsured Americans seem likely, adding, "We ask Congress to protect our patients."