114th Indiana General Assembly

Senator Tim Skinner

RESIDENCE
5899 Devonald Avenue
Terre Haute, IN 47805
812-466-7165

STATEHOUSE
200 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204
317-232-9523

ONLINE
S38@IN.gov
www.IN.gov/S38

For complete bill information and committee hearing dates, visit the General Assembly's web site at: www.in.gov/legislative/

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Dear Friends:

The forces of mother nature definitely left its mark on 2005. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita proved this a few months ago when they brought about unimaginable destruction and loss of life throughout the Gulf Coast. But in the face of these catastrophic storms, it was very uplifting to hear about the many acts of kindness and generosity of so many Americans.

I was very proud of how quickly our state took action to provide assistance. Within days of Hurricane Katrina, Operation Hoosier Relief, Indiana's disaster-assistance team, deployed National Guardsmen, Natural Resource Conservation Officers, law enforcement teams, medical personnel and other volunteers to aid in recovery efforts.

Here in Indiana, tornadoes ripped through parts of the state in November which also took a heavy toll. The outpouring of help and financial aid from local citizens, businesses and Hoosiers throughout the state was of great assistance to those most hurt by these storms. As we begin to rebound and rebuild, I hope this spirit of giving continues.

The Senate will convene January 9th for the short session of this General Assembly which must conclude business by March 14th. Many issues will come before us including a look at our state's emergency management plans to determine if there is anything we need to do legislatively to better prepare us to take quick action in the event of a future disaster.

Senate Democrats will continue to push for initiatives to provide additional funding for education. Many schools were shortchanged under the current state budget and are struggling to meet the needs of students and teachers. We will also be reviewing proposals dealing with property tax relief, energy cost assistance and transportation funding.

I hope you will take time to respond to my '06 legislative survey located inside this newsletter. Having your input on these important issues will help me when making decisions on the many proposals that will be considered.

It is a pleasure to serve the citizens of Senate District 38. I hope you will take time to contact me by mail, phone or email to express your views on pending legislation or if I can provide assistance to you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Wishing you a healthy and happy New Year,

Tim Skinner

Representing Senate District 38
including Vigo, Vermillion, Parke and Warren Counties

Investing in our kids

Heading into next session, there are many important issues facing the General Assembly. However, one that we must confront is continuing to find ways to improve our schools and invest in our children.

Because we believe that providing a world-class education should be Indiana's top priority, Senate Democrats plan to propose a comprehensive early childhood development initiative entitled *Every Child Matters*. Aimed at closing the state's growing achievement gap, we believe this proposal can be fully implemented without raising any taxes.

Highlights of this initiative include a plan to phase in statewide full-day kindergarten by 2010; creating a public-private partnership to promote early childhood reading; conducting an independent study to determine what it actually costs to appropriately educate children; establishing Education Innovation Grants to encourage schools to develop new programs and curriculum; and creating a statewide bulk purchasing pool so schools can join together to buy supplies and equipment at reduced prices.

These are common sense approaches that would help to strengthen our communities, grow our economy and improve the lives of all Hoosiers. Investing in the success of the next generation of Hoosiers is one of the best investments we can make, and we hope you will join us by expressing your support of the *Every Child Matters* proposal.

Privatization

Should the state be moving in this direction?

Change was expected upon the arrival of the new administration last January. In some cases, change may be needed, but a trend has emerged that is disturbing for many Hoosiers. The favored tool now being utilized is that of privatization.

Several areas of state government have already been handed over to private companies including the food service for all state prisons and the operation of the New Castle correctional facility. State hospitals, which care for some of our most vulnerable Hoosiers, have also been slotted for privatization as well as Indiana's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamp and Medicaid programs. This administration is also exploring whether to allow private businesses to log in our state forests, operate the inns at our state parks and take control of the I-80/90 Toll Road.

Privatization raises many concerns. Out-of-state companies are awarded huge state contracts, but despite the fact that these contracts are paid for by our tax dollars there is virtually no public oversight of their performance. These businesses are not required to follow the same open record laws as state agencies.

When state government privatizes certain functions, the quality and eligibility of those that need services can be diminished. The public has no idea how the programs are operating, the number of people who are getting services or the amount of compensation that company executives are receiving in salaries and benefits. It is hard to see how the public can be assured that its tax dollars are being used wisely unless there is total accountability. In addition, we know that privatizing such things as welfare has failed in other states including Wisconsin and Colorado.

Instead of trying to fix problems from within state agencies, the governor has instead chosen to take risks through privatization. Countless state employees may lose their jobs or be forced to take positions with new private contractors at lower wages with fewer or no benefits.

This is a serious issue that could potentially have a major impact on the lives of thousands of Hoosiers. With the governor's propensity to lean toward privatization, it is likely that legislation will be considered that will call for a review of any plans to turn over control of state services to private vendors.

Serve as a Student Page

Serving as a Page for a day with the Indiana General Assembly is an excellent educational opportunity for students.

- Students between the ages of 12 and 18 are eligible to apply.
- Students can participate for one day assisting with various legislative activities.
- Being a Page for a day is an excused absence from school.
- Interested students should write, call or email the Senator. Please refer to the contact information listed on this newsletter.
- Include your full name, address, phone number, age, school and two different dates you are available to serve.
- The '06 session begins January 9th and will continue through March 14th. The Senate is normally in session on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

For further information, contact the Senate Student Services Office at 800-382-9467, ext. 2-9410.

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2006 Legislative Survey

You may also complete this survey on-line at www.in.gov/S38

Feel free to have another family member respond to questions in column #2.

	Respondent #1	Respondent #2
1. Do you support further expansion of full-day kindergarten to provide all children with the opportunity to get a good start on their education?	1. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	1. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
2. Do you support the implementation of new local sales and/or income taxes if this would educe property taxes?	2. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	2. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
3. Do you support the awarding of contracts to allow out-of-state companies to operate certain state government services and programs?	3. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	3. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
4. Do you support legislation which would require legislative review of efforts to privatize state governmental services?	4. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	4. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
5. Do you support legislation to require Indiana Senate confirmation of state department heads similar to what is done in 48 other states and at the federal level?	5. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	5. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
6. Do you support the addition of more toll roads in Indiana?	6. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	6. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
7. Do you support legislation to legalize electronic gaming machines, i.e. cherry masters and pull tabs?	7. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	7. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
8. Do you support an increase in the current $5.15 per hour minimum wage?	8. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	8. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
9. Do you support the state giving local units of government the option to consolidate various government functions at their own discretion?	9. Support ❑ Oppose ❑	9. Support ❑ Oppose ❑
10. What do you believe are the most pressing issues facing the State of Indiana? (Please rank 1 through 5 with 1 being the most important.)		
Education	10. _____	10. _____
Environmental protection	_____	_____
Property tax relief	_____	_____
Health care access and affordability	_____	_____
Job creation and retention	_____	_____

Additional Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your opinions are very important to me!

State Senator Tim Skinner
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2785
Toll-free: 800-382-9467
E-mail: S38@IN.gov

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Connecting with you

Personal contact with constituents has a direct impact on the legislation we consider and what ultimately becomes law. In ongoing efforts to connect more efficiently, for those of you who have email access, I will be offering periodic email updates on issues facing the Indiana General Assembly. If you would like to receive these updates, please provide your email address below.

Email address: (please print clearly)

_____

Or subscribe online now at www.in.gov/s38

If address is different than above, please print corrections clearly or affix mailing label here.

_____

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State Senator Tim Skinner
Statehouse
200 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis IN 46204-2785

Skinner '06 Legislative Survey Response

Please tape or staple here. Thank you.