

## Lt. Gov. Crouch's sprawling daily grind

She's a valued partner to Gov. Holcomb and plans to 'be ready' for the top job

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

NASHVILLE, Ind. – The Daily Grind in downtown was bustling even though the prime coffee drinkin' hours had long passed.

Into this mix of Hoosier hill folk and tourists last Friday walked Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, without entourage.

She is a

product of local government, having served as Vanderburgh County auditor and commissioner, eight years in the Indiana House and then appointed by Gov. Mike Pence as state auditor. And, much like her current boss, Gov. Eric Holcomb, she was plucked out of a certain degree of Statehouse obscurity to form a gubernatorial ticket a year ago last July, then won an epic 100-day campaign into power.



Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch during her HPI interview at the Daily Grind coffee house in downtown Nashville. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

Her portfolio is sprawling, presiding over the Indiana Senate while in session, heading up the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the state's terrorism

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## Fast internet comes to Grandma Barnes Road

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

NASHVILLE, Ind. – Lordy, they're going fast, fast, fast on Grandma Barnes Road. No, not the Dodge Chargers, the Harley Softtail Breakouts or the F-150 Platins.

The breaking news: You can find the fastest Internet speeds in America on Grandma Barnes Road deep in the hollers of Brown County.

This was no accident and, in fact, purposely was almost a decade in the making. And it happened because of a unique collaboration between activist



**“At 1.3 billion people, India represents 1/7 of the world’s population and growing fast. Imagine if more Hoosier small businesses tapped into this exploding market where the demand exists for our high quality products and intellect?”**

*- Gov. Eric Holcomb, in India*



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Key players in the Brown County broadband breakthrough include (from left) State Sen. Eric Koch, Mainstream CEO Bryan Gabriel, Brown County Highway Supt. Mike Wagner and citizen "champion" John Tiernan. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

citizens, locally elected officials, the Brown County School Corporation and the highway department, state legislators, two gubernatorial administrations and a small company that is investing here and in places like Harrison and Washington counties.

**Or as Lt. Gov.** Suzanne Crouch told the dozens of people gathered at a downtown pavilion on a rainy Friday afternoon to celebrate the expansion of high speed Internet to close to 400 homes, "Government we like to have, but it is always the hard-working men and women who are taking the risks and the sacrifices to move your communities forward and move our state forward."

Brown County's Vision 2020 plan of 2009 identified high speed internet needed for education, economic development and public safety. A task force was formed in 2011 to attempt to achieve that goal, with limited success. Two years ago, Nashville Town Manager Scott Rudd tried again, creating the new Brown County Broadband Task Force that includes this writer. Mike Laros, who heads the committee, explained after the 2011 version, "The main thing we learned is it ain't easy to get broadband in rural America."

At the Indiana Statehouse, then-Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann was also studying rural broadband, had convened a state task force that

included agency heads, elected officials, big companies like AT&T, and defined solutions. One of them was to create criteria for local communities to position themselves for broadband investment, like time frames to gain permits and a central office to serve as a clearing house for permits. State Sen. Erich Koch carried the "Broadband Ready" legislation, which Gov. Mike Pence signed, and so Nashville and Brown County became the first municipality, the first county, and the first county/county seat tandem to receive the designation from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation.

Sen. Koch observes, "Rural broadband is a challenge not just for Indiana, but every state. The solution? There is no silver bullet. The solution is a silver buckshot. It will take many solutions until we're all the way there."

**With the new** designation, Rudd noticed a quick uptick in inquiries. Smithville crews were laying fiber within the town. Another came from Bryan Gabriel, CEO of Mainstream Fiber Networks. Its mission is to provide customers and communities with affordable, reliable fiber optic service solutions and superior customer care. Its website proclaims, "We will work to educate communities about the benefits and value of high speed internet. We will continually invest in partner communities to grow cohesively with



the direction of the modern age.”

What was needed were citizen activists or in Mainstream’s parlance a “champion,” and that was John Tiernan, who moved from downtown Chicago to Grandma Barnes Road four years ago. “We were drawn to the county because of the schools and world class mountain bike trails. We enjoy the mix of musicians, artists and entrepreneurs,” Tiernan said. “Coming from Chicago, we really took the challenges of rural Internet for granted.”

**Tiernan joined** the second broadband task force, listened to those from the highway department, Nashville Community Foundation, the schools and the town discuss the miles of fiber which had been buried in the soil, but were dark and inaccessible. There were federal programs via agencies like the U.S. Department of Agriculture and others. It was a complex array of “buckshot” solutions and the backdrop to all of this was that the technology was evolving rapidly. Some communities would invest heavily in technologies that became obsolete. Others would install technology in the winter, only to learn that there was less connectivity once the foliage came out in the spring and summer.

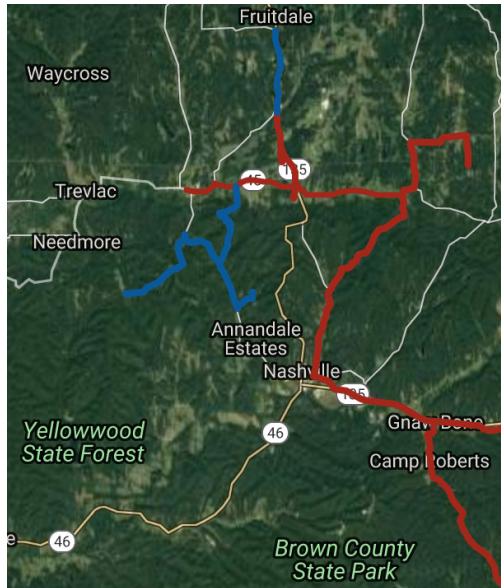
Tiernan had approached providers. “Less than half would give me a quote and those who did ranged well into the six figures,” he said. Tiernan’s problem was he lived deep in the sticks out by Yellowwood State Forest. This writer’s cabin lies about a quarter mile off SR46 and within the reach of AT&T’s network. Originally I was told I couldn’t have access, so I had to endure the woefully slow Hughes Net satellite dish for a couple of years, until I had the gumption to personally lobby then-AT&T President George Fleetwood, who contacted the company’s Bloomington engineering office, which made it happen. Once installed, there was an occasional hiccup, and I once had four AT&T vans in my driveway. I told a technician, “Wow, I’m impressed by your customer service.” He explained that it came in at that level because of Fleetwood’s interest.

**But if you live much** beyond the main highways and didn’t know George Fleetwood, there was little chance for connectivity.

Tiernan learned of Mainstream, which installed

what became a fiber optic beachhead to Brown County Schools’ campuses near Helmsburg and out toward Story. In Mainstream, Tiernan found a partner: “It was a breath of fresh air. The despair I felt after six figure quotes and then there was hope to bring Internet to Grandma Barnes Road.”

Sen. Koch explained of Gabriel and Mainstream, “He’s put technology, he’s put in capital, he’s taken risk and he’s worked closely with local leadership. We’re not done here.”



**A Mainstream map shows current fiber (red) and new fiber (blue) making its way into the hollers. Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch chats with Nashville Town Manager Scott Rudd and a citizen last Friday (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)**



Mainstream has invested \$950,000 in Brown County, bringing in 400 homes in and around Grandma Barnes Road, and a second project along SR135 from Bean Blossom to the Johnson County line is now underway. “There are more than 400 homes in these two areas,” Gabriel said. “We’re really interested in working with people who want broadband.”

**And what Gabriel** also needed was the citizen activist, Tiernan. When he first arrived in Brown County, about 30% to 40% of his neighbors were interested in service that came with a high monthly fee. With Mainstream involved, Tiernan was able to convince close to 100% of his neighbors to commit to buying the

service. Mainstream found cooperation from the Brown County Highway Department, which helped the company assist with right-of-way issues.

“Because of Bryan and Mainstream we now have internet speeds on Grandma Barnes Road that rival the fastest Internet in the country. It is five times faster than the Internet speeds we left in downtown Chicago,” Tiernan said. “What does this mean for the Tiernans? My children will have every educational opportunity that any kid in this country can have. My wife and I will be more competitive in our careers. We’re saving \$200 a month with our deci-

sion to switch to Mainstream.

"We always wanted to think of Brown County as our forever place," Tiernan said. "Now it can be."

Nashville proclaims itself as a "Pioneer Art Colony." Gov. Holcomb's inaugural address celebrated pioneering Hoosiers riding Conestoga wagons to Gemini space capsules. Lt. Gov. Crouch invoked the most famous Hoosier pioneer.

"It is so interesting to me that Abraham Lincoln said the fact that some can achieve great success is proof to all that others can achieve it," she began, speaking to dozens of locals who showed up at a pavilion where the fireplace was ablaze. "You here in Nashville have achieved great success. You have taken it upon yourselves and community to come together to collaborate and cooperate to accomplish a goal and provide services to you and your residents. I can't think of any greater success than that."

Crouch added, "Gov. Holcomb and I believe that

rural Indiana is the next great economic frontier here in Indiana. To realize that economic development, we must have that broadband connectivity and speed to every corner of our state. Health care depends on it, education depends upon it, business depends upon it and agriculture depends upon it. So the fact that you all have taken the initiative to make that a reality and to improve the quality of life and place in community, there is nothing greater good that can be done. What I always like to remind people . . . is what's really great about Indiana is her people. Hoosiers across this state know that government alone is not the answer but rather you all are. Our pioneering spirit is alive and well because we're independent, work hard and we understand what really matters."

**On this day**, what really mattered was that Grandma Barnes Road was expressly connected to the world. John Tiernan could log on to the Internet, and watch Gov. Holcomb forge economic relationships in India. ❖

## Lt. Gov. Crouch, from page 1

task force. When she joined the Brown County Broadband Task Force to celebrate its Internet expansion, she looked at State Sen. Eric Koch and quipped, "I want to share with you all the one thing I enjoy the most, which is being president of the Senate. As a former representative for eight years it is gratifying to be finally in charge of these senators."

Gov. Holcomb is clearly pleased with the work Crouch is doing, telling HPI, "Lt. Gov. Crouch is a passionate professional with a heart for public service, and her experience in local and state government has given her a strong understanding of the issues facing our small towns and rural communities. She is detail-oriented and thorough, something you don't always see in individuals working in leadership positions — and in that way she models excellence for all those around her."

**Holcomb, speaking from** India, adds, "She has been a great friend and closest advisor in my first year as governor, and I look to the future with greater confidence knowing she and her team are there with us in a true partnership."

Her rise to power begs the question: Is she preparing to break the ultimate Hoosier political glass ceiling and become the state's first female governor? She is the fourth consecutive female lieutenant governor, following Democrat Kathy Davis, and Republicans Becky Skillman and Sue Ellspermann. Only one of her predecessors, Skillman, ever launched a gubernatorial campaign and that was short-lived, eclipsed by Mike Pence's decision to run in 2012.

She responds to HPI's question with humility and demurement: "I'm a big believer that things happen for a reason. What is meant to be is meant to be. I also believe that if you work hard, you are always ready for opportunities."

She has also proven durable on the campaign trail,



**Then-Lt. Gov. Eric Holcomb welcomes then Auditor Suzanne Crouch to his ticket in August 2016, on their way to a 100-day election victory sprint. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)**

winning four legislative races and two statewide. In her last campaign finance report, she had an ending balance of \$436,987.12, and raised \$190,925 for the first half of 2017. This underscores her willingness to be ready.



So the logical answer is, yes, Crouch will likely take the steps to be ready, come 2022 or 2023 in the twilight of a potential second Holcomb term. Whether it is seen as a *fait accompli* that Lt. Govs. Robert Orr and Frank O'Bannon managed remains to be seen, as Speaker Brian Bosma, U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita and State Sen. Jim Merritt have long harbored gubernatorial aspirations. Her resume suggests that she will be well-prepared. She possesses a deep affection for rural and small town Indiana. She is smart and funny, with a wicked sense of humor. She still lives in Evansville and returns most weekends. She appreciates a cold beer and a warm campfire.

The Crouch Statehouse office is one of diversity. Her Senate parliamentarian is a woman (who is now also her general counsel); her chief of staff is African-American; her chief financial officer is a Democrat, Lisa Acobert. She replaced two departing agency heads with women: Jodi Golden at Office of Community and Rural Affairs and Danielle Chrysler at Office of Defense Development. She has tasked all five state agencies within her portfolio with coming up with new vision/policy and practices that fit into Holcomb's "five pillars."

And Crouch has proven that she has the courage to lead. After Gov. Mitch Daniels reformed FSSA with IBM's welfare model, she was one of the first legislators to raise the alarms after constituents began falling through the cracks. It wasn't an easy decision, as Daniels was famously alpha male and the smartest person in the room. "It was the hardest thing I've ever had to do, going against my governor," Crouch said. "But at the end of the day you have to do what's right."

Here is our interview at the Daily Grind:

**HPI:** What are the striking differences between serving at the local level and now at the three state levels you've done in the General Assembly and Statehouse?

**Crouch:** Coming from local government and from a part of the state that is geographically removed from the capitol city – and at least before I-69 was pretty difficult to get from Evansville to the Indianapolis – there was often a sense of isolation. We felt disconnected from our state government. The best connection we had was when there were problems. That always kind of stayed with me. The first thing I did when I became state auditor was to visit all 92 county auditors and local community leaders and officials. To me it was important to have that contact. Government works best when local, state and federal work together, when Democrats and Republicans work together, when people work together. Establishing those relationships and partnerships and not waiting for local government to come to the capitol is just to me critical in build-

ing that relationship that will prosper and lift up locals. I traveled to all 92 counties. I struck me how incredibly big the state is, how diverse, and how incredibly beautiful.

**HPI:** It is a beautiful state. Sometimes I don't think Hoosiers appreciate how beautiful Indiana really is, even though we don't have mountains.

**Crouch:** I went to Oldenburg and I thought, it's like they've taken a German community and just plopped it down in Indiana. The sense of history and beauty was incredible.

**HPI:** After serving in local government and then in the General Assembly, did you have a greater apprecia-



Lt. Gov. Crouch celebrates the Holcomb ticket's election a year ago. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

tion for the local complaint that there isn't enough home rule in Indiana? Or have your perspectives changed on that?

**Crouch:** No, not really. It's interesting to me that everyone wants home rule when it benefits them. The locals want home rule, but when there's a tax increase they want the legislature to do it. I think it was Tip O'Neill who said that "all politics is local." It is best when it's closest. It's extremely personal. You're governing the people you live with, who you play sports together with. It's just a more personal kind of politics and government.

**HPI:** Are you visiting all 92 counties this year as LG?

**Crouch:** We keep track of the counties I've been to. I don't have a plan to visit all 92 this year, but we'll get to all of them.

**HPI:** You head Department of Agriculture and also Rural Affairs. What are some of the key issues in those realms?

**Crouch:** In July the Department of Ag unveiled our 10-year strategic plan, a roadmap of what we want

to do in the future. There's a lot of areas where agriculture needs to thrive. We have a very good relationship with IEDC. Former director Ted McKinney sat on the IEDC board, worked with IEDC very closely and in an advisory role to make sure we were engaged with economic opportunities that affect ag. We need to continue with that. The summer study committee met over CAFOs.

**HPI:** Will CAFOs be a big issue coming up this next General Assembly session?

**Crouch:** I think it will be an issue that the legislature has looked at and they make look to see if there should be some changes, but to me I don't believe it's going to change a whole lot. The Department of Ag is in the process of selecting a new director. We expect to have that done by the end of November.

**HPI:** Did you make a recommendation on this person?

**Crouch:** We are interviewing people; we will have a recommendation to the governor who will vet the candidates and make a decision.

**HPI:** One of your predecessors, Sue Ellspermann, really turned me on to the need for rural broadband expansion, particularly to the last mile. We've seen other states like New York make a real statewide commitment to

get into the last mile in those hollers. Are you passionate about that issue and is it a priority?

**Crouch:** It is a big priority and I'll tell you why. Gov. Holcomb and I believe that rural Indiana is our next big economic frontier. We have to be a champion to place



resources to grow our communities and to explore economic opportunities. That's where our future lies. But it ain't gonna happen until you have broadband. That is really the foundation for education, for health care in rural Indiana. I drive I-69 every week and there are more places where I don't get a connection than I do get one.

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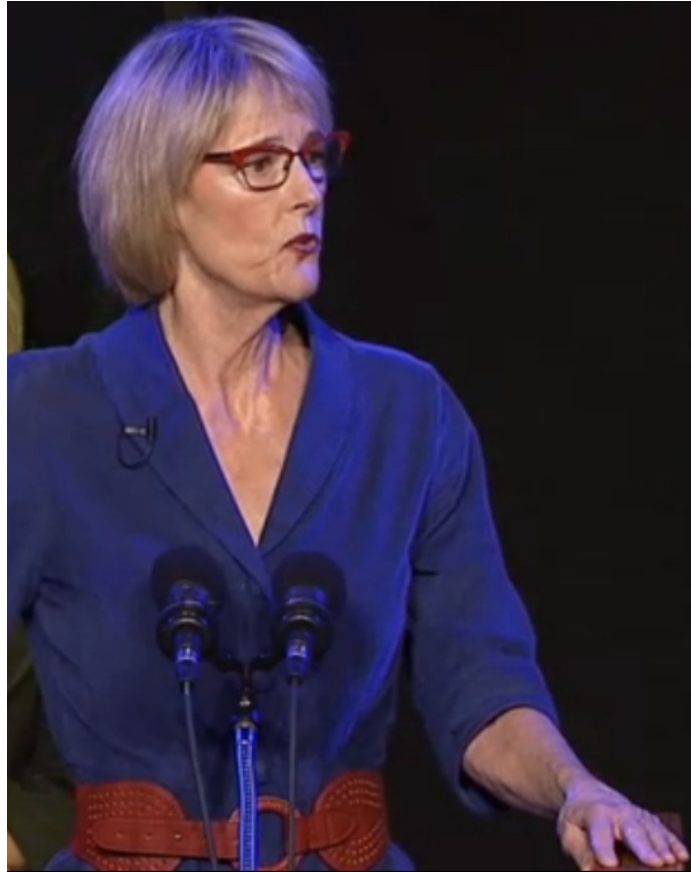


Traveling all over the state, I've experienced personally all the different places that don't have connectivity, so it's important.

**HPI:** We're seeing pockets of the state where private companies, like Mainstream here in Nashville and Brown County, are investing heavily. Smithville is another that is starting to fill in the gaps. And yet there are large parts of Brown County where broadband still seems like a faraway notion. Do you think the governor will eventually come up with a comprehensive statewide strategy to get into those last miles?

**Crouch:** We are already taking a number of steps to address the broadband issue. One of the things we're starting with is the broadband map has not been updated since 2014, so we need to get that updated to really see where those unserved pockets are. In addition to that, there's the super highway education partnership to put \$2 million in to connect schools. That announcement was just made. We had the First Net and AT&T announcement they are starting and Indiana has opted into that so we can have long voice connected. I think there are things we can do encourage and help our REMCs and dot.coms to expand their coverage and connectivity. It was suggested that at the state level we have a broadband SWAT team that can come in and advise on how to bring in rural opportunities to fund their own, or take some steps to help make that connection. There's a lot of little steps we can take that won't cost a whole lot of money.

**HPI:** One of the dilemmas facing the Brown County Broadband Task Force (full disclosure, Howey is a member of this committee) is we don't know where the technology is going to be in the next two to five years. We've watched communities invest in broadband strategies only to have the corresponding technologies become obsolete. There is a lot of dark fiber in the ground that is not being utilized. We don't know if sometime in the near future we'll have access to connectivity beamed in from outer space. When I asked Gov. Holcomb about that last summer, he responded that that's why it might be best for the private sector to be at the vanguard. We're seeing that with Mainstream here in Brown County.



Lt. Gov. Crouch gives her inaugural address last January at the Indiana State Fairgrounds. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

**Crouch:** It certainly is a dilemma, but you can't just not do anything. There is never a perfect solution. At the end of the day, it's all about leadership. Communities have to have leadership that recognizes a willing partner. The current administration at the federal level has said that broadband is important and a big part of our infrastructure. What are they going to do to help with that?

**HPI:** I make the connection between the broadband and opioid issues. You can make the case that people in communities without broadband don't have as many entrepreneurial outlets and without them, we lose a segment of the population to addictions to meth, opioids and now heroin. It allows them to slip away from society and that has significant social repercussions.

**Crouch:** One of the things we wanted to do in our rural areas is to encourage regionalism, to encourage things as Regional Cities did. Look to your neighbors and figure out how you can work together as a region. We have to be sure we are addressing that with the broadband issue, but also with other issues. Without a doubt, Ball State has been working on this. The report hasn't come out yet, but there's a direct correlation between broadband connectivity, to health care, to telemedicine. Kids have connectivity at school, but when they go home they don't and can't do their homework. They have to do it somewhere else. They don't want to live in a community where they

can't be like everyone else. Definitely there is a correlation. It goes a long way toward getting those children the same advantages for health care and education that the urban areas are getting.

**HPI:** We have a short session of the General Assembly coming up. What can you tell us about the governor's agenda beyond jobs, infrastructure, economic development and the opioid crisis?

**Crouch:** Whatever is put forth is going to be supporting those five pillars, addressing the economy and infrastructure. Our infrastructure, the roads, bridges and rural areas, but another infrastructure area is our aging wastewater systems, and our water infrastructure. I was meeting with the Japanese delegation from the home of Subaru in Japan. The governor was asked if we would

like to expand, could we get enough people, and what's Indiana doing. I mentioned the Next Level Jobs and the enhanced skills fund and I said, "You know, I have the same question. Why don't you send some people to us," and he said, "We have the same problem in Japan. Our generation didn't produce as many children as our parents did. Some of this is just a matter of numbers."

**HPI:** A good friend of mine, Ray Irvin, wrote the ordinance for the Monon Trail, implemented it through Indy Greenways, and when Gov. Daniels took office, helped INDOT coordinate the growing statewide trail system. On the wastewater and water fronts, he believes these can be regionalized, with the piping being placed under the trail rights of way that are now connecting cities. So every city or town won't necessarily have to have its own wastewater or water system. That's an idea the administration might want to consider. Any other big ideas percolating in your mind?

**Crouch:** You'll just have to wait until November.

**HPI:** OK. Tell me about your partnership with Gov. Holcomb?

**Crouch:** He's a good friend, a great partner. We visit every week.

**HPI:** Do the two of you have a weekly lunch or breakfast?

**Crouch:** We just usually meet in the office, talk and visit. A couple of things about Gov. Holcomb, one, he doesn't have a big ego. So he doesn't care who gets the credit. That's a positive when working with the General Assembly. As long as it gets done, it doesn't matter who claims credit for it. I find that to be a very, very attractive quality as a leader. He's very collaborative, very cooperative, gets people to work together. His personality lends itself to that. We're pretty aligned on our values and the things we should stay focused on, those five pillars. In the five agencies I oversee, I always challenge my agency heads: How does that meet one of the five pillars? We've implemented a number of programs, like the Housing First program. We had \$9 million for permanent housing and we amended the legislation to make it available for people coming out of treatment, and then wrapping FSSA services around that so those people who need a place to stay – and it shouldn't be in their home environment – is something we're doing with housing. We are looking at changing generational problems through housing. In Fort Wayne we put up a housing development for single moth-



ers who are working on getting training and education. It not only provides the housing, it provides transportation, helps them get placed in an institution where they can get training, day care for their children. If you're looking at breaking cycles, you can't just give people a physical fix and say, "There it is." We did the same thing in Muncie; it's a home for homeless veterans. We wrap services around them. The psychiatrist is there. We're providing the home but also the services. We have to try and address things holistically.

**HPI:** Did you begin interfacing with Gov. Holcomb when he was on Gov. Daniels' staff?

**Crouch:** No.

**HPI:** Reason I ask is, you played a role in identifying the problems with the FSSA/IBM deal that became a big problem.

**Crouch:** What happened was Evansville was one of the first areas where they rolled it out and I kept getting complaints, as other legislators did, from our non-profits, United Way, from our hospitals, that they were having problems with the computer system. You can't take vulnerable and disabled and people of poverty and now say, "OK, you have to apply for your benefits via a computer." These people didn't even have a computer. I filed legislation in the House that stopped the rollout, and I was not very popular.

**HPI:** To Gov. Daniels' credit, he came around, realized there was a problem and the so-called hybrid fix actually created a better system that works today. That was a pretty courageous

thing for you to do.

**Crouch:** It was the hardest thing I've ever had to do, going against my governor. But at the end of the day you have to do what's right.

**HPI:** It made him a better governor. My last question is, you're the fourth female lieutenant governor. Do you aspire to be governor some day? I realize this would be seven years off, but talk about what you'd like to do after a term or two as LG? People are speculating.

**Crouch:** Growing up in Evansville, I never dreamed of being lieutenant governor one day. I'm a big believer that things happen for a reason. What is meant to be is meant to be. I also believe that if you work hard, you are always ready for opportunities.

**HPI:** So you'll keep your options open, right?

**Crouch:** Right now I'm happy to be lieutenant governor. It is an honor to serve. Hopefully we'll win reelection in 2020 and I'll continue to serve the good people of the state of Indiana. ❖



# Gauging '18 mid-term election one year out

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – This is the proverbial “one year out” from the consequential 2018 mid-term election. Indiana will feature one of the marquee U.S. Senate races that will likely be impacted by the controversies surrounding President Trump and he will be a complete wild card in this cycle, just as he was in 2016.

Should scandal, war and an inability to move any kind of impactful legislation through a mostly inert Congress, the prospects are there for a Democratic wave election. But Trump has exhibited a certain layer of Teflon and we watched what was supposed to be a tsunami election favoring the Democrats in 2016 go in reverse, which sparked the biggest upset in U.S. presidential history and pulled Gov. Eric Holcomb into office.



At this writing, HPI sees U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly as a nominal favorite and while he leads U.S. Reps. Todd Rokita and Luke Messer in cash on hand – \$4.6 million to \$2.4 million each for the Republicans – this edge won't matter much because of all the outside super PAC money that is already flowing in at a historic pace and will continue to do so.

But it will be a tough race for Donnelly no matter what happens. A Morning Consult Poll showed his approval declining to 47% from 53% in the second quarter. U.S. Sen. Todd Young's approval also declined, from 48% to 45%. This slippage may be a symptom of the groaning lack of confidence in Congress. We've also seen a shift on the GOP side, with Rokita and Messer sniping less at each other and training their sights on Donnelly. There's been talk that State Rep. Mike Braun could have an avenue to win the primary due to the unpopularity of Congress, but Rokita still has a slight name ID edge, having run and won statewide twice, while his CD is within the Indianapolis media market. We believe Braun would have to spend \$5 million to \$6 million in order to gin up his statewide name ID to win. The question: Is he willing to personally fund that?

Should a Democratic year take shape, we'll be

watching the 2nd, 8th and 9th CDs and whether Democrats William Tanoos in the 8th, Daniel Canan or Liz Watson in the 9th, and most likely Mel Hall in the 2nd, can wage competitive campaigns. Tanoos, Canan and Watson are already showing some fundraising prowess, while Hall came into the race too late to register in the third quarter FEC reports. Right now we rate the reelection of U.S. Reps. Jackie Walorski, Larry Bucshon and Trey Hollingsworth in the “Likely” Republican category, but that could change. Why? Because the Cook Partisan Index puts all three districts in double digit +Republican category, so it will take a wave to bring their defeat.

**On the other hand**, there are foreboding data sets that will prompt some sleepless GOP nights. Let's look at the latest polling. Gallup Daily Tracking has President Trump's approval at an anemic 34%, with a whopping 62% disapproving. The more Trump-friendly Rasmussen Poll has those numbers at 43/55% while the Democratic PPP puts it at 34/62%. Fox News puts it at 38/57%, and Reuters/Ipsos at 35/60%. These are all woeful numbers for a controversial incumbent heading into his first mid-term cycle with virtually no legislative accomplishments. Trump has found traction as agency heads at the EPA and Interior are rolling back regulations, but that is not normally a driver in mid-term elections.

The direction of the country polling is also a GOP migraine. Reuters Ipsos has it 24% right track, 64% wrong track. Economist/YouGov puts it at 31/60%, Harvard/Harris at 29/60% and even Rasmussen has it at 32/62%. These types of numbers can drive wave elections.

The Congressional generics should worry Republicans. PPP puts it at 50-40% favoring Democrats. NBC/Wall Street Journal puts it at 48-41 Democratic, Fox News at 50/35%, Reuters/Ipsos at 36-28%. We've actually seen the Democrats leading the Congressional generic in their blowout years of 1994, 2010 and 2014, the first two where they lost dozens of seats in the House. So double digit leads this cycle,

along with President Trump's lousy approval ratings, portend to a Democratic wave.

Perhaps.

Liberal Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank observes, “President Trump's job approval rating fell to just 33% in a Gallup poll this week. One of his campaign aides pleaded guilty in the Russia probe and two more were



indicted. Republicans are fighting over their tax plan, increasing the odds of yet another legislative debacle. It would seem that the midterm election is the Democrats' to lose. And you can be sure they will try their best to do exactly that. Democrats seldom miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Several recent incidents of self-sabotage have already proven the great Will Rogers adage: 'I am not a member of any organized political party. I am a Democrat.'

**Nationally, the Bernie Sanders wing of the party is pulling it farther left, pushing universal health care and education. Billionaire Tom Steyer is seeking impeachment, and we saw how that completely backfired on Republicans in 1998 with President Clinton heading for a Senate trial. If Democrats over-reach and make 2018 the "impeachment election," that will be a motivating factor for President Trump's loyal 35% base to turn out in droves. Americans don't like to be told their vote doesn't count or that they made a bad decision. And polling shows that the Trump base is unlikely to change no matter what the president says or does, who he shoots on Fifth Avenue, or what Special Counsel Robert Mueller documents.**

On the Hoosier home front, Indiana Democrats have a nice early roster of State Senate candidates and could be competitive in four or five districts even without a wave in their favor. But we've repeatedly pressed IN Dems for a list of Indiana House candidates and they haven't produced one, leading us to believe that it doesn't exist. There is no party designated-candidate for secretary of state or for treasurer.

**Indiana Democrats must make some serious inroads into the GOP Statehouse super majorities this cycle. If they don't, we are probably looking at a decade of them in super minority status.**

Crimping Democratic recruitment could be Gov. Eric Holcomb's Morning Consult approval at 53% with 21% disapproving. You can expect Gov. Holcomb to be a campaign trail happy warrior next fall to protect his super majorities. And this extends potentially into the 2020 cycle. Usually you're hearing of a potential rival nominee when it's someone's turn (i.e. Larry Conrad), there's a natural heir apparent (Frank O'Bannon), or there's a bright young Turk (young, young Evan Bayh) making the Jefferson/Jackson Dinner rounds. This year, you can hear a pin

Polling Data						
Poll	Date	Sample	Approve	Disapprove	Spread	
<b>RCP Average</b>	<b>10/12 - 10/31</b>	--	<b>39.3</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>-16.9</b>	
Economist/YouGov	10/29 - 10/31	1291 RV	43	52	-9	
Gallup	10/29 - 10/31	1500 A	35	61	-26	
Rasmussen Reports	10/29 - 10/31	1500 LV	43	55	-12	
PPP (D)	10/27 - 10/29	572 RV	38	56	-18	
NBC News/Wall St. Jnl	10/23 - 10/26	900 A	38	58	-20	
FOX News	10/22 - 10/24	1005 RV	38	57	-19	
Reuters/Ipsos	10/20 - 10/24	2352 A	35	60	-25	
Harvard-Harris	10/14 - 10/18	2159 RV	42	58	-16	
Marist	10/15 - 10/17	928 RV	38	54	-16	
CNN	10/12 - 10/15	RV	38	57	-19	
Emerson	10/12 - 10/14	820 RV	44	50	-6	
All President Trump Job Approval Polling Data						
Poll	Date	Sample	Right Direction	Wrong Track	Spread	
<b>RCP Average</b>	<b>9/27 - 10/31</b>	--	<b>30.8</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>-29.8</b>	
Economist/YouGov	10/29 - 10/31	1291 RV	31	58	-27	
Rasmussen Reports	10/21 - 10/26	2500 LV	32	62	-30	
Reuters/Ipsos	10/20 - 10/24	2352 A	24	64	-40	
Harvard-Harris	10/14 - 10/18	2159 RV	29	60	-31	
Marist	10/15 - 10/17	928 RV	31	63	-32	
Emerson	10/12 - 10/14	820 RV	40	50	-10	
IBD/TIPP	9/29 - 10/8	887 A	35	64	-29	
USA Today/Suffolk	9/27 - 10/1	1000 RV	24	64	-40	
All Direction of Country Polling Data						
Poll	Date	Sample	Democrats (D)	Republicans (R)	Spread	
<b>RCP Average</b>	<b>10/12 - 10/31</b>	--	<b>46.2</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>Democrats +9.9</b>	
Economist/YouGov	10/29 - 10/31	1291 RV	39	36	Democrats +3	
PPP (D)	10/27 - 10/29	572 RV	50	40	Democrats +10	
NBC News/Wall St. Jnl	10/23 - 10/26	753 RV	48	41	Democrats +7	
FOX News	10/22 - 10/24	1005 RV	50	35	Democrats +15	
Reuters/Ipsos	10/20 - 10/24	2352 A	36	28	Democrats +8	
CNN	10/12 - 10/15	RV	54	38	Democrats +16	
All 2018 Generic Congressional Vote Polling Data						

drop with that question.

What are the wild cards?

**The GOP nightmare scenario** is that they can't pull off tax reform, coming on the heels of four health care repeal/replace failures in the U.S. Senate. Republicans from Newt Gingrich to Ted Cruz to President Trump have warned that failure there will insure Democratic majorities in 2019. But even if Congress passes and Trump signs tax reforms, it doesn't mean it will save GOP scalps. The latest NBC/Wall Street Journal Poll shows a mere 25% supporting it, 35% opposed and 39% have no opinion. "Trump and Republicans have a long way to go ... to convince people of the merits of the plan," said Republican pollster Bill McInturff of Public Opinion Strategies.

We can only fathom future bombshells coming from Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller's Russia collusion probe. The indictment and guilty plea from George Papadopolous, and the notion that he may have been wearing a wire since his July arrest, has all the earmarks of a political Shakespearean calamity for the president. In a political sense, Monday's indictment of Paul Manafort and his associate, and the specter of a wired Papadopolous have the signature of a coming cataclysm unseen since Watergate. In the 1974 elections following President Nixon's downfall, Democrats picked up 49 House seats, four in the Senate



and four governorships.

This could be the drip, drip, drip death by a thousand cuts, or it could yield nuclear explosions and political fallout for a GOP that has thoroughly embraced Trump, even though he's a former Democrat and hardly committed to traditional modern conservatism.

Then there are the real nukes, with President Trump and Vice President Pence continually suggesting a nuclear showdown with North Korea. Trump's generals paint a dire picture for such a conflagration, with potentially millions of casualties from Seoul to Tokyo. There is no known comparison to gauge the potential political consequences. We've never seen a hot confrontation between two nuclear powers.

**For a moment**, let's pretend that somehow, some way, Trump decapitates the North Korea regime and casualties are minimal. In that scenario, he would become a modern day warrior hero president. Anyone want to take the bet that it turns out that way? I'm offering a St. Elmo's New York strip dinner on that wager.

Conversely, if there are millions of casualties and the U.S. becomes a pariah nation (atop the Trump pullouts from the Iran deal, the Trans Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate accords), the domestic political consequences would also be hard to gauge because there is nothing to compare that scenario with. Or if nothing happens and it looks like Kim Jong Un got Trump's goat and red lines

mean nothing, we'll have an impotent POTUS. So danger abounds.

**U.S. Senate**

**Donnelly outraises GOP in NE Indiana**

The Fort Wayne Journal Gazette's Brian Francisco reports that the six candidates for next year's GOP nomination combined to collect \$11,250 in itemized contributions from 11 donors living in northeast Indiana, according to their most recent campaign finance reports. Individual contributions of \$200 or more must be reported in detail to the Federal Election Commission. In the meantime, Sen. Joe Donnelly, D-Ind., received more than \$14,700 in itemized contributions from 40 residents of northeast Indiana, considered the most Republican region of the state, according to recent years' election results. Keep in mind, the 3rd CD is one of the most Republican in not only the state, but the nation. "The surge of excitement and support that many voters had for Trump may likely decline since he is not directly on the ballot. But for Democratic voters, Trump is very much on the ballot in the person of any Republican running for Congress," Wolf said in an email to the Journal Gazette. "So it's not surprising that Democrats who are cheesed off that Trump won and looking for revenge are supporting Donnelly earlier."

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**Little cash for GOP Senate candidates**

Terry Henderson, Andrew Takami and Mark Hurt are far behind the rest of the field in campaign fundraising (Fort Wayne Journal Gazette) aimed at winning a U.S. Senate seat. Henderson, a Hamilton County entrepreneur, has raised \$272,000, including about \$5,400 in the third quarter, and has \$100,000 in cash. He has lent his campaign \$250,000 and repaid \$150,000 of it. Takami, a New Albany college administrator, has raised \$143,000, including about \$28,700 in the third quarter, and has \$74,600 in cash. Hurt, a Kokomo attorney, has raised about \$100,000, including about \$25,000 in the quarter, and has about \$3,100 in cash. He has lent his campaign more than \$21,000.

**Democrats slam 'deficit hawks'**

Here's Indiana Democrats' take on U.S. Reps. Luke Messer and Todd Rokita voting on the budget: "After their vote today, Congressmen Messer and Rokita have shown they're not concerned with fiscal responsibility, they're not concerned with credibility, and they're certainly not worried about their rampant hypocrisy," said Will Baskin-Gerwitz, senior media strategist for the Indiana Democratic Party. "Once again, Congressmen Messer and Rokita proved that their claims to be deficit hawks were laughable, voting in lockstep with their party elites . . . for a budget that will add \$1.5 trillion to the debt over the next 10 years. As recently as July, Congressman Messer said that 'the American people are tired of this nation continuing to pile up debt.' Meanwhile, Congressman Rokita is known for a powerpoint presentation he traveled with, where he assailed the nation's debt."

**Hurt releases internet ad**

Republican Senate candidate and Kokomo attorney Mark Hurt released a new ad Monday, touting his experience in healthcare policy. A professional staff person at both the federal and state levels, Hurt was integral in de-

feating President Clinton's health reform package "While other candidates are getting caught in the mud, we are proud to be running a positive campaign, talking about issues people care about," Hurt said. "Hoosiers need leadership that knows how to get things done, not how to cater to Washington elites."

**Congress**

**4th CD: Democrats debate**

The primary election may still be seven months away, but you never would have known it Sunday night to have heard the three Democrat candidates for 4th District U.S. Congress go at it (Bernsee, Greencastle Banner Graphic). Tobi Beck of Avon joined Joe Mackey and Sherry Shipley of Lafayette in addressing two dozen people during an appearance at the Greencastle Elks Lodge.

**General Assembly**

**Lindauer wins HD63 caucus**

Jasper native Shane Lindauer was appointed to finish Mike Braun's term in HD 63 Monday evening during a Republican caucus held at the Jasper City Hall. Of the 43 voting members at Monday's caucus, Lindauer received 30 votes (70%) with his only competitor, Jerry Sidebottom of Washington, receiving 13 votes (30%), according to The Herald. He had been endorsed by State Sen. Mark Messmer. In August, Lindauer announced his intention to run for the seat in the 2018 election but with Braun's resignation to concentrate on his U.S. Senate run, the seat needed to be filled. Braun's resignation was effective Nov. 1. In 2010, Lindauer was elected to the Dubois County Council District 2 where he served a four-year term. He has held adjunct faculty teaching positions at



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Oakland City University Bedford Campus and for Ivy Tech in Evansville. "It is an honor to follow in the footsteps of the past two to fill this seat, State Sen. Messmer and now possible U.S. Sen. Braun," Lindauer said. "I fill privileged to have the opportunity to serve and look forward to it."

### **Owens, Cravens announce for SD26**

Two Madison County residents have formally announced their candidacies to fill the vacancy in the Indiana Senate with the retirement of Republican Doug Eckerty (de la Bastide, Anderson Herald-Bulletin). Madison County Commissioner Steffanie Owens announced Thursday that she is seeking the Republican Party nomination for the SD26 seat. Anderson Fire Chief Dave Cravens, who has been actively campaigning for the nomination for several months, made it official that he is seeking the Democratic Party nomination for the seat. Eckerty announced earlier this year he would not be seeking reelection in 2018. Eckerty defeated incumbent Democrat Sue Errington in 2010, receiving 53% of the vote. He was unopposed in 2014. "The state party asked me to run," Owens said. "This was not on my radar. I was focused on running for commissioner again." Owens said she met with Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb and Senate President Pro Tem David Long and was encouraged to run for the seat. "I thought a lot about it," she said. "What can I bring to the state level? I'm trying to make a difference." Senate Minority Leader Tim Lanane introduced Cravens, saying he is a humble guy with solid qualifications as a business owner, land developer and fire chief. Lanane said Cravens brings knowledge and experience to the campaign in the area of public safety issues, adding that firefighters deal with addiction on a daily basis. "It's time we change the direction of Indiana," Cravens said. "I will work for the middle-class families, and if I'm elected, you won't be forgotten."

### **President**

### **Trump eyes Obamacare repeal in tax bill**

President Trump on Wednesday suggested using the GOP tax bill to repeal ObamaCare's individual mandate (Wiexel, The Hill). "Wouldn't it be great to Repeal the very unfair and unpopular Individual Mandate in ObamaCare and use those savings for further Tax Cuts," Trump tweeted. The idea is being pushed by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and also has the backing of House Freedom Caucus Chairman Mark Meadows (R-N.C.). Meadows said Wednesday he supports repealing the mandate in tax reform and thinks "ultimately" it will be included because he is going to push for it. He said he has been talking to Cotton about it. A Cotton spokeswoman told The Hill that Cotton and Trump spoke by phone about the idea over the weekend and "the President indicated his strong support."

Rep. Messer backed Trump's call, saying, "The individual mandate is crushing middle-class Hoosiers, and I agree with President Trump that it's well past time to

repeal it. In 2015, nearly 140,000 Hoosiers paid a penalty under this Obamacare regulation. Of those, more than 80 percent had incomes less than \$50,000. We need a step away from government control of our healthcare and our day-to-day lives, and a return to freedom for all Americans."

### **Math not working for GOP tax plan**

There is a math problem at the heart of the Republican Party's protracted introduction of a sprawling tax bill, and it grows, in part, from President Trump's two nonnegotiable demands (New York Times). Mr. Trump has insisted on "massive" tax cuts, including reducing the top corporate tax rate to 20 percent from 35 percent and delivering a tax cut for the middle class. Both of those goals have proved difficult for the Republicans putting together the House version of the tax bill. They are running into political challenges as they try to offset lost revenue to stay within the confines of the \$1.5 trillion tax cut that lawmakers have voted to allow. The tax rewrite is pitting businesses against individuals, as lawmakers look for ways to offset trillions of dollars of personal and corporate income tax cuts by limiting popular individual tax breaks, including preferential treatment for 401(k) plans and the state and local tax deduction. Business groups, meanwhile, say lawmakers run the risk of putting the United States at a global disadvantage if it does not reduce the corporate tax rate to a level commensurate with other industrialized nations.

### **Trump PAC to push tax reform**

President Donald Trump's super PAC is drawing up plans to spend \$100 million on an all-out push to sell tax reform and elect pro-Trump Republicans in 2018. The group, dubbed America First Action, is expected to host a fundraiser in the coming months that will be attended by Vice President Mike Pence and is in talks with the administration to get Trump to headline an event. It has tapped oil and gas mogul Harold Hamm, a Trump ally whose net worth exceeds \$11 billion, to boost its fundraising campaign. And it is recruiting major Republican Party donors across the country."

### **Realtors to oppose plan**

After House Speaker Paul Ryan warned last year that he may not be able to fully save tax incentives they view as crucial to their industry, members of the National Association of Realtors started developing an action plan, the group's officials said. Among their goals: preserving deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes, both of which GOP lawmakers have targeted as a way to pay for lowering certain tax rates. The Realtors recently deployed personalized digital advertisements in every district of House Ways & Means Committee members asking constituents to remind the lawmakers not to "let tax reform become a tax increase for middle class homeowners." ❖

# Buttigieg develops a national power base

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – Mayor of South Bend never has provided a national political base – until now. Now, Mayor Pete Buttigieg is featured more often in major national publications and on national TV than any member of Congress from Indiana or, for that matter, more than most members of Congress anywhere.



Almost always it's with portrayal of South Bend's mayor as an emerging Democratic Party leader, maybe a future presidential candidate, even though he lost in his first venture into national politics earlier this year as a candidate for Democratic national chairman. In losing, he won more national attention.

So, what is his goal? Locally, he says, it's completing his parks investment program, a new part of "the South Bend story" he tells about in the national interviews. Nationally, it's funding a political action committee. A PAC? Isn't that something for big-money special interests, not exactly fitting the image of Buttigieg in those stories in Time, the New York Times and the Washington Post and in appearances with Charlie Rose and Seth Meyers?

"I'm very skeptical of the creation of super PACs as a policy," Buttigieg says. "But if they are going to exist, if the big special interests get to have them, then I think someone speaking up for ordinary people ought to have one, too."

**His PAC, "Hitting Home,"** already has raised over \$100,000; he isn't ready to announce exact totals yet. After raising much more, it will support selected Democratic candidates in 2018 in a different way. The concept: Abandon TV ads hyping a candidate as a savior and dumping mud all over the opponent. Feature real people telling their own stories about issues of importance to voters. Don't base messages on results of some telephone opinion poll.

An example of the type of personal message to be used is on the "Hitting Home" website. Jennica Liberatore, mother of triplets born prematurely at 28 weeks, is shown telling at a South Bend town hall meeting of how the Affordable Care Act assured care and saved the family from bankruptcy when facing \$5 million in medical costs.

"What turned the tide on the Affordable Care Act (defeating repeal) was not the cleverness of Democratic politicians," Buttigieg says. "It was the power of people telling their own stories in those town halls. That's why I want the voters speaking to the camera, not the candidate speaking."

**Most candidates to be selected** will be running at the state rather than federal level, Buttigieg says, citing emphasis on races for state legislative seats and such state offices as secretary of state and attorney general. Some congressional races? Yes. But he deploras mistaken regard of the federal level as "the only level that matters."

The PAC won't support candidates in or around South Bend. That's mainly because the PAC legally cannot coordinate with a backed candidate, and appearance of coordination would be hard to avoid with candidates in the area. Instead of offering uncoordinated PAC support, Buttigieg says, he will campaign personally and directly for candidates such as Sen. Joe Donnelly and the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 2nd District.

He expects to select mostly candidates in the middle of the country rather than on the coasts because of belief that is where the political future will be decided. He wants candidates who can win "in red (Republican)

or purple (swing) areas." That means moderates rather than firebrands. The national attention, including Mark Zuckerberg's tour of South Bend, an upcoming visit by the mayor of Los Angeles, two more national publication stories in the works and another TV show, will help Buttigieg in raising PAC funds.

**Will it lead** also to Buttigieg leaving? Despite speculation that he wouldn't stay through his first term, Buttigieg now is completing his sixth year as mayor, having served with three different governors. He will move to something else eventually, of course. No need to hurry, however. Not with mayor of South Bend now a national political base. ❖



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



# Leading indicators point down on Indiana's economy

By **LARRY DeBOER**

WEST LAFAYETTE – An unsettling number popped up on my computer screen last week. The index of leading economic indicators for Indiana decreased in August. It was the first decline since April 2009, during the Great Recession.



The leading index is “leading” because it is made up of economic measurements that change before the general economy. If a recession is coming, the leading indicators drop first. If a recession is about to end, and a recovery will begin, the leading indicators start moving up first.

For example, the number of new people applying for unemployment insurance is a leading indicator. When someone gets laid

off, one of the first things they’ll do is apply for benefits. No economic survey is needed to measure that change. The unemployment offices report the data weekly, so if business activity is declining, the benefit application data will show it first.

The state leading indicators are compiled by the Philadelphia Federal Reserve. You can find them at [www.philadelphiafed.org](http://www.philadelphiafed.org). Click on “Research and Data” and then “Regional Economy.”

The leading index dropped by 0.6% in August. That means the Indiana economy is expected to decline by that much over the next six months, through February 2018.

**The current condition** of the Indiana economy is measured by – you guessed it – another index. The coincident index moves up and down with actual conditions during the month. It dropped in August too, by 0.4%. That was the first decrease in almost five years.

The coincident index is closely related to Indiana total employment and to the Indiana unemployment rate. In August the total number of people on Indiana business payrolls dropped by a few thousand, and the Indiana unemployment rate went up from 3.1 to 3.5%.

That was enough to bring the coincident index down.

The August leading index dropped for two reasons. There was an unusually large increase in the number of people applying for unemployment insurance in August. And, the coincident index fall helped cause the leading index drop. That sounds mixed up; the leading index is supposed to predict the coincident index, not the other way around. Turns out that the coincident index is pretty good at predicting itself, so it’s a leading indicator. When the coincident index declines, it often keeps declining, enough to produce a six-month drop in the economy.

**How accurate is the index** of leading economic indicators for Indiana? Not bad, actually. I’ve got numbers on the index back to January 1982. That’s 428 months. Before August, in 36 of those months the leading index predicted a coming six-month decline in the Indiana economy. Twenty-six of those predictions proved correct. Almost three-quarters of the time, when the leading index said there would be a decline, there was. In the other quarter, the leading index predicted a six-month decline, but the economy grew instead. The leading index was wrong.

Indiana was not alone in August. The entire Great Lakes region saw its leading indexes fall that month. Most of those states had declines in their coincident indicators too. They all had increases in their unemployment rates, and Illinois and Wisconsin had decreases in total employment, like Indiana.

Back during the Great Recession, the leading index dropped for 14 months in a row. Usually the index has to drop for three straight months before it really predicts a recession. One month isn’t enough. The Philadelphia Fed hasn’t published the September index yet. But some of the data that make them up are available. The good news is that Indiana employment grew in September. New applications for Indiana unemployment benefits dropped a lot. The bad news is that the unemployment rate went up again, to 3.8%. So it’s possible that the Indiana leading index will read positive when it’s announced for September. If the unemployment rate increase looms large, though, it could be negative too.


The Indiana leading economic indicator index

has dropped for the first time in eight and a half years. Should we panic? No. Should we be worried? Not really. Concerned? Still too strong. Put me down as “interested.” I’ll be interested to see what the next readings are. If they’re positive, you can forget you read this. If they’re negative, that’s even more interesting. ❖

**DeBoer is a professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University.**

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# NJ, Virginia gov races with high stakes

By **KYLE KONDIK** and **GEOFFREY SKELLEY**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – In an off-year long on election commentary but short on actual elections, the two main events on a Spartan political calendar are now upon us: New Jersey and Virginia will elect new governors next week, and the stakes are high, particularly for Democrats.

As we have argued before, the only way the Democrats can be judged to have a good night is if they sweep both governorships. Republicans already hold a massive 34-15 advantage in state governorships (there is one independent, Gov. Bill Walker of Alaska). The two races decided next Tuesday are currently split -- Democrats hold Virginia, Republicans hold New Jersey.

A flip-flop, with Democrats winning the Garden State but Republicans capturing the Old Dominion, would represent no net gain for Democrats, and a maintenance of the net gubernatorial status quo would represent a win for Republicans. A double win by Republicans, which is difficult to fathom, would be a triumph, particularly given the Republicans' difficulties right now (more on that in a second).

A Democratic sweep, meanwhile, would represent progress for the minority party, although Republicans could say that Democrats had an advantageous environment in both states. They would be correct, but the challenge for Republicans is that such an advantageous environment could very well be present again in many places this time next year, where far more is at stake and Republicans have far more to lose, and Democrats far more to gain.

The president often hinders his party in an off-year election, particularly if that president is unpopular, and President Donald Trump looks about as weak now as he has at any point in his still-young term. His approval ratings have dipped below 40% in all three major polling averages (FiveThirtyEight, HuffPost Pollster, and RealClearPolitics), and these same three averages show a Democratic edge in the House generic ballot of between six to 10 points, around the kind of numbers that might suggest a Democratic wave next year and a flip in party control of the House. We've got a long way to go until the midterm, but 2017's elections are in a few days, and the environment for Republicans is poor.

**Monday's bombshell indictment** of Trump's former campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, also seems poorly timed for Republicans heading into these elections, although we're not sure how much it affects these races. Similarly, it's also difficult to say if Tuesday's lone-wolf terrorist attack in New York City changes anything.

An upset in New Jersey by Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno (R) over former Ambassador to Germany Phil Murphy (D) is hard for anyone to imagine.

However, an upset in Virginia by former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie (R) over Lt. Gov. Ralph Northam (D) is not difficult at all to fathom. Gillespie has run a nasty, tough campaign against Northam, blanketing the airwaves with ads arguing that Northam and the current Virginia Democratic administration restored voting rights to a sex offender and that Northam backs sanctuary cities (something Virginia doesn't have), thus unleashing scary gangs in the suburbs. From the left, Latino Victory Fund (an outside group) produced an ad portraying a Gillespie backer chasing nonwhite children in a truck (LVF quickly took the ad down and the money behind it was a relative pittance, but it has generated a lot of headlines and Republicans hope to use it as a rallying cry in the final days).

Democrats argue that Gillespie's ads have ended up hurting the Republican's favorability, but while Gillespie's tougher campaign is hardly a tribute to high-minded

civics, that does not necessarily mean it will not be effective, and politics is rightly or wrongly a game measured through wins and losses. Carter Eskew, an Al Gore campaign veteran writing in the Washington Post, echoed a lot of the chatter we've heard and read about the potential effectiveness of Gillespie's messaging versus Northam's.

**The Northam campaign** has not hit Gillespie as hard, and if the Democrat loses, there will be a lot of painful "what ifs" for Northam and his team to consider in the coming weeks, months, and years. Indeed, in the event of a loss, the comparisons to Hillary Clinton's 2016 national disaster will run rampant in Democratic circles.

Polls in the commonwealth have been all over the place. While most show a Northam lead, the spread is huge, ranging from a Hampton University poll showing Gillespie up eight points to a Quinnipiac University poll showing Northam up 17. If anything, one cannot accuse the pollsters of "herding" together at the end: There are going to be at least some pollsters who finish far from the eventual margin. Steve Shepard of Politico has noticed that many pollsters surveying Virginia have used polls based on calling people on voter lists, as opposed to random digit dialing calling a larger universe of people. The voter list polls, which mimic the techniques used by campaigns, find a narrower range of horse race predictions, from Gillespie by one to Northam by seven. That's roughly the range of the internal campaign polls we've heard about throughout the race.

The RealClearPolitics average puts Northam's lead at about 3.5 points -- not big enough to consider him more than a modest favorite, and only then because the small polling lead may be reinforced by the generic advantages any Democrat might have in this race (meanwhile, if Clinton was president, Gillespie might be the one favored right now, for reasons we get into in more detail below). Like in his narrow loss to Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA) three years ago, Gillespie may close hard at the end, although our





sources on both sides do not indicate that there has been much movement in this race either way for weeks, and the bulk of the evidence continues to suggest a small Northam lead. But a Gillespie win would not be as surprising as Trump's own national victory was a year ago.

To get ready for next week, we've identified five numbers, or sets of numbers, that we'll be watching next week in the gubernatorial contests and in some other races down the ballot. After the results come in, we'll report back to you with what these numbers tell us.

**1. Will Gillespie buck the typical anti-White House party pattern in Virginia?**

Rightly or wrongly, Virginia's gubernatorial election is now viewed as one of the first indicators of how voters are responding to a president. This is obviously the product of being one of the two regularly-scheduled statewide elections in the year following a presidential election, meaning it takes place roughly 10 months after Inauguration Day. While the commonwealth's gubernatorial election has been hit-or-miss in forecasting the vote in the succeeding federal midterm, it has usually gone for the party outside of the White House. From 1977 to 2009 -- nine elections -- the out-of-power party won the governorship in Virginia. Though that streak came to an end in 2013 when now-Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D) defeated then-state Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli (R), the result didn't upset a long streak of the president's party performing worse in a gubernatorial contest than in the presidential election the year before -- at least based on the two-party vote. The reality is, for the past 40-plus years Virginia voters have usually shifted away from the president's party in the gubernatorial race, even when the president's party won the governorship.

Gillespie will be seeking to end this streak of worse performances by the president's party. President Trump won 47.2% of the two-party vote in Virginia, so that will be the number Gillespie must best to end it. For what it's worth, an average of the last five polls puts Northam ahead 49%-44%, which would work out to about 53%-47% in the two-party vote. Given the closeness of the race, Gillespie may be able to out-perform Trump, particularly if he can get close to Trump's margins in rural Virginia while improving on Trump's percentages in the state's three major metropolitan areas. Democrats also argue that the smaller off-year Virginia electorate is less friendly to them than a presidential-year one is, which

gives Gillespie an opportunity even as the overall environment is unfavorable to him right now.

**2. Will Phil Murphy outrun Hillary Clinton?**

Unlike Virginia, which has seemed close and competitive for the entire election even as Northam has led the lion's share of polls, New Jersey has seemed like an easy Democratic takeover the whole cycle. Phil Murphy, a wealthy Democrat who served as ambassador to Germany in Barack Obama's first term, has held a towering lead in polls over Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno (R), and national Republicans have not seemed all that interested in making a run at defending this open seat. A big part of Guadagno's trouble is unpopular term-limited Gov. Chris Christie (R), who despite winning a smashing 22-point victory in 2013 now has approval ratings in the teens.

New Jersey's Democratic lean is also a challenge for Guadagno, although the state actually hasn't been that Democratic for very long. Prior to 1996, the state regularly voted a little bit more Republican than the nation in presidential races, although typically only by a few points. More recently, it has become reliably Democratic, most recently giving Hillary Clinton a 14-point margin of victory, a margin about a dozen points higher than her national performance.

Compared to Virginia, New Jersey's gubernatorial results don't seem quite as historically tied to the White House party. Still, over the past four presidencies before Trump (George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama), the non-presidential party has won each of the seven gubernatorial elections. The Democrat, Murphy, is in an excellent position to extend that streak to a fifth president, Trump. ❖



# Gary's Hatcher years will be celebrated

By RICH JAMES

MERRILLVILLE – When Richard Gordon Hatcher was elected mayor 50 years ago, Gary was one of the most segregated cities in the nation. Blacks were confined to Midtown, but they weren't bothered by the housing restrictions, said State Rep. Charlie Brown, D-Gary. Brown said blacks accepted the segregation because jobs were plentiful and the pay was good. Brown came to Gary from Philadelphia in the early 1960s and took a job as a teacher. He quickly became part of Hatcher's campaign team.



The Hatcher years will be featured during a celebration

Saturday at West Side High School. Among those expected are close friends, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Minister Louis Farrakhan. The Hatcher years were tumultuous. Many embraced Hatcher for being the one of the first blacks, along with Carl Stokes of Cleveland, elected mayor of a major U.S. city.

Despite the adulation, many whites quickly began fleeing the city. The white sections of the city soon turned black as whites left for Merrillville and other suburbs. Employment in the steel industry began to decline in the 1970s and reached a peak about 1980. As unemployment soared in Gary, so too did crime. Several times at the end of his tenure, Gary was labeled the homicide capital of America.

**One thing Hatcher did** especially well was bring federal money home to Gary, largely for public housing and job development. In 1981, Jackson was the featured speaker for the dedication of the Genesis Convention Center, which gave the city a sense of pride and a facility large enough to hold mass gatherings. At the time, only Merrillville's Radisson Hotel and Star Plaza Theatre were large enough to welcome crowds. At the dedication, Jackson said, "The Merrillville rip-off is over," meaning that Gary had a facility to rival Merrillville for attracting crowds and conventions.

While whites may have fled the city in droves, politicians always looked to Hatcher for support if the office they were seeking included all or parts of Gary. And

Hatcher, whose city made up about 30% of the Democratic vote in the county, usually delivered.

Hatcher always strove to break new ground for black politicians. At a county Democratic Party convention he sought adoption of a resolution calling on the party to back a black for countywide office. Hatcher thought it was only right in that the Gary vote was key to electing whites to countywide offices. When the party refused to back the resolution, Hatcher and his delegation walked out of the convention.

**Throughout much of his 20 years** in office, Hatcher pushed for the construction of a National Civil Rights Hall of Fame in Gary. It was often a controversial endeavor, particularly when the principals behind the project refused to open its financial books. But the push goes on. The hall of fame backers recently were awarded a \$59,500 grant to do a feasibility study and create a business plan for the hall. Part of the \$25 cost of the tickets for the Saturday gala will go toward making the hall of fame a reality. ❖

**Rich James has been writing about state and local government and politics for more than 30 years. He is retired from the Post-Tribune.**





**Marc Chase, NWI Times:** At the same time Lake County's disgraced former sheriff blamed a \$1.6 million glut in annual jail overtime on federal quality standards, he went rogue, granting 1,400 or more hours per year in unauthorized time off for more than 30 jailers. That's what Lake County Council members and new Sheriff Oscar Martinez say they're learning following former Lake County Sheriff John Buncich's ouster. Buncich, ousted earlier this year because of a felony bribery conviction, argued he created the positions and benefits in question because he needed more supervisors in the jail, and the County Council wasn't willing to pay for them. For years, Buncich blamed the unfunded mandates of a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice for massive overtime being paid to Lake County Jail corrections officers. On an annual basis, Buncich would stand before the County Council, requesting hundreds of thousands of dollars beyond his budget to pay for off-the-rails overtime for his jail corrections officers. Some County Council members would protest, but ultimately acquiesced, as Buncich blamed standards imposed in the Justice Department settlement agreement for the jailers' burgeoning work hours. But this week, the County Council and new sheriff are reporting that an unauthorized benefit and pay arrangement Buncich had with more than 30 jailers poured gasoline on the jail's fiery staffing challenges for as many as eight years. ❖



**Dan Thomasson, Evansville Courier & Press:** How near is the end of the Republican Party as we know it? That is, and probably will be, the inescapable political question of the day — at least until next year's midterm elections, when voters will decide whether to cast their lot with GOP candidates loyal to Trumpism, traditional conservatives, or neither, turning Congress back over to the Democrats. One thing seems certain. Despite President Donald Trump's recent reassurances that there is no division in the party that elected him to the White House, there is, and all his blustery denials to the contrary are as disingenuous as most everything that comes out of his mouth. His kiss-and-make-up with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell after harsh words that included questions over the Kentucky lawmaker's own fitness to carry out his (Trump's) over-the-top agenda is clearly a case in point. At the same time the hotelier-in-chief was professing his admiration for McConnell and denying there had been anything but the warmest feelings between them, Steven Bannon, once Trump's alt-right chief strategist in the White House on all things pertinent to governance, was pledging to push McConnell out of his leadership spot. Actually, one must wonder at times who really is the president of the United States — Trump or Bannon. Two key senators, Bob Corker of Tennessee, one of his first supporters, and Jeff Flake of Arizona, said they had enough of Trump and said they would not seek reelection with both pulling no punch-

es, denouncing him as a threat to responsible government. Trump countered they really planned to quit because they couldn't be reelected. So far, however, most of the Republicans in both houses have kept their eyes on their shoes, clearly waiting to see the public's reaction to all this. Will they stay that way? It's too early to tell, but Democrats don't need many votes to continue to disrupt Trump's (and Bannon's) agenda. Meanwhile, Bannon is promising to put up candidates everywhere, and pro-establishment followers have set up a political action committee in response. No war? Baloney! ❖

**George Will, Washington Post:** Needing a victory to validate their majorities, congressional Republicans have chosen not to emulate Shakespeare's Henry V before Agincourt. He advocated stiffening the sinews, summoning up the blood and lending the eye a terrible aspect. The Republicans would rather define victory down. What began with a bang of promises of comprehensive tax reform will end with a whimper: The only large change will be to the national debt. Consider a small proposal — repeal of the estate tax. It will be paid by an estimated 5,500 people dying this year, raising about \$20 billion — a pittance in the \$3.88 trillion budget. Repeal's significance would be philosophic rather than economic. Desperate to propitiate impatient constituents, Republicans say this is no time (actually, there never is a time) to fret about the national debt, which was \$9 trillion a decade ago and passed \$20 trillion two months ago, having increased 22 percentage points under the Republican president who preceded the present one. House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) says do not worry, "we finally have a president who is willing to actually even balance the budget." Ryan underestimates the president, who has promised to eliminate not just the budget deficit but also the national debt in just eight years, without touching entitlements. As Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute naughtily reminds us, during half a century of Republican rhetoric of frugality, 1960 to 2010, entitlement spending grew 8% faster under Republican presidents than under Democratic ones. ❖

**Peggy Noonan, Wall Street Journal:** The first sign of political competence is knowing where you stand with the people. Gallup this week had President Trump at 36% approval, 59% disapproval. There have been mild ups and downs, but the general picture has been more or less static. He proceeds each day with the confidence of one who thinks his foundation firm when it's not—it's shaky. His job is to build support, win people over through persuasion, and score some legislative victories that will encourage a public sense that he is competent, even talented. The story of this presidency so far is his inability to do this. He thwarts himself daily with his dramas. In the thwarting he does something unusual: He gives his own supporters no cover. ❖

## House votes for Dunes N.P.

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Ind., is halfway to his goal of converting Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore into America's 60th national park (Carden, NWI Times). On Wednesday, the U.S. House unanimously approved legislation to apply the national park moniker to the 15,000 acres of federally held land stretching for 15 miles along the south shore of Lake Michigan. If H.R. 1488 is approved by the U.S. Senate and signed into law by the president, the federal Dunes property would join the ranks of the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Yosemite, the Great Smoky Mountains and other natural wonders recognized as truly special places in the United States.



## State could get \$39M from tolls

INDIANAPOLIS — By converting six Indiana interstates into toll roads, there is an 85 percent chance that revenues would exceed \$39 billion from 2021 to 2050, according to a feasibility study awaiting review by Gov. Eric Holcomb (Miley, CNHI). There's a 50 percent chance a toll system would exceed \$53 billion. While I-65 would become the largest revenue generator — up to \$16.2 billion — it could also see a 10 percent decrease in traffic along its 261-mile northwest-to-southeast route due to tolls. The projected revenues are based on levels of confidence. So in the case of I-65, the \$16.2 billion figure comes with 50 percent confidence level. Bumping it up to 85 percent, the toll revenue would be \$12.1 billion. A similar tolling system along I-69 could raise between \$8.4 billion (85 percent chance) to \$11 billion (50 percent chance). Under the same levels, tolls along the east-west I-70 could likewise produce \$6.9 billion to \$9.1 billion. Similarly, I-74 could bring in \$3.2

billion to \$4.2 billion. Also included in the report is I-94 with revenue at \$2.9 billion (85 percent) to \$3.7 billion (50 percent). So is I-64 in southwest Indiana, where a 22 percent decrease in traffic would be anticipated due to tolling.

## Indy lands college football title game

INDIANAPOLIS — Indianapolis will host the College Football Playoff National Championship game in 2022, city officials announced Wednesday (Schoettle, IBJ). The game will be played Jan. 10, 2022, in Lucas Oil Stadium to decide the champion of the 2021 season. It will be the first time Indianapolis has hosted the event. The game and related activities are expected to draw 100,000 visitors to the city and have a \$150 million economic impact on the region, Visit Indy officials said. Former Indiana Sports Corp. Chairman Michael Browning said the city did not make a formal bid for the game. Instead, the city was asked in September if it could host the game and iron out the details within six weeks.

## Jeff, New Albany file opioid suits

JEFFERSONVILLE — The cities of Jeffersonville and New Albany are taking on multi-billion dollar wholesale pharmaceutical distributors that officials claim are responsible for proliferating the opioid addiction crisis in their communities (Beilman, News & Tribune). Jeffersonville Mayor Mike Moore announced at a Wednesday morning news conference that the city is filing a lawsuit against Amerisource-Bergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson Corp. New Albany announced later in the day that it is joining a lawsuit against these same distributors. Moore clarified that Jeffersonville's lawsuit is not a class action, but the city will ask that its suit to be consolidated with several others in southern Indiana and Ohio.

## 2,000 syringes circulating

LAFAYETTE — Tippecanoe County Health Department is awaiting the return of 2,148 syringes supplied as part of its needle exchange program, according to a report obtained by the Journal & Courier (Paul, Lafayette Journal & Courier). As of Sept. 31, the most recent date for which data were available, the needle exchange had served 83 people and had supplied 4,475 syringes, of which 2,327 — or 52 percent — were returned since the program opened its doors in August, according to a quarterly report submitted to the Indiana State Department of Health.

## Trump to nominate Powell to Fed

WASHINGTON — The White House has notified Federal Reserve governor Jerome Powell that President Donald Trump intends to nominate him as the next chairman of the central bank, according to a person familiar with the matter.

## Hollingsworth files Member lobby ban

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Trey Hollingsworth announced has introduced new legislation that would, if passed, place a lifetime lobbying ban on former members of Congress (News & Tribune). The Banning Lobbying And Safeguarding Trust Act of 2017, or BLAST, is part of Hollingsworth's "three-pronged approach to government reform," according to a news release. "Hoosiers are tired of politicians putting their careers — present or future — ahead of the needs of their constituents," Hollingsworth said in the release. "This bill is simple: you can never be a lobbyist after being a Representative or Senator. Congress must put Americans first, solve problems for Americans, and improve the lives of Americans."