

Deep into the ‘Super Majority’ era

Record fifth cycle of GOP dominance stresses the Statehouse process

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – In the state’s 205th year, we are now in the “Super Majority Era” of governance. While there have been 20 Democratic House and

Senate super majorities, and 49 for Republicans over the past two centuries, never have these decks been stacked like

they are today with both chambers a deep crimson red for the past four cycles.

According to former speakers Brian Bosma and John Gregg, current Speaker Todd Huston and Senate President Pro Tempore Rod Bray are working with caucuses that are too big.

As the General Assembly heads toward an April



House Speaker Todd Huston (left) and Senate President Pro Tem Rod Bray have had to lead super majority GOP caucuses since taking their helmets.

21 sine die, Huston and Bray are attempting to shepherd their super majority caucuses (39 in the Senate, 71 in the House) on an array of issues that could alter the state’s fu-



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The book of Pence

By **JACK COLWELL**

SOUTH BEND – We know some things about the autobiography former Vice President Mike Pence is writing. We know the title won’t be one of those suggested by the late-night TV hosts or on Twitter.

Some of those suggestions: “I Did It His Way.” “Lord of the Flies.” “Thank you, Sir. Can I Have Another?” Nor will there be, as Jimmy Fallon suggests, a chapter on “how his boss tried to murder him.”

We know the book, first of two Pence will write in a multi-million-dollar publishing deal, is for release in 2023, as the contest for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination gets serious. Pence, of course, already is deadly serious



“There just seems to be no balance anymore in this building.”

- State Sen. Ron Alting, after a debate on a wind/solar bill, which resulted in the bill’s death. Sen. Mark Messmer described himself as a “hostage negotiator” working with a “schizophrenic.”



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Jack E. Howey
 editor emeritus
 1926-2019



about seeking that nomination. The autobiography timing is part of his quest.

We know the book will be fiction. Wait, you say, aren't autobiographies classified as nonfiction? Yes. And Pence's book will compete for high ranking on the list of nonfiction bestsellers.

However, autobiography authors don't always stick with the truth. Many include a lot of self-promoting fiction. So, would Pence, seeking the Republican presidential nomination, really tell the truth about the Jan. 6 insurrection, when supporters of Donald Trump stormed the Capitol, forcing Pence and his family to flee from the Senate chamber and hide?

Polls show Trump still is highly popular with Republican voters. Could Pence tell what he really thought when Trump denounced him as the crowd grew angrier at the vice president for not halting certification of presidential results?

"Hang Mike Pence!" they chanted. Could Pence tell of the danger of the violent mob? Or, so as not to upset the Trump base, would he say the chants were for hanging a portrait of Pence?

Others in hiding with him said Pence was furious that Trump didn't quickly call for the insurgents to stop and didn't check on the safety of the Pence family. Could he write about that now, when any criticism of Trump could end his presidential dreams?

As it is, despite all of the loyalty to Trump that Pence showed as an obedient vice president, Trump didn't even mention him when listing future Republican leaders. And he told big GOP donors that Pence failed him in declining to join in the plot to overturn presidential election results. Will

Pence write only glowing praise of Trump, seeking to get back in good graces with Trump and Trumpster voters?

Pence, if interested in facts and history, could have some important revelations in his book, including:

- Never told facts about behind-the-scenes battling as the White House Coronavirus Task Force, which Pence headed, sought to get Trump to take the pandemic seriously and stop promoting strange "cures."



- Whether Trump, in asking Pence to throw out results from key states he lost, acted delusional, actually thinking he won, or was instead clearly arguing to change what he knew was a losing score.

- Times when Pence was able to tone down or sidetrack drastic, dangerous actions that Trump threatened to take.

- What he knows of Trump's dealings with Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Ukraine.

But Pence isn't interested in bombshells to send his book to the top of the bestseller lists. He's interested in winning support to send his poll numbers to the top among

contenders for the Republican nomination.

Pence says his book will tell the story of his life, "from serving in Congress, to the Indiana's governor's office, and as vice president of the United States" and that he looks forward to taking readers "on a journey from a small town in Indiana to Washington, D.C."

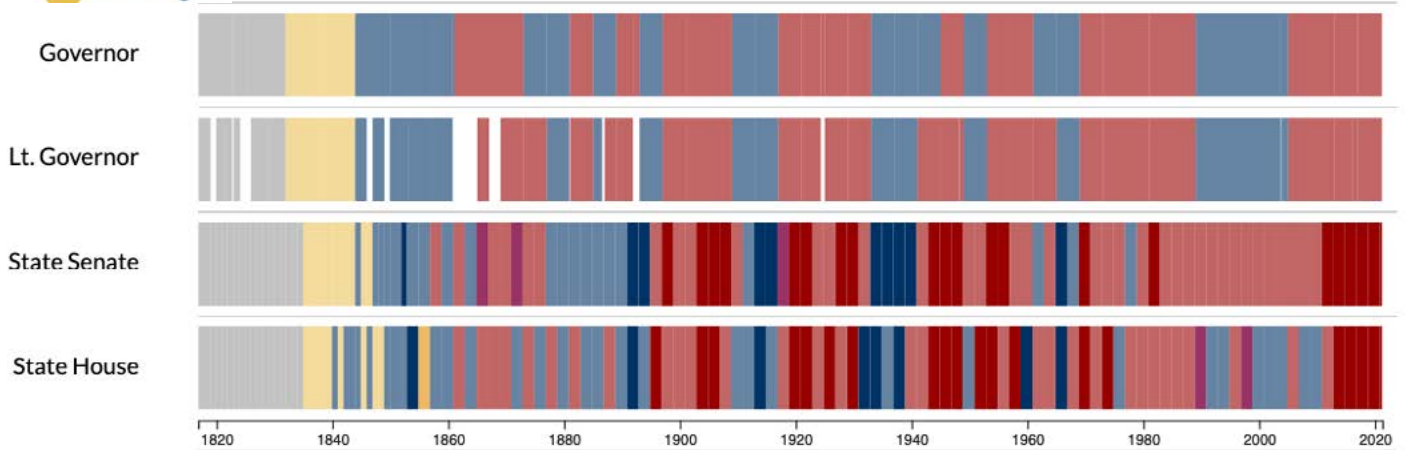
We know, despite Twitter suggestions, that the

famous fly of the vice presidential debate won't write the foreword for the book. Equally unlikely is that the foreword will be written by an ungrateful former president. ❖

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



Party Control of State Government Over Time



Super majorities, from page 1

ture pandemic responses, how it deals with municipalities and manages its natural resources ranging from wetlands, to CAFOs, to 5G cell tower siting, abortion, as well as local ordinances.

CapitolandWashington blog publisher Trevor Foughty charted the history of General Assembly power, with the dark reds and blues denoting super majorities on his charts. "It immediately becomes obvious that we are now in the longest stretch of super majority control in either chamber in history, and certainly for both chambers at the same time," Foughty said. "There have been super majorities a lot more often than you would think."

Super majorities historically occur under a governor of the same party. They tend to happen due to nationalized elections, as Hoosier Democrats dominated following the New Deal election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, and the 1964 landslide victory by President Lyndon B. Johnson, or after President Eisenhower's final mid-term in 1958. Democrats have held 12

super majorities in the Senate and eight in the House.

Senate Republicans have held 20 super majorities, occurring during the run-up to World War I, during the Ku Klux Klan era of the 1920s, two more in the late Great Depression era, three more during the end of World War II and beyond, and now five consecutive.

House Republicans have had 19, including the four current cycles beginning in 2014, three during the end of World War II, two during the Eisenhower administration, and two during the era of Gov. Doc Bowen.

The current super majority era coincides with the historic decline of the Indiana Democratic Party, which began with Mitch Daniels' defeat of Gov. Joe Kernan in 2004.

While House Democrats held simple majorities after the 2006 and 2008 elections, Daniels and Bosma recruited heavily in 2010, running Sharon Negele, Mike Karickhoff, Kevin Mahan, Rhonda Rhoades, Jim Baird, Cindy Kirchofer, Sue Ellspermann, Wendy McNamara, Ron Bacon, and Tim Wesco, who all won, along with current Republican State Chairman Kyle Hupfer, who lost a challenge to Rep. Scott Reske.

The skid exacerbated in 2010 when U.S. Sen. Evan



Bayh abruptly pulled the plug on his reelection bid, setting off what HPI termed the "Bayh dominoes" that led to the loss of several southern Indiana congressional and legislative seats. Bayh's pullout also coincided with the rise of the Tea Party movement that cascaded into a number of southern river counties, changing county courthouses from Democrat to Republican.

The House GOP won a 60-40 majority in 2010, giving them control of the 2011 reapportionment, which led to the 69-seat super majority in 2012, 71 seats in 2014, 70 seats in 2016, 67 seats in 2018, and 71 seats in 2020.

The pandemic now has GOP super majorities poised to alter the balance of power with several bills now sitting on Gov. Eric Holcomb's desk awaiting his signature or veto. HEA1123 would allow the General Assembly to call itself into special session to deal with future public emergencies, passing 64-33 in the House and 37-10 in the Senate. Holcomb promised to veto that bill two weeks ago, insisting it is unconstitutional.

Another bill would allow county commissioners to override local health officials in declaring public health emergencies and another bill would exempt religious gatherings from state health mandates.

Former speaker Gregg, who lost to Holcomb in 2016, wrote an op-ed appearing on the Statehouse File website earlier this week. "I have been following the Indiana General Assembly since I was an intern in 1977 and later served in the House of Representatives and as speaker of the House," Gregg writes. "In all those years, never have I seen an assault on our state's chief executive like what is occurring in the current legislative session.

"Because Gov. Eric Holcomb followed the advice of public health experts and instituted a statewide mask mandate in the middle of a global pandemic, a group of his fellow Republicans are now out for revenge," Gregg continued. "That revenge has taken the form of House Bill 1123 which has passed both chambers of the General Assembly with only Republican support. It will likely now be vetoed by Gov. Holcomb. And that veto must be sus-

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GOP House will ignite reforms

At least a 59-seat majority is a precursor to Daniels' plan to reshape Indiana

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY** and **KATIE COFFIN**

INDIANAPOLIS - Indiana House Democrats suffered a stunning rebuke Tuesday as Republicans seized control of the lower chamber - and the 2011 redistricting process that will shape the next decade of Congressional and legislative maps - with at least 59 seats as Republican Ron Bacon picked up 600 votes today to defeat Democrat Mike Goebel. HPI had forecast a 54 to 62 seat majority on Monday. The GOP picked up 10 Democratic seats while one - HD76 where Sen. Bob Deig had a 30-vote lead over Republican Wendy McNamara - hangs in the balance with only two Gibson County precincts uncoun-
 Not only losing their majority, the Democrats lost

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Brian Bosma speaks to Republican faithful Tuesday night as he watched his party take at least 58 seats, which will return him to the speakership this week. Bosma is expected to help shepherd Gov. Daniels' education, government and business reforms. (HPI Photo by Isaac Daniel)

Young climbs the hill

By **BRITTANY BROWNREGG**

BLOOMINGTON - "Baron is off the hill," Todd Young supporters were heard saying at his campaign gathering here last night.

With the race ending in a 52-42 percent, 22,754 vote victory in a race national pundits viewed as a bell-wether, Young will take over the seat that U.S. Rep. Baron Hill has been holding for the past five terms.

The gathering of Young's supporters remained positive throughout the night. They watched as Young called Hill just after 9 p.m. when the decision became clear. Young said that Hill agreed to work together for a smooth transition.

"He was gracious in defeat," Young said.



"History will record that Indiana led the way."

- U.S. Rep. Mike Pence, who announced today he will not seek a U.S. House leadership post, igniting speculation he will run for Indiana governor



Former House speakers Brian Bosma and John Gregg tell HPI it's far tougher to lead a super majority caucus.

tained. I fully appreciate the balance of power required amongst the three branches of government, but this proposal is a misguided step too far. Because some Republican lawmakers did not agree with Gov. Holcomb, they are seeking revenge by attempting to weaken the office of governor for all future occupants. It is irresponsible at best and dangerous at worst."

Asked by Howey Politics Indiana about the difference between majorities and super majorities, Gregg explained there are "Three types of majority caucus: Narrow, standard majority and super.

"In a narrow caucus, everybody stays in line and acts as a team," Gregg began. "If you've got the standard majority you can have a few souls that wander periodically, but they don't wander far or often. A super majority would be a nightmare, too many free agents, no discipline, no vision, no common purpose and many, many splinter groups.

"It's not fun to be a minority leader but having a super majority leads to the animals taking over AND passing laws limiting gov power and deciding to call themselves into session (violating the constitution) and thus turning themselves into a full-time legislature

(all from the party of less government)," Gregg continued. "Super majorities are the result of gerrymandering and straight ticket voting. I feel badly for Bray, and Huston and Gov because they have too many members."

Asked the same question, Bosma said Wednesday, "The short answer is smaller majorities lead to more unity and singular purpose in a caucus. The big group is more likely to have factions and distractions which distract leaders from their agenda to manage people. I'd say the sweet spot is around 58 if you can keep the minority in their seats."

Bosma added, "Speaker Huston has a very big group to manage but he is doing it well."

Huston and Bray now have a veto showdown with Gov. Holcomb. The legislative leaders describe this as a "disagreement," while Holcomb says HEA1123 is "uncon-

stitutional" and will ultimately be decided by the courts.

Had the Indiana Democratic Party been competitive over the past decade, Holcomb might have found additional support from his loyal opposition. ❖



Sen. Tallian, Rep. Boy describe super minority life this session

By ANNE LAKER

INDIANAPOLIS – Who better to ask what it's like working on environmental issues under super minority conditions in the Indiana General Assembly than two Democrat lawmakers from Northwest Indiana Region, home to the most delicate natural ecosystem in the state.



Sen. Karen Tallian (D-Ogden Dunes), an attorney, has served at the Statehouse since 2005. This year, she authored a coal ash clean-up bill, and worked to negotiate amendments to the controversial wetlands bill.

Rep. Patricia Boy (D-Michigan City) is a former small business owner elected in 2018. Bills she authored this year included spilled substances reporting rules,

support for towns wanting to complete greenhouse gas inventories, and others. None received hearings. She also worked to lessen the damage of the wetlands bill.

In separate but similar interviews, both were remarkably candid about the frustrations of a devilish imbalance of power in today's Statehouse.

Do you see any common ground between yourselves and Republican leaders when it comes to the environment?

Rep. Boy: We've been working on amending SB389, the wetlands bill. Working with IDEM, we're on our 24th amendment [as of Monday morning 4/12]. There's now one-stop permitting. IDEM says they can work with it; it's not a net loss of wetlands. [Note: the bill was further amended Tuesday to eliminate or reduce protections for two classes of wetlands]. The House Natural Resources Committee seems a little more concerned about nature than the Environment Committee is concerned about the environment. With SB373, we're still looking at the carbon sequestration project but not getting protection for those who live around it. The only legal protection is for public water departments. In 1986, there was a lake in Africa

with volcanic soil building up on the bottom. In the middle of night, a big explosion killed 1,746 people and 3,500 head of cattle. They died of asphyxiation in their sleep. There's no protection for something like that. I'm working on an amendment for protection against death or injury to people or livestock and damage to wells caused by seismic activity. They're drilling down 6,000 to 8,000 feet into a deep saline aquifer. That can sometimes eat away the rock. Not that I think that carbon sequestration is a bad thing. I voted to let this bill out of committee. I just want to make sure we do this the right way. In the Judiciary Committee, the project owners [Wabash Valley] came again and said there were no problems.

Sen. Tallian: We had an IDEM agency bill that we have every year. Even that was whittled down because it was clear, given the wetlands bill, that someone was having a battle with IDEM. When you've got the head of the Environmental Affairs Committee having a battle with the agency, that distorts things. The agency is supposed to and should rightfully have input. On the other hand, sometimes the agency needs help. For example, in the past few budgets, the IDEM budget has been curtailed; so has DNR's, so they don't have ability to do all the programs they are supposed to do, and the legislature needs to hear that.

What do you know about voter interest in environmental issues?

Sen. Tallian: I would characterize my district as comprising two main groups, organized labor and the environmental lobby. My district is along Lake Michigan and next to a state park and a federal park. Save the Dunes was started in my town. All the people are heavily committed to environmental issues.

Rep. Boy: I sent out a survey and the environment was one of the top three issues of concern in my district. I have a lot of farms, too. Farmers want to be able to repair field tiles in drainage. That problem was repaired in committee with the wetlands bill. A lot of people are working on coal ash issue as well and NIPSCO is retiring their coal plant and Bailly [Nuclear Power Plant] is closed. People are concerned about coal ash, warming of the lake, the wetlands (we have a lot of wetlands up here). But the House Environmental Affairs Committee has two farmers, three realtors, and three builders ... that's crazy.

What do you observe regarding the power of industry lobbyists?

Rep. Tallian: There seems to be this whole group of builders in both the Senate and House, but there is a

so-called “builders caucus” in the House, I hear. That’s the result of gerrymandering.

What’s the #1 thing you wish your Republican colleagues would do or not do when it comes to environmental policy?

Rep. Boy: Take some science courses. In debating SB373 and sequestration, we were talking about how carbon dioxide can be toxic. “I took a chemistry course, it’s not toxic,” said one of my colleagues. I wish they would hear our bills at least. Just listen to them. They say there’s so little time to do everything ... and then they propose to end the session a week early.

Sen. Tallian, you serve on the Senate Environmental Affairs Committee. What’s that been like?

Sen. Tallian: I’ve been in the Senate for 16 sessions and I’ve been on this committee for all but two of those years. Let me tell you, when I first came to the Statehouse, Bev Gard was chair. She was a scientist and was committed to environmental issues. Those first couple years, I was a rookie, but after a while, she and I started to work together a lot. We got to the point where she trusted me and she didn’t do crazy stuff. She’d say: “Tallian, help me with this legal stuff.” We would actually write a bill together. We did that a lot over the years. She left in 2012 and then Ed Charbonneau came in. There’s a lot to this job, a lot of technical and science stuff. He took a little time to learn the job and work on water issues. He and I worked together as well; we were buddies from adjoining districts. With Mark Messmer [current committee chair], this is his third session. I don’t feel like we have someone in there who’s really committed to the whole topic. I’ve offered bills this year. I don’t think I ever heard a Democrat’s bill being heard. Last year we had hardly any meetings of the committee. I think that’s a big part of what’s wrong; we don’t have a science-based committee chair who’s committed to the environment.



Sen. Karen Tallian (to) and Rep. Pat Boy.

What kinds of environmental policies Indiana is missing?

Rep. Boy: Better notification of environmental spills. Protecting contiguous forests for habitat corridors. Our state forests are not old growth and most of the old growth is gone. The state is not allowing contiguous areas to become old growth forests. The DNR states on their website that old growth is important but they don’t have plans to create old growth. There are no cross-party alliances on any topic this year. We’re walking into a brick wall.

Sen. Tallian, you authored a bill on coal ash disposal, SB367. What happened with that?

Sen. Tallian: I couldn’t even get Mark [Sen. Messmer] to discuss it with me. He said, “Oh you know, IDEM is going to make rules about that.” I don’t think he knew that. It was clear that he wasn’t really interested. He did not even give feedback; he just ignored it. It’s hard to deal with what’s not being heard. If the chairman won’t hear a bill and you’re not a big money lobby group that goes to the leadership and governor, that’s it. With this atrocious wetlands bill [SB389], the governor sent the agency heads of DNR and IDEM to testify against the original bill. Think of the last time that these agency heads actively opposed a Republican bill? Bev Gard was brought out of her chair to write an op-ed against this bill.

What can regular Hoosiers do to impact Statehouse politics?

Rep. Boy: Elect more Democrats. We’re 29 out of 100 in the House, a super minority. Anything that’s proposed can be passed without our help, or over our objections. We have to try to appeal to reason. Our party has proposed 43 amendments to the budget, most of which were not heard. We asked for \$1.5 million for food pantries and we got \$300,000, which is the same funding level for years. And they [Republicans] wouldn’t hold off on corporate tax cuts. We didn’t say “don’t raise them.” We just said, don’t cut them this year. And they did anyway. I requested that home health care workers get at least a \$12-an-hour wage. No traction.

Sen. Tallian, talk about your cannabis bills this year.

Sen. Tallian: One was to legalize possession of marijuana and other was to create an agency to regulate anything related to cannabis. This year was the closest I got; my bill went to the Commerce Committee. Chip Perfect said he wouldn’t hear my bill, but he invited me to come and testify on the subject.

What do you think the new leadership of the state Democratic Party needs to work on?

Rep. Boy: I'm hoping they can get more grass-roots people to join them. We need to get progressive Democrats to work with other Democrats. Our county party chair is in favor of that. It's all about the big picture. In the meantime, we are doing as much as we can. Rep. Carolyn Jackson (D-Hammond) had a bill on protecting kids from lead contamination that actually passed in the 2020 session.

What is the path forward?

Sen. Tallian: It's getting harder every year. There are a lot of people who are just noisemakers. They have no plan or commitment; they just like to make noise. My strategy all along was to bond with your committee chairman, work with them, actively do it, and always when you speak on an issue or a bill, know what you're talking about. When you do that and your ideas are not totally crazy, people listen to you. I've made a lot of changes to a lot of bills that will never have my name on them. If there is an issue, I can offer a solution. First time I ever did this, it was my first year here. Connie Lawson was in leadership in the Senate. She was having trouble with language and

HIPPA; HIPAA was fairly new. As an attorney I was working the case. When I approached her and offered to help, she looked at me like, "Who the hell are you?" But I gave her the language. The next week she came back and said, "You know, I talked to my people and that was exactly what we needed." That was the beginning of a working relationship. That's also how I ended up having a relationship with Bev Gard, who is very Republican. Same thing with Phil Boots. We hadn't always agreed, but we had a relationship.

Give us some parting perspective.

Sen. Tallian: It took years...I remember being on the Environmental Affairs Committee, 10 years ago, when we were talking about renewable energy standards. It took a few years to even talk about it; it was a really hard conversation. And now we have a bill [HB1381] about siting wind and solar projects. [As of Monday 4/12] Not everyone's happy with it, but I think it's going to pass. We've gone from "We won't even talk about this," to "Let's have a bill that all of the stakeholders have input on." [Editor's note: the bill died on Tuesday]. ❖

A consultant and grant writer, Laker is principal of Laker Verbal LLC.

Abortion reversal bill heads to Holcomb

Howey Politics Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana lawmakers on Wednesday approved a bill that would require doctors to tell women undergoing drug-induced abortions about a scientifically dubious option that the bill's proponents claim could halt an abortion midway through the process (AP). The Republican-dominated House voted 62-25 to give the measure final legislative approval, sending it to GOP Gov.



Eric Holcomb for consideration and possibly setting the state up for another legal battle over abortion restrictions. Republicans have pushed the bill despite objections that it would force doctors to provide patients with scientifically

shaky medical information. Supporters say the requirement would ensure that a woman can halt a medication-induced abortion if she changes her mind after taking the first of the two drugs used in the procedures and takes another drug instead. A letter was read during a committee hearing from an Indiana woman who said she gave birth this year after she took the reversal drug midway through a medication-induced abortion, but that she had to search the internet about how to do it. "What we want to do is just provide the women with the information so you don't have to Google it, because it is very time sensitive that you have

this information," said bill sponsor Rep. Peggy Mayfield, a Republican from Martinsville. Other provisions of the bill would ban medication abortions ordered via telemedicine and require the notarization of a parent's signature allowing abortions for minors. The Senate voted 36-14 in favor of the bill last week. Holcomb hasn't taken a public position on the bill, but he has signed previous anti-abortion legislation. His spokeswoman, Rachel Hoffmeyer, said Wednesday that the governor would review the measure.

County health veto bill passes Senate

Legislators are poised to make county commissioners the final authority on local emergency health orders, after a flare of tempers at a committee hearing (Berman, WIBC). House and Senate negotiators are fixing some ambiguous language, but the substance of the final bill isn't expected to change. It allows businesses to appeal to the commissioners if the health department writes them up for a violation of an emergency order. And it keeps a provision added by the House, requiring the commissioners to approve any emergency health order stricter than what's been imposed statewide. South Bend Democrat David Niezgodski joined Republicans in voting for the original appeal-rights bill in the Senate, but the votes on the proposal have otherwise followed party lines. Republicans say the bill gives residents' elected representatives a say in decisions by unelected health officers. Democrats predict the change will politicize what should be a non-partisan decision. Bloomington Representative Matt Pierce argues the appeal process could stretch as long as six weeks, while the coronavirus can spread rapidly through

a community in a third of that time. Despite the differing views, a 25-minute hearing to discuss the final version was uneventful until the very end, when Pierce began to ask to make a final point. Charlestown Sen. Chris Garten (R), the committee's chairman and author of the original bill, didn't acknowledge him and announced the hearing's end, slamming down the gavel when Pierce protested what he called a "jam job." A second conference committee hearing has been scheduled for today.

Messmer pulls wind, solar siting bill

A strong coalition of renewable energy developers, major businesses and manufacturers could not muster enough support in the Indiana Senate Tuesday to pass a bill that would have shifted some local control over the siting of wind and solar farms to the state (Berggoetz, [IBJ](#)). The Senate's less comprehensive version of House Bill 1381 technically died after it wasn't even called for a vote by Sen. Mark Messmer, R-Jasper, following a Republican caucus meeting. "There wasn't enough support to pass the bill," Messmer said. "There's no sense talking about a bill that's not going anywhere." Still, some elements of the bill could potentially re-emerge in the waning days of this year's regular legislative session, set to adjourn as early as next Wednesday. The bill, hotly debated throughout the session, would have created some statewide regulations for wind and solar projects and provided some financial incentives from developers for counties that choose to give a green light to such projects. But tough opposition from representatives of local governments, as well as grassroots citizen groups, kept pushing the local control alarm that ultimately may have led to the bill's demise.

More changes to wetlands bill

Lawmakers gave final approval Wednesday to a disputed bill seeking to remove protections from Indiana's already diminished wetlands amid mounting criticism that the legislation could cause damage to the state's waterways, wildlife and vegetation (Smith, [AP](#)). The bill's advance came one day after the death of a contested renewable energy bill meant to set standards for wind and solar projects. The wetlands measure, which has sparked bipartisan opposition within the Republican-dominated Legislature, would eliminate a 2003 law that requires the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to issue permits in a state-regulated wetland and end enforcement proceedings against landowners allegedly violating current law. The Indiana Senate voted 31-19 Wednesday to send the bill to Gov. Eric Holcomb, who earlier in the Legislative session said it was cause for "concern."

State regulatory officials argued that because wetlands provide water purification, habitat for wildlife and reduced flood risks, it's critical they're protected. The pushback prompted lawmakers in the House to scale back the intended repeal last week, although the amended bill would still reduce wetland permitting regulations for

croplands and ephemeral, or temporary, streams. The bill was additionally amended to be retroactive as of Jan. 1, meaning building projects in some wetland areas would no longer need permits. Fees currently required to be paid to state — as compensation for any harm those projects might cause to wetlands — would also be eliminated. While Democratic lawmakers supported another provision added to the measure that would establish a task force to study wetland classifications, they the Legislature should instead wait for the task force's recommendations before taking further legislative action. "This bill is still a mess. In my opinion, this is one of the most hurtful bills of the entire session," said Democratic Sen. Karen Tallian of Ogden Dunes, adding that the final version of the bill — while less extreme than the original legislation moved by the Senate — still rolls back what opponents say are critical protections for wetlands. Republican bill author Sen. Chris Garten and other sponsors maintain that vague language in the current state law, over-enforcement by state regulators and high mitigation fees that drive up housing costs prompted the drafting. They contend removal of state protections would help developers and grow the housing market. "We did not want to affect the wetlands that had significant hydrologic function," Garten said Wednesday, noting that certain classifications of wetlands remain regulated. "But, unfortunately, (certain wetlands) are defined so ambiguously that we literally right now have an agency that's running around classifying farm ground and broken drain tiles as wetland. That's what we're trying to address."

IndyGo bill revived

During the waning days of Indiana's legislative session, IndyGo will be fighting to quash yet another proposal that would result in a multi-million dollar financial hit on the public transportation system (Berggoetz, [IBJ](#)). The fate of the Senate-approved proposal is in the hands of Rep. Jim Pressel, R-Rolling Prairie. Pressel, chair of the House Roads and Transportation Committee, now needs to decide whether he agrees with the Senate version of his HB 1191, where the IndyGo amendment was inserted, or objects. If he agrees, the full House will vote on the amended bill again. If not, the measure will go to a House-Senate conference committee to determine whether a compromise can be reached. Pressel did not answer a request Wednesday to comment on his intentions. The revised bill passed the Senate by a 33-16 vote on Tuesday, the day after extensive criticism from Democrats, some of it aimed at Sen. Aaron Freeman, R-Indianapolis, who introduced the amendment.

Senate balks at gun permit repeal

Legislators have backed off a plan to do away with gun permits in Indiana (Berman, [WIBC](#)). Instead of requiring a license to carry a gun, the House voted to have State Police create a list of people who aren't allowed to carry one. ❖

Do Republicans really care about debt?

By **KELLY HAWES**
CNHI News Indiana

ANDERSON – Now that a Democrat is in the White House, Republicans seem a lot more concerned about the national debt. Speaking to reporters in his home state of Kentucky, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell suggested the debt was already high enough.



"We've reached a critical point here," he said. He noted that the debt, which hit an all-time high of \$28.1 trillion at the end of March, had grown to the size of the U.S. economy for the first time since World War II. "I hope we're not beginning to engage in the habit of anytime we want to do something call it a national emergency and run up the national debt," McConnell said.

So maybe we should talk a little bit about that debt. In approaching this issue, you might think about China, which does hold a significant share of the national debt. But did you know China isn't even the largest foreign holder of U.S. government debt?

According to the personal finance website "The Balance," Japan had that distinction as of last September with \$1.28 trillion in U.S. government debt. China was second with \$1.06 trillion, and the United Kingdom was third with \$439 billion. All told, the website says, foreign governments held more than \$7 trillion in U.S. government debt as of last September. And just to be clear, that foreign debt accounts for only about a third of the total.

Who owns the rest? Well, in a very real way, we do. According to The Balance, as of last fall the public held more than \$21 trillion, or almost 78%, of the national debt.

"If you add the debt held by Social Security and all the retirement and pension funds, almost half of the U.S. Treasury debt is held in trust for your retirement," The Balance reported. "If the United States defaults on its debt, foreign investors would be angry, but current and future retirees would be hurt the most."

Not that there's any real threat of the government defaulting. Still, McConnell is right when he expresses concern about the size of the debt. It's fair to ask how high we can reasonably allow the debt to

go without jeopardizing the economy.

Just for the record, though, McConnell wasn't saying these things when Donald Trump was in office and the debt was growing by almost \$7 trillion over four years. Almost \$2 trillion of that can be attributed to the tax cuts a Republican Congress approved in 2017.

McConnell had no problem with those tax cuts, but he's not so sure about a plan Joe Biden says will create jobs and address climate change. "It's like a Trojan horse," McConnell said. "It's called infrastructure, but inside the Trojan horse, it's going to be more borrowed money, and massive tax increases on all the productive parts of our economy."

All the productive parts of our economy. Does that include working stiffs like you and me? A report by The Center for Public Integrity found that the 2017 Tax and Jobs Act delivered the biggest corporate tax cut in U.S. history but ultimately provided almost no benefit to the average worker.


So how much of this discussion is really about the debt? Well, maybe not much. After all, Biden is proposing to pay for his plan by rolling back some of those tax cuts, but McConnell says that's an idea Republicans just can't support. "I don't think there's going to be any enthusiasm on our side for a tax increase," he said.

A tax cut for big corporations and the wealthy that drives up the national debt? No problem. Rolling back those cuts to rebuild our infrastructure and create jobs? For McConnell and the Republicans, that seems to be a bridge too far. ❖

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

GOP still in denial on Capitol insurrection

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – It used to be Democrats were the party that put the “fun” in “dysfunction.” But in today’s Grand Old Party which gathered in Florida last weekend, there is still denial that the insurrection on Jan. 6 at the U.S. Capitol was a historic travesty.

There was former president Donald J. Trump, who spent much of his Saturday speech before Republican National Committee donors, still glued to that “rigged” 2020 election. “I wish that Mike Pence had the courage to send

it back to the legislatures... I like him so much. I was so disappointed,” Trump said.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was called a “dumb son of a bitch.” According to Josh Dawsey of the Washing-

ton Post, Trump told a cheering crowd that the election was “rigged” and “bullshit.”

Trump sought to position himself as the Republican kingmaker, saying he wanted to talk “about the future of the Republican Party – and what we must do to set our candidates on a course to victory. I stand before you this evening filled with confidence that in 2022, we are going to take back the House and we are going to reclaim the Senate. And then in 2024, a Republican candidate is going to win the White House.”

In an article titled “The Insurrection Is the Message. And Republicans Are All Still Onboard. Inside the Republican Donor Retreat,” The Bulwark’s Tim Miller reported, “Look, I don’t want to torment you with gratuitous reading about the details of the RumpRoast Master of Palm Beach’s unemployment routine, but here’s the deal: When the party’s entire leadership reaffirms their captivity to a man who attempted to overturn our democracy, it merits being called out with specificity. And that’s what happened Saturday night in South Florida.

“Now you might think that a former president declaring that he was disappointed that his sincere effort to become an unelected autocrat would get some pushback from attendees,” Miller continued. “That people with live political careers – people who currently hold elective office and are due to face voters soon – might see some benefit to distancing themselves from the most direct assault on our democracy undertaken by a president in the postwar era.”

Instead, there were ... “Crickets.”

Or in the words of Trump adviser Jason Miller, “Saturday’s speech will be welcomed words to the Republican donors visiting Mar-a-Lago to hear directly from President Trump. Palm Beach is the new political power center, and President Trump is the Republican Party’s best

messenger.”

This, from a president who won 2016 in a quirk, then presided over a Republican Party that lost the House in 2018, the White House in 2020 and the U.S. Senate on Jan. 5, 2021. This from a president who sent the Republican National Committee a “cease and desist” letter for using his name on fundraising appeals. As the RNC gathered, the Trump campaign had \$85 million, while the RNC reported \$84 million.

CNN’s Chris Cillizza writes that Trump is, essentially, “constructing what amounts to a shadow version of the GOP.”

Monmouth finds 43% of GOP v. vaccine

About 1 in 5 American adults remain unwilling to get the Covid vaccine, even as more people are getting the shot. The [Monmouth University Poll](#) finds partisanship remains the main distinguishing factor among those who want to avoid the vaccine altogether, with 43% of Republicans versus just 5% of Democrats saying this. Currently, 22% of independents say they want to avoid getting the vaccine altogether.

Poll has 53% favoring Capitol commission

A majority of the public (53%) says an independent commission should be set up to examine what happened at the U.S. Capitol in Monmouth Poll taken in mid-March. Another 37% say this review can be accomplished through internal investigations and 10% are unsure of the best way to pursue the inquiry. Most Democrats prefer an independent commission (62%) over internal investigations (30%), while opinion is more divided among Republicans (49% commission and 41% internal) and independents (47% commission and 42% internal).

Morning Consult poll on ‘infrastructure’

Last week Politico posed a question in Playbook that’s expected to dominate politics over the next several months: What counts as infrastructure? According to American voters, a lot. Our latest poll with Morning Consult tested some of the things that President Biden is including under the rubric of his massive infrastructure bill – items that stretch the traditional definition beyond roads and bridges to items such as child care, paid leave and broadband. Yet most people seem fine with any contortions. As long as it’s something they like, the Biden administration can call it whatever they want: Paid leave: 47% agree, 37% disagree (31% of Republicans agree); Child care: 53% agree, 32% disagree (40% of Republicans agree); Caregiving: 54% agree, 31% disagree (43% of Republicans agree); Internet: 68% agree, 19% disagree (57% of Republicans agree); Public schools: 70% agree, 20% disagree (62% of Republicans agree) Overall, voters back Biden’s infrastructure plan, 57% to 24%. One of every four Republicans said they support it. As for paying for it by raising taxes on corporations, 62% of respondents are in favor (including 29% of Republicans) vs. 26% opposed. ❖



Rep. Spartz hears about journalism atrophy

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana journalists who have “retired” this past year have included Kevin Rader from WTHR-TV, Ed Ernstes from WSBT-TV, Seth Slabaugh of the Muncie Star Press and Dave Bangert from the Lafayette Journal & Courier.

The scare quotes come because not all of these journalists had reached age 65. They were corporate casualties amidst a pandemic that has been deemed a “media extinction” event. We’ve watched as newspapers in Zionsville, Batesville and Rushville merge with others in Lebanon and Greensburg.



The Michigan City News-Dispatch whose alums include Jack Howey, Al Spiers and Robert Schmuhl was combined with the LaPorte Herald-Argus (which hired a rookie journalist a century ago named Ernie Pyle) to create the LaPorte Herald-Dispatch. One on-line edition last winter featured this lead story: Toy boat races at a local swimming pool.

Many newspapers like the Gannett chain include sports coverage in what used to be their news holes. Smaller newspapers, now lacking the manpower, resort to lead headline stories like those making the high school honor society.

There have been newspaper closures and quick reopenings in Clinton and Chesterton when local businessmen rushed in to save the local news franchise. NUVO Newsweekly in Indianapolis closed its print edition.

Don Hurd, who revived the Daily Clintonian, told the Terre Haute Tribune-Star, “I felt it was very important that the residents of Vermillion County didn’t lose their local newspaper. By bringing back the Clintonian we plan to be very involved in the local communities that the newspaper serves. Our companies believe strongly in local names and local faces journalism. We plan to provide Vermillion County with a hometown newspaper they will proudly call their own.”

Beverly Joyce, publisher of CNHI newspapers in Anderson, Greensburg, Lebanon and Goshen, explained, “We’re the ones in the streets covering everything from city councils to commissioners, so

without additional revenue, or with loss of revenue, we’ve had to definitely made some hard decisions.”

Those decisions have included cutting days of print publication. The News & Tribune in Jeffersonville discontinued its Monday edition, while the Anderson Herald Bulletin no longer prints on Tuesdays and Saturdays. News & Tribune Publisher Bill Hanson told readers, “Readership changes, newsprint prices, print production expenses and delivery costs have resulted in many community newspapers publishing fewer days of the week to remain economically healthy. The virus crisis has had a significant impact on the News & Tribune because most of our revenue comes from advertising by local businesses, which are also suffering at this difficult time.”

Indiana is home to 180 newspapers of paid circulation and 55 free, with an estimated total circulation of 3.043 million. It has 260 radio stations and 25 TV outlets.

Steve Key of the Hoosier State Press Association said in a Zoom conference call with U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz on Monday, “We’re in an odd time when our readership, especially since November, has never been greater, as people realize it’s the local news outlets that allow them to analyze what’s happening in their own communities.

“But on the other hand, we’re financially struggling as the duopoly takes the majority of the digital advertising,” Key explained. “On one hand, the readership of newspapers has never been greater, but on the other hand the financial picture is very tough.”

That “duopoly” is Google and Facebook. Both media platform behemoths announced a couple of years ago they would pay for “local” content. According to Key and others on the call, it’s not been a two-way street.

One broadcaster described local media with Facebook as a “symbiotic relationship,” but added, “I don’t feel it was a fair relationship at all.” If there are issues, there are no contacts. Dave Holgate of Paxton Media, which owns 15 newspapers in Indiana, added, “Google and Facebook absolutely dwarf our revenue. We need to hold on to our revenue, not give it to them.”

Spartz is working on the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act of 2021 that “would provide a temporary safe harbor for publishers of online content to collectively negotiate with dominant online platforms regarding the terms on which content may be distributed.”

Dave Arland of the Indiana Broadcasters Association said, “It’s critically important to us these two ginormous platforms whether you’re in broadcast or print really dwarf everything that we’re doing. So we have to be able to negotiate with them and doing it together would be more powerful than doing it individually.”

Research by the Univer-



city of North Carolina in a 2018 report revealed that since 2003, more than a quarter of U.S. newspapers folded, leaving behind what the New York Times calls "news deserts." An updated report revealed that another 300 newspapers folded between 2018 and 2020, eliminating 6,000 jobs.

What is saving some local press are "billionaires" who have decided to step in and save local news franchises. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos bought the Washington Post. Boston Red Sox owner John Henry stepped in to save the Boston Globe. Hansjorg Wyss and Stewart W. Bainrum saved newspapers in Annapolis and Baltimore from Tribune Co. Glen Taylor bought the Minneapolis Star Tribune, Elizabeth Green established 30 Chalkbeat non-profits, including one in Indianapolis. Paul Huntsman bought the Salt Lake Tribune and turned it into a non-profit. H.F. Lenfest purchased the Philadelphia Inquirer and set up what the NYT calls a "hybrid" model, a "for-profit, public benefit corporation." Herb and Marion Sandler gave money to start ProPublica, which has produced investigative journalism

with local partners, including the South Bend Tribune.

The Indiana Citizen started by Bill and Ann Moreau launched as a nonpartisan, non-profit platform launched in 2019 with the goal of increasing the number of informed, engaged Hoosier voters. It is operated by the Indiana Citizen Education Foundation, Inc., a 501(c)(3) public charity. It has established a partnership with The StatehouseFile.com. The Indiana Citizen in 2020 launched a news and information platform focused on the civic life on Indiana and specifically, the Indiana General Assembly.

The pandemic, changing media patterns and behaviors, and the newspaper industry's disastrous decision a generation ago to avail its news content for free have led to the so-called perfect storm.

A century ago and up through the late-20th Century, there was a consolidation of partisan newspapers in many communities, creating the local arbiter and fact-checker. With its financial model outdated, many newspapers and now local TV network affiliates are cleaving news staffs to the bone. Many Hoosiers now rely on local blogs, Facebook and Twitter to get their news content. ❖

Where's the money going?

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Round two of COVID relief funds have been allocated and billions have been sent out already. Did you get \$1,400 for each person in your household? Unless you had less than \$80,000 in income (\$160,000 for a couple), you didn't see those checks.



"I don't need that money," says a friend in Elkhart over our statewide Zoom connection. He's right. But what harm is that money doing? If he doesn't spend it or give it away, the money won't just sit in his bank. The bank will lend to people, businesses, or state and local governments to spend accord-

ing to their opportunities and needs.

"Won't the U.S. have to raise taxes to pay off this new debt?" demands a college student in New Albany. "We're going to have to pay it back, with interest, some day. It's putting a future burden on my back." Pay it back to whom, when? From whom was this money borrowed? No foreign country or domestic investor lent this money to the US Treasury.

This money is only an electronic entry in the ledgers of the Federal Reserve System. There is no increase in conventional debt and no interest to be paid to holders of such debt.

"Won't it cheapen the dollar abroad?" asks a woman in Sullivan. No. The world is in a massive recession. Our dollars will be welcomed by nations exporting to us and greeting us as COVID-safe tourists. Our stimulus will perk up their economies.

"We are in danger of a massive jolt of inflation," declares a participant from Monticello. Where's the evidence? Stimulus round one didn't give us economy-wide inflation, except in limited corners of the economy.

"Housing! Timber! Gasoline!" counters a gentleman from Toad Hop. Yes, housing demand jumped when some people started working at home. They wanted more or different space and were able to afford mortgages with low interest rates. This demand for new structures or remodeled existing homes caused timber prices to rise. It's evidence the initial relief funds did as intended; it helped many workers to get or keep jobs.

Oil prices are a different story. They're dependent on the needs and whims of a few nations with price increases following severe price declines.

"This new stimulus money will be wasted on frivolities," comes a cry from Hobart.

"It will just reenforce laziness, undermining virtuous labor," proclaims a shadowy figure from Greenfield.

"It's a Communist plot to undermine Capitalism," insists one conspiratorial voice. The next visionary Zoomer affirms, "It's a Capitalist plot to increase consumption and undermine Socialism."

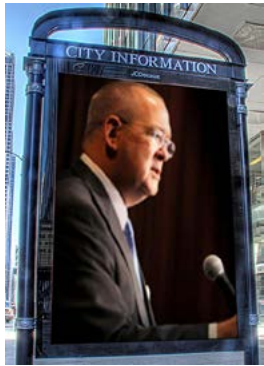
I suggest to the group we now leave this session and our preconceptions, turning instead to what we observe personally, not just gossip disguised as news. As a last resort we might see what the available data tell us. ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist. Reach him at mortonj-marcus@yahoo.com.

Post-COVID world favors quality places

By **MICHAEL HICKS**

MUNCIE – We are now a year past the darkest days of the COVID recession. As the economy slowly begins to recover, we should recognize that Indiana has still lost six years of job creation. Total employment in Indiana is back at April 2015 levels, and there are only 1,500 more people working than we had back in the summer of 2000. This should be pretty sobering news. Still, as we ponder the pace and shape of the recovery, it is encouraging to consider what good might have come from this disaster.



There are many little things we can point to. Household savings have spiked and many tens of millions of families made

investment in the physical stock of their homes. As with any recession there is some of what economist Joseph Schumpeter called “creative destruction.” This is the closure of failing firms and a reallocation of their assets to more productive purposes. There are glimmers of hope on firm productivity growth, which languished over the past decade. But one of the biggest changes is a great leap forward on our use of communication technology in business, government and education.

It is hard to overstate this latter effect. A year ago, I didn’t know what Zoom was. Today, I have mastered several types of videoconferencing software and pre-recorded an entire graduate class on Open Broadcaster Software.

Even old dogs can learn new tricks.

Today, about one in five workers continues to perform their job remotely, and 75% of office workers do so. A substantial share of these workers — some studies say one in four, but at least one in six nationwide — will continue to work at home after the pandemic. This will have all sorts of effects, from reducing the demand for downtown restaurants to reducing commute congestion. The substantial shift to online work will also change where workers and their families choose to live.

Between 23 million and 35 million households will find themselves newly unencumbered by the need to live within an easy daily commute to work. This won’t result in a complete loss of geographic attachment. Most of these workers will still need to live near the same metropolitan region, so moves within metropolitan areas will be more common than moves between cities. Still, this will alter the choices families can make and accelerate the already quickening trend of residents choosing better quality-of-life communities.

Of course, this means picking winners and losers

as families choose to live in different locations. But, this is a clear instance where the winners will be those places that have been investing in neighborhoods and schools. The losers will be those places who’ve stuck to the 1960s models of community development or treated the symptoms of population loss rather than the cause. As painful as this will be for some places, it is better that good policies receive brisk reward and bad policies suffer.

Significantly lessened commuting requirements leave workers free to think more long term about their residential decisions. Of course, they’ll still want to be nearby the thick labor market regions offered by large cities, but now they can look for homes more distant than a daily commute requires. This may return population growth to a number of places outside the formal metropolitan borders.

Here in Indiana, I think there is a list of likely winners. These are places that have made substantial community improvements over the past decades and continue to offer good to great public schools. Let me focus on central Indiana as an example.

A family relocating to the Indianapolis region for office work that can be done remotely for perhaps 80% of the time can cast a wide net. Places like Kokomo, Shelbyville, Rushville, or dozens of places in western Hancock County with good schools and great neighborhoods will see growth. Northward toward Daleville and Yorktown, northwest toward Lafayette and south toward Columbus and Bloomington are certain to see busier real estate markets and new families looking around.

Many other places, too numerous to mention, will fare poorly. The newly mobile families aren’t interested in ‘worker housing,’ a fancy new business park or unsupported claims about schools and neighborhoods. The newly liberated office workers are likely the savviest group of Americans ever to undertake large-scale migration. They’ll do their homework.

The formula for success is pretty clear. Communities need good schools, safe, livable communities and some public amenities. I’ve written this often, but need to be more specific. Population growth in Indiana is now happening almost only in places with good schools. This shift will accelerate that dynamic.

In the last year for which we have data, “A”-rated school corporations saw enrollment growth of 1.3%. The “B” corporations saw a 0.06% decline, and “C” corporations lost 0.11 percent. The “D”s suffered a 0.79% loss, and “F”s lost 9.75% of students. To be clear, this is not the fault of a poor rating system. This history is the result of families voting with their feet in an exodus that started long before anyone thought to rate schools.

It is hard to overstate how big this could be. Indiana’s current share of this newly mobile workforce is somewhere between 450,000 and 700,000 families. It will take a few years for these decisions to shake out. Workers and businesses still need to explore the full scope of remote work. Families will take time to research where

they wish to live, and housing markets will have to adjust. This will take more than a year or two, and there is some uncertainty about how many new families might find Indiana of interest.

Still there is a great deal of certainty as well. I am sure that for much of Indiana, this is a once-in-a-century type opportunity. This opportunity will reward those who prepared.

Takeaways from special House elections

By **KYLE KONDIK**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – Almost exactly 47 years ago – April 16, 1974 – Republicans suffered what would be the fourth of five U.S. House special election losses in the first half of that year. Bob Traxler (D), who would go on to serve two decades in the U.S. House, defeated James Sparling Jr. (R) in MI-8.

This happened despite – or perhaps, because of – embattled President Richard Nixon campaigning in person for Sparling days before the election.

The New York Times' R.W. Apple Jr., who followed Nixon's campaigning in the district covering Michigan's thumb as well as the cities of Saginaw and Bay City, reported, "A Sparling aide confided this morning that he would be happy if the President never mentioned the local candidate's name." Alas, Apple reported, the president "mentioned Mr. Sparling constantly."

Traxler won by three points in a district that Nixon had carried by 24 points in 1972 and 13 points in 1968. "It was yet another in the string of upset Democratic victories in special elections that showed Congressmen – even Republicans – how devastatingly unpopular were Richard Nixon and his works," wrote the authors of the 1976 Almanac of American Politics. Another one of those Democratic victories, which came earlier in the year, was that of Richard Vander Veen (D) in the Grand Rapids-based MI-5, which Gerald Ford had left behind when he became vice president in 1973.

The Democratic victories in the first half of 1974 probably represent the most influential special House elections in recent history. The GOP losses "helped convince Republicans that Nixon needed to resign," the authors of a more recent (2016) Almanac of American Politics wrote. Perhaps the only comparably influential set of special elections were those held between the 1930 midterm election and the opening of Congress in December 1931, which allowed Democrats to capture the majority during the Great Depression after narrowly coming up short in November 1930.

For those who did not, this is a lost chance at growth. ❖

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The 1974 specials also provide perhaps the best example of how special elections -- themselves their own form of a "midterm" election -- can operate as a miniature version of regular midterm House elections, which often deliver setbacks to the president's party.

But they do not always operate this way, and special elections can sometimes be deceptive bellwethers for the approaching regular election.

With one House special election already in the books this year – Rep. Julia Letlow's (R, LA-5) victory in the race to replace her late husband – and several more on the horizon, we thought it would be a good time to take a look at the modern history of special elections, dating back to 1957, the start of Dwight D. Eisenhower's second term as president. We picked 1957 because we used Bloomberg congressional expert Greg Giroux's excellent compilation of House special elections as our guide for this article, and Greg's list goes back to that year.

We've identified five big-picture takeaways from this election history. But first, a few numbers:

There have been 289 House special elections since 1957. That includes Letlow's victory last month, but it does not include a looming runoff between Democrats Troy Carter and Karen Carter Peterson in LA-2, coming up on April 24. This list also includes a couple of do-over elections, where the November results were wracked by problems: 2018's NC-9 election, which was re-run in September 2019, and 1974's LA-6 election, re-run in early January 1975.

Just to put in context how relatively few special elections there are, remember that there are 435 individual House elections every two years. So the whole history of special House elections since 1957 only adds up to roughly two-thirds of the number of races in a single, regular November House election.

There has been at least one House special election in every calendar year since 1957, with the exception of 2000. This averages out to roughly nine House special elections in every two-year election cycle, some of which end up being contested on the same day as a regular, biennial November federal election.

Despite occurring relatively infrequently, House specials are still a regular part of the election calendar, if irregularly scheduled. Article I, Section 2, clause 4 of the



Constitution mandates that “When vacancies happen in the Representation from any State, the Executive Authority thereof shall issue Writs of Election to fill such Vacancies.” This is why every House vacancy is filled through a special election, and why governors have no power to appoint temporary replacements to the U.S. House (unlike with Senate vacancies, which are handled differently based on state laws and where governors often have appointment powers).

Some of the most prominent House members in the country have first come to Washington via special elections. That includes the top two House Democrats, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D, CA-12) and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D, MD-5), as well as the second-ranking House Republican, House Minority Whip Steve Scalise (R, LA-1).

With that, here are our five takeaways from nearly 65 years of House special elections:

1. Special House elections more often break against the party in power

Just as the non-presidential party is likelier to net seats in midterms, so too is the non-presidential party likelier to capture House seats in special elections than the presidential party. Of the 289 House specials since 1957, 55 were won by the party that did not hold the seat prior to the vacancy. Of these 55 flips, 39 were won by the non-presidential party.

The Democrats’ 1974 victories are an extreme example of this dynamic – five flips over the course of just four months – but the non-White House party enjoyed other longer, successful runs at various other times, too.

2. They can be a preview of the upcoming November general election

In the case of 1974, the Republican losses ended up being a preview of the November campaign -- even with Nixon gone, the Democrats still won 48 more seats in 1974 than they had won in 1972. In other words, the Democrats’ “special” strength manifested itself in the regular election. This also ended up being the case, to a lesser extent, in the other aforementioned examples. Democrats netted a dozen seats in the 1970 cycle, Nixon’s first midterm, and Republicans netted 15 in 1978 and 34 in 1980. There are other examples when special success proved to be a harbinger of things to come.

Democrats flipped three Republican-held seats in the first half of 2008, including the Illinois seat of the former Speaker of the House, the now-disgraced Dennis Hastert, and two Republican-leaning seats in Louisiana and Mississippi. Democrats ended up augmenting their majority that November.

In a 2010 study covering House special elections conducted from 1900-2008, political scientists David R. Smith and Thomas L. Brunell found that when “one party takes seats away from the other party in special elections, the gaining party generally fares reasonably well in the general election.”

In the 2018 cycle, Democrats only flipped one Republican-held seat in a special election – PA-18, won by Rep. Conor Lamb, who now occupies a different, redrawn district, PA-17 – but that performance combined with a series of strong Democratic showings in heavily Republican districts that cycle attracted the attention of analysts. Writing in early 2018, Daniel Donner of the liberal elections site Daily Kos Elections used historical special election results from state and federal legislative races to identify a strong Democratic environment, which would manifest itself that November.

3. But sometimes specials are not a preview

History is also dotted with examples of special election results that break in favor of the White House party and/or do not reflect what would happen in the November election. As noted above, 39 of the 55 special election party flips were victories by the non-presidential party. But that also means that the presidential party flipped 16 seats from the opposition party.

4. Special election winners typically win their next election, but not always

In the wake of now-former Rep. Karen Handel’s (R) victory in the closely-watched 2017 GA-6 runoff, a number of prognosticators (including us) initially gave her the benefit of the doubt for the regular election based on the belief that special election winners usually win their next election. That is the case, but there are exceptions -- as Handel herself ended up becoming when she lost to now-Rep. Lucy McBath (D, GA-6) in November 2018.

Just 20 of the 288 special election winners since 1957 lost their next House election, although some did not run again (Letlow is excluded from this group because she hasn’t had the chance to run for another term). The last person to flip a seat in a special election, Rep. Mike Garcia (R, CA-25), would be on this list were it not for his narrow, 333-vote victory last November following a 10-point win in a May 2020 special election. It’s a credit to Garcia that he isn’t on this list – Joe Biden won his district by 10 points in November, making Garcia a major overachiever – but it does suggest, along with other examples in this section, that special election winners are not necessarily untouchable in their next election.

Ron Paul – yes, that Ron Paul – won his first U.S House victory in a 1976 special, defeating Bob Gammage (D). Gammage came back and beat Paul in the 1976 general election, and then Paul beat him in November 1978.

5. Special elections can keep seats “in the family”

House seats sometimes pass to family members other than spouses in special elections: for instance, current Rep. Donald M. Payne Jr. (D, NJ-10) won a 2012 special to replace his late father. Another current House member, André Carson (D, IN-7), won a special election in 2008 to replace his late grandmother, Julia Carson (D). Mo Udall (D-AZ) served for three decades in the House after winning a special election to replace Stewart Udall, his brother, who had become Secretary of the Interior. ❖

James Briggs, IndyStar: There are few rising stars in the Indiana Democratic Party. Whatever that number is — Ten? Five? — there are even fewer willing to risk wasting their time and sacrificing career prospects to run in elections where Republicans are heavily favored. Christina Hale was an exception. Hale, 46, is the former state representative and lieutenant governor candidate who fired up the Democratic Party last year by mounting a competitive campaign to succeed retiring Susan Brooks in the Republican-leaning 5th congressional district. Hale raised millions of dollars and appeared likely, if not probable, to flip a coveted Republican seat in a red state. But her campaign followed the recent pattern of Democratic heartbreak in Indiana. Hale lost, and it wasn't particularly close, with U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz capturing 50% of the vote and Hale receiving 45.9%. Hale's campaign is a microcosm of the Democratic Party's problem in Indiana. As a conservative Democrat who talked about cutting government spending and dismissed the activist dream of defunding the police, Hale should have appealed to the typical Republican-leaning voter who occasionally splits their ticket.



But the substance of Hale's campaign barely mattered. The Indiana Democratic Party is operating without distinction from the national party, so candidates such as Hale are vulnerable to the prevailing conservative view of liberals. Spartz and the Republican Party branded Hale as a liberal socialist who pals around with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and that was that. "What we really need right now are some wins," Hale told me. "Our millennials and Gen Zers, they weren't around when Evan Bayh and Joe Kernan and Gov. Frank O'Bannon were running the state in a way that people felt good about." Don't look at Hale to be the Democrat to get that next win, though. Hale is working on resuming her career in the private sector and she's not planning another run for office. It's not clear who else you can look to. Pete Buttigieg, the former South Bend mayor and Democratic candidate for president, is charming Washington as President Joe Biden's transportation secretary. He has no interest in running for office in Indiana, which tells you all you need to know about how hard it is to win here as a Democrat.

Leading the upstart, overachieving Buttigieg presidential campaign is not unlike Mike Schmuhl's challenge in Indiana. In a state with few big-name Democrats and next to no talent pipeline, Schmuhl is going to have to find unknown, yet talented, candidates and package them as credible contenders. He has already proven he can do that. The harder task might be giving Democrats a brand that compels conservative-leaning voters to consider the candidates on their own merits. When I talked to Schmuhl, though, he suggested Republicans might actually be the party with an image problem. "I think Republicans, from ex-President Trump on down, have an identity crisis on how far right they're going to be or how extreme they're going to be on certain policies when the vast majority of

the American people and the vast majority of Hoosiers, I would say, are somewhere in the center and have kind of a common sense mindset," Schmuhl told me. ❖

Mark Bennett, Terre Haute Tribune-Star: As a kid, I laid in bed listening to the Indiana Pacers' games on a transistor radio. It was the only way to follow them, back in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Pacers played in the old American Basketball Association, a short-lived but talented rival of the NBA. The announcers often peppered their play-by-play with mentions of Indiana Coach Bobby "Slick" Leonard, arguing a ref's call or huddling his Pacers for timeouts. Eventually, I saw "Slick" coach his Pacers in exhibition games played at Hulman Center, resplendent in flashy plaid jackets and wild bell-bottom pants. Those memories flooded back Tuesday afternoon, after word came that Leonard had died at age 88. Leonard and his wife, Nancy, had five children, 12 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. His ABA Pacers brimmed with talent — future Hall of Famers Mel Daniels, Roger Brown and George McGinnis, along with Bob Netolicky, Billy Keller, Freddie Lewis, Darnell Hillman and others. Leonard coached them to ABA championships in 1970, '72 and '73, and then guided the franchise into its NBA era beginning in 1976. He amassed a 387-270 record in the ABA and wound up with 529 total victories in both leagues before retiring in 1980. He spent more than 50 years with the Pacers, as the coach, general manager and then color analyst known for his "boom, baby" shouts after Indiana 3-pointers. ❖

William McGurn, Wall Street Journal: A recent slip by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg reveals that what the Biden administration means by infrastructure is not at all what the American people think it means. In an interview last week with TheGrio.com, he declared "there is racism physically built into some of our highways," and that this racism was a "conscious choice," not "just an act of neglect." If this is truly what Mr. Buttigieg and the administration believe, the trillions they are about to spend will almost certainly end up going less to actual infrastructure needs than some as-yet-to-be defined measure of "equity." Perhaps Mr. Buttigieg has a case. If so, he and the president should be more forthright in detailing exactly what the administration means when it says the American Jobs Plan "prioritizes addressing long-standing and persistent racial injustice." Is this limited to targeting "40 percent of the benefits of climate and clean infrastructure investments to disadvantaged communities"? What other agendas might they be piling on here? Because when most Americans hear the word infrastructure, they think of physical structures—roads, bridges, airports, power lines—with clear operational benefits. Mr. Buttigieg's appearance on "Fox News Sunday" is a good example. Host Chris Wallace opened by hammering the secretary for not being "straight" with the American people in claiming the U.S. is ranked 13th globally for infrastructure. ❖

FDA continues J&J vaccine pause

WASHINGTON —The federal government’s recommendation to pause using Johnson & Johnson’s Covid-19 vaccine will remain in place after an advisory panel put off a vote on how to move forward following reports of a few cases of life-threatening blood clots ([Wall Street Journal](#)). The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, or ACIP, said Wednesday it doesn’t have enough information yet about the risk of these unusual side effects to determine whether the vaccine should be continued, discontinued or recommended only for certain groups of the population. The ACIP expects to meet again in another week or two to revisit the issue. U.S. health officials on Tuesday recommended that use of the J&J vaccine be paused while they investigate. Members of the committee said they needed more time to learn more about the clotting condition the women developed and how common it may be. The delay shouldn’t pose a problem to vaccinations, the members said, because supplies of other vaccines are available.



Biden announces Afghanistan pullout

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said Wednesday he will withdraw the remaining U.S. troops from Afghanistan, declaring that the Sept. 11 attacks “cannot explain” why American forces should still be there 20 years later ([NewsNation Now](#)). “We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan hoping to create the ideal conditions for our withdrawal, expecting a different result,” Biden said. “I am now the fourth American president to preside over an American troop presence in Afghanistan. Two Republicans. Two Democrats. I will not pass

this responsibility to a fifth.” His plan is to pull out all American forces — numbering 2,500 now — by this Sept. 11, the anniversary of the attacks, which were coordinated from Afghanistan. “It is time to end America’s longest war,” Biden said, but he added that the U.S. will “not conduct a hasty rush to the exit.”

House doctors want Fauci at border

WASHINGTON — A coalition of Republican doctors in the House on Tuesday sent a letter to Dr. Anthony Fauci, asking him to address concerns about COVID-19 and the border crisis ([The Daily Wire](#)). Their concern about the public health pandemic grew after touring the border for themselves. According to the coalition, Dr. Fauci is in a position to make the public health emergency known. “In your role as Chief Medical Advisor to the President, we feel it is imperative that you use your position to publicly express your concerns over the national health emergencies created by this surge in illegal immigration,” the letter, first obtained by the Daily Caller, reads. The letter is signed by Greg Murphy (R-NC), Brad Wenstrup (R-OH), Andy Harris (R-MD), John Joyce (R-PA), Brian Babin (R-TX), Buddy Carter (R-GA), Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA), Drew Ferguson (R-GA), Diana Harshbarger (R-TN), Mark Green (R-TN), Larry Bucshon (R-IN), Ronny Jackson (R-TX), and Scott DesJarlais (R-TN).

4 Muncie PD officers indicted

MUNCIE — Four Muncie police officers have been indicted on charges accusing them of using excessive force during arrests or of trying to cover up that misconduct, a federal prosecutor announced Wednesday. Officers Joseph Chase Winkle, 34, and Jeremy Gibson, 30, and Sgt. Joseph Krejsa, were initially charged in a 12-count indictment in March 2020 ([AP](#)). But acting U.S. Attorney John

Childress announced Wednesday that a 17-count superseding indictment returned by a federal grand jury charges all three with additional counts while also charging Officer Corey Posey, 28.

Council chafes at Mayor Parry

MICHIGAN CITY — Is the mayor holding the city hostage by refusing to resign? Some members of the Michigan City Common Council think so since he left apparent racist remarks on a Black pastor’s voicemail and has refused calls to resign ([La-Porte County Herald-Dispatch](#)). “The way you look at ministers or people who look like me in general – it infuriates me to think that you still have the right to sit in that seat where you represent upwards of 10,000 African-American people in this community, and think you can do it with your head held high,” City Councilman Sean Fitzpatrick said in direct address to Mayor Duane Parry.

Bedford PD officer arrested by ISP

BEDFORD — A Bedford Police Department sergeant has been arrested on official misconduct-related charges, according to state police ([WRTV](#)). Sgt. Jeremy Crane, 38, of Bedford, was arrested Wednesday by Indiana State Police’s Organized Crime and Corruption Unit and charged with official misconduct false reporting.

Banks calls border situation a ‘crisis’

FORT WAYNE – “A humanitarian crisis” is what U.S. Rep. Jim Banks said he witnessed during his visit at the US-Mexico border. Rep. Banks told [WANE 15](#) that President Biden is directly responsible for what’s happening at the border. “Almost every single person that we talk to told us that the border was under control before Joe Biden took office, under Donald Trump’s watch,” Banks said.