

The Howey Political Report



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“QUOTE” OF THE WEEK

“Bush really connects. It’s a mistake to underestimate him....”

- Former President Clinton after meeting President George W. Bush, in *TIME* magazine

Rep. Kerns might be the odd man out

HPR ponders 9 possible new CDs

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY** in Indianapolis

There's going to be quite a game of musical chairs played out in the final days of the Indiana General Assembly this spring and summer.

The loss of a Congressional seat will bring Indiana's total down from 10 to 9. If we had to guess who will be the odd Congressman out, it would be Republican freshman Brian Kerns.

After talking with a several members of Congress, several influential legislators, and a number of Republican and Democratic operatives, here's how we came to such a deduction:

Regional power centers: There will always be at least two Indianapolis seats - the suburban 6th and the urban 10th. In the past, there was a third seat - with the 5th and currently the 7th poking their way into the suburban sprawl.

Congressional seats will almost certainly be based around Northwest Indiana's Region (1st CD); South Bend (3rd); Fort Wayne (4th), Evansville (8th) and the Louisville suburbs (9th). That probably won't change because each region of the state has different needs and the powers-that-be won't want those diluted and diffused.

Three to shift: That leaves three districts - the 2nd, 5th and 7th - without singular regional population hubs and most likely to shift, or in the case of one, to simply be erased.

Two of those districts have freshman Republican representatives - Mike Pence in the 2nd and Kerns in the 7th. Of the two, Pence has better alliances in the Indiana General

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TICKER TAPE

DANIELS CONFIRMED BY THE SENATE, HEADS "INDIANA MAFIA": The U.S. Senate confirmed former Lilly executive Mitch Daniels as director of the Office of Management and Budget on Tuesday. Meanwhile, Business Week magazine listed the top 20 people who carry sway with President Bush and noted the existence of the "Indiana Mafia" in the new administration that includes Daniels, Stephen Goldsmith, Al Hubbard, and Mike Gerson.

TREACY SAYS 'NO WAY' TO WORKING WITH LAUDIG: Marion County Democratic Chairman candidate Ed Treacy told HPR he had two words to describe his feelings about the prospects of working with current Chairman Steve Laudig: "No way." HPR's Daily Wire reported on Monday that Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson was mulling over a deal where Treacy would assume the title of chair, and Laudig would stay involved with candidate recruitment and field work. "'There is no way Laudig will have a seat at my table,' Treacy told HPR. He said that whoever told HPR about the proposed deal was "smoking something funny." Laudig said he promised Peterson that he would not campaign for the office, but told HPR Monday afternoon, "I look



Kerns, *from page 1*

Assembly. Pence headed the Indiana Policy Review Foundation for several years, then hosted a talk radio show, giving him access to key and influential members of the Indiana legislature (Speaker John Gregg guest hosted the show for Pence on occasion). His chief-of-staff, Bill Smith, formerly headed the Indiana Family Institute and has good friends in powerful places. While the 2nd CD will likely shift, most likely to the west or northwest, it is unlikely to be dissolved because of Pence's political network. Not that House Democrats might not want to try. Indiana Democratic Chairman Robin Winston told HPR that Pence represents the biggest threat to outright Democratic dominance in the state because of his youth, communication skills, and ability to galvanize a conservative grassroots power base.

Here's how the HPR reapportionment scenario plays out fully:

5th CD: Indiana has long had a north-central agriculture district and that currently is Rep. Steve Buyer's 5th CD, which is a sprawling beast served by five television markets.

The 5th CD is likely to go through the blender. Pete Visclosky's 1st CD will likely expand southward into southern Lake and Porter counties and will probably take in Newton County, which just elected a Democratic sheriff. Visclosky won his last couple of elections by 57 and 58 percent of the vote, so House Democrats won't want him to take on too many Republican areas. Plus, Visclosky and Buyer have a good relationship, with Buyer doing most of the work on the Kankakee Valley flood control and wildlife refuge. Visclosky will want Buyer to retain part of that (Jasper County).

3rd CD: This is the first trouble spot Indiana House Democrats are going to want to shore up. U.S. Rep. Tim Roemer won with just 51.7 percent of the vote in 2000, which sends up a red flag for a 10-year incumbent. Roemer will likely be in OK shape during the 2002 mid-term election, but the district runs strong Republican in presidential years. He can't get help to the west in Porter County, because that could make Visclosky vulnerable. He will likely pick up Democratic Starke County from the 5th, though that may not be enough. One scenario Buyer believes will be in play is

to extend the 3rd down U.S. 31 to UAW stronghold Kokomo, where Roemer could pick up Democratic areas in Marshall and Howard counties.

4th CD: This is a compact district served by one media market - Fort Wayne. U.S. Rep. Mark Souder fears that it will be expanded into two, South Bend/Elkhart if it juts west or Indianapolis if it dives south and picks up Muncie and Anderson from the 2nd. But if the 3rd is extended down to Kokomo, the 4th would be in a position to pick up the easternmost remnants of the 5th - Kosciusko, Wabash, Miami, Grant and Blackford counties. That would keep the 4th completely in the Fort Wayne market.

2nd CD: In this scenario, Pence's 2nd CD would shift west and north, possibly taking parts of Henry and Hancock, part of the rapidly growing Republican bastion of Hamilton (thus, making Pence Indianapolis MSA's third congressman).

6th CD: U.S. Rep. Dan Burton's district - currently rated the 3rd most Republican in the nation - would likely lose a good chunk of Marion County to Democrat Julia Carson's current 10th CD. Burton won't mind (though he might lose the Indianapolis Motor Speedway) because the Marion County townships are becoming more Democratic. His district would shift around to the west, taking in big Indianapolis MSA growth areas of Boone and Hendricks counties to offset the east and northern losses.

9th CD: U.S. Rep. Baron Hill is going to have a big problem. His district is becoming more Republican as Cincinnati expatriates move into Dearborn, Ohio and Switzerland counties. He can't move west because House Democrats won't want to take any areas away from the Bloody 8th, which is an area they believe they can take over. So the 9th CD will likely move north, perhaps taking Wayne County (Richmond) away from Pence, along with parts of Bartholomew and Decatur counties, which lean Republican.

8th CD: OK, so we've played this

Rubik's cube from The Region in Northwest Indiana, across the north, then down the east side of the state, and, finally, into the Ohio River Valley. National Democrats persistently believe they can knock off U.S. Rep. John Hostettler. The way they believe they'll grease the skids is to add Vigo County and the Democratic bastion of Terre Haute, and more of Monroe County (Bloomington and the Indiana University liberal offshoots), coming at the expense of the 7th CD.

5th and 7th CDs: That brings us back up the western side of the state. Under this HPR scenario, the 5th CD has lost sizeable parts of its fringes to the 1st, 3rd, 4th and possibly 2nd CDs. The 7th has lost three significant population pockets - rapidly growing Hendricks and Boone counties to the 6th, and Terre Haute and Bloomington to the 8th CD. In the final stage, Buyer's 5th CD floods southward, taking in Lafayette and Tippecanoe County, along with Fountain, Parke and Putnam counties and the rest of Vermillion.

Again, Buyer has better contacts and affiliations in the General Assembly than Kerns does. In this scenario, Kerns, who lives in southern Vigo County, lands in the 8th CD, where there would be considerable pressure for him to not challenge Hostettler, lest the incumbent be bloodied up for the fall and where he could face Speaker Gregg, who will have great influence over the final maps. If this were to pass, House Democrats would shore up the 3rd and 8th CDs, hope that Hill builds up the kind of constituent respect that enabled Lee Hamilton to become a statesman, Pence becomes the third Indianapolis area Member, Carson expands into increasingly Democratic Indianapolis, and Burton's district becomes a true doughnut.

Buyer urged legislators to keep one other element in mind: "They need to think beyond the politics and more into the aspects of public policy and what is in the best interests of the various constituencies." ♦

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forward to working with the mayor and the congresswoman in consolidating the gains of the last three years. We can turn Marion County into an organization with not only Democrats at the top, but through and through. I'll take whatever role the mayor and congresswoman want me to take."

WINSTON, O'BANNON BACKING MAYNARD JACKSON: Indiana Gov. Frank O'Bannon and Democratic Chairman Robin Winston are backing former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson to become the next Democratic National chairman. "If I followed the majority, I probably wouldn't be able to vote in some states," Winston said (Mary Beth Schneider, Indianapolis Star). "I stand by my convictions." O'Bannon is backing Jackson over Terry McAuliffe because Jackson came to Indiana to raise money for the party, said spokesman Thad Nation. Former President Clinton picked McAuliffe to lead the DNC in what was seen as a power play against Al Gore heading the party. Gore indicated he would have kept Joe Andrew at the helm.

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME HAS LEADERSHIP TROUBLES: Several legislative leaders said they were sur-

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prised by Gov. Frank O'Bannon's endorsement of daylight savings time during his State of the State address and almost all said it was going to be tough to pass. House Majority Floor Leader Mark Kruzan, D-Bloomington, called it the most polarizing, nonpartisan, grass-roots issue there is in Indiana (Mike Smith, Associated Press). "I think it would be problematic this session," said Ways and Means Chairman B. Patrick Bauer. Senate President Pro Tempore Bob Garton said he has put the question to his constituents in surveys the past five years, and gets anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 responses. "Invariably, 60 to 65 percent of the people are opposed," he said. House Minority Leader Brian Bosma is for making the change, but says when he asks his constituents about it, 48 percent are for, 48 percent against, and 4 percent don't care.

SENATE UNANIMOUSLY OVERRIDES O'BANNON VETO: The Indiana Senate on Tuesday unanimously approved overriding Gov. Frank O'Bannon's veto of a bill reducing the tax on insurance premiums (Nikki Kelly, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). There was no discussion on the override, which passed 74-21 last week in the House. The bill now becomes law. The bill phases down the tax that insurance companies pay

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Bayh stakes new ground in power shift

By BRIAN A. HOWEY

INDIANAPOLIS - James Carville told NBC's Tim Russert on *Meet the Press* that there is no way U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton will run for president in 2004, and I believe him.

That means that U.S. Sen. Evan Bayh has about two years to get his Democratic constituency credentials together prior to determining whether he runs for re-election or for president.

This past week saw him take two conspicuous stands. Last week while his office was peppered with inquiries from the Indiana media (or should have been) about how he would vote on the John Ashcroft nomination, he instead wrote an op-ed article for the *Washington Post* titled, "*The Wrong Man.*" This hit the streets as thousands - mostly Republicans but also influential Democrats - were permeating the Beltway for the Son of Bush inaugural. As HPR's *Daily Wire* first speculated on Friday, it could be seen as an overt attempt to placate the NARALs and the NOWs, which lambasted his potential vice presidential nod last summer for not being pro-choice enough.

Then on Tuesday, he and U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman unveiled the Public Education Reinvestment, Reinvention, and Responsibility Act (Three R's), which would dramatically downsize the number of federal education programs, provide public schools with increased federal funding of \$25 billion over the next five years, and allow states and local communities more flexibility in spending federal education dollars. In return, states would be required to set standards for raising academic achievement, for closing the gap between high- and low-performing students, for helping immigrant children learn English, and for improving the quality of their teachers. States and local educators would be held accountable for meeting these goals, and would have to demonstrate annual progress.

Roll Call's Morton Kondracke observed, "friendly Democrats are advising (President Bush) to think big from the outset on education. Aides to Sens. Joe Lieberman and Evan Bayh have told Bush advisers that the new president should push for a full package of education reforms right away, not just a \$5 billion reading initiative."

Mike Tackett of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote on Monday, "For a party out of power, Democrats could be in a position of surprising strength at the beginning of the Bush administration." Tackett identified Bayh, Lieberman and U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy as Democrats "trying to get out ahead of the Bush administration on important issues such as education."

Think about the implications. In one week, Bayh begins to make amends to the Democratic left flank on the life issue, then rushes to ride the party's power wave just as a new president takes charge. And Bayh tried to strike a new chord on what it means to be a New Democrat of the 21st Century.

He described the RRR legislation as striking the right balance between federal and state involvement in education. "The federal government can't just continue to throw money at the growing challenge of educating our children and hope it will be solved," said Bayh. "In this plan, the federal government provides additional resources, but preserves state and local control over how to educate our children. States and local educators determine standards and the federal government holds them accountable for meeting those standards."

Bayh calls it "a middle ground between the Democratic agenda of more spending and programs without accountability, and the Republican agenda of more block grants and vouchers." Sounds like that bipartisanship notion the President keeps talking about. ♦

No time for property tax reform?

By BRIAN A. HOWEY

INDIANAPOLIS - All of us here at the North American Headquarters of The Howey Political Report have been struck by the utterly low level of expectations at the Statehouse at the turn of the century.

As mentioned last week, Gov. O'Bannon dedicated a mere one paragraph to reassessment, and it provoked no more of a response from the floor than some shallow, rapid breathing and a couple of cases of heart palpitations.

Watching from the balcony of O'Bannon's State of the State address was Indiana Tax Court Judge Thomas Fisher, who had publicly charged a virtual across-the-board lack of leadership on the topic.

A week prior, Senate Finance Committee Chair Larry Borst said that with the state's financial picture heading quickly south, there would be little likelihood that reassessment could be dealt with any earlier than 2003.

Last Monday, three Evansville legislators - State Reps. Vaneta Becker, Dennis Avery and Jonathon Weinzapfel - told the public that there "would probably be no time during the current General Assembly session to deal with property tax reassessment," according to the *Evansville Courier & Press*. "They said the legislative agenda is crowded with such controversial issues as the state budget, casino gambling and redistricting, and the State Tax Board probably won't have its new property tax reassessment regulations prepared until late spring. Avery said if no action is taken by the legislature, the Indiana Tax Court will do the reassessment."

Gov. O'Bannon's office is indicating that it eagerly awaits the new property tax rules in April and at that point there will be enough information to forge a new reassessment system.

This "no time" excuse from the Evansville crew is a crock. It is widely assumed that there will be at least one

special session to deal with all the controversial issues.

The governor could easily announce in April that he expects all the business to be finished up - except reassessment - by the official sine die, or in Overtimes I or II. But then the governor could say, "There will be a final overtime, of undetermined length, to deal with property taxes and reassessment."

The governor could then take his obsolete Taxpayer Protection Plan, revamp it in vivid detail, and tell his buddies Borst and Bauer, and Becker, Avery and Weinzapfel, to take it or leave it and offer another version, all fresh fodder for legendary compromise.

The hard, undeniable facts confronting O'Bannon and the legislature are what Evan Bayh might call the "white, hot heat of public opinion."

In each of the HPR/TeleResearch Polls conducted in 2000, property tax reform was either the top issue or a white, hot second. An on-line *Indianapolis Star/WTHR* survey this past week that included 2,088 respondents revealed that property taxes was the top issue, even beating out such populist-friendly issues as "telemarketing restrictions" and "free textbooks for public school students."

HPR can just about guarantee that there will be newspaper columns written along with editorials and commentary that will be demanding this spring and summer that a new system be put in place in 2001 so we can assess things in 2004 when it's time to choose a new governor ... and a legislature.

People weren't voting for Judge Fisher in 2000. They were voting for servant governors and legislators and they were telling them to get busy and clean up their rooms.

The late Adlai Stevenson might have put it best when it comes to 2001 priorities: "I'm prepared to wait for your answer ... until hell freezes over." ♦

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on premiums from 2 percent to 1.3 percent over five years. It is projected to cost the state about \$28 million annually when fully implemented.

CAMPAIGN SPENDING

HIGH: The two candidates for a House seat in Madison County set a record for spending in District 36 (Ken de la Bastide, Anderson Herald-Bulletin). Republican Jack Lutz spent \$106,734 and his Democratic opponent, Terri Austin, spent \$124,666. Lutz won by 910 votes out of almost 24,000 cast. Austin is expected to seek election again in 2002.

SEN. ROGERS' SWAN

SONG? Sen. Earline Rogers, D-Gary, says she probably won't run again when her current term ends in 2004, and she's sad that she has never been part of the majority (Steve Shaw, Gary Post-Tribune).

INDIANA STEEL INDUSTRY BRACES FOR MORE BANK-

RUPTCIES: The Times of Northwest Indiana reported on Sunday that the nation's second, third and fourth largest integrated steel corporations may declare bankruptcy as early as February. The Times Clint Mitchell reported, "The problems of December and January likely will continue, as LTV Corp will almost assuredly be joined in bankruptcy by a handful of other integrated

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steelmakers. One industry insider has speculated that by April as much as 70 percent of the country's steel capacity could be produced by bankrupt companies." The steel companies topping the speculative bankruptcy list include Bethlehem Steel Corp., LTV and National Steel Corp.

GOLDSMITH MAY BE VICTIM OF POLITICS, COMPASSION: In the Washington Post's coverage of HUD Secretary Mel Martinez's confirmation, it reported that former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith may have been bypassed for the cabinet post because of politics and President Bush's desire to appoint a "compassionate conservative." The Post reported, "Republican sources call Martinez an ideal symbol of Bush's compassionate conservatism, but they concede that his nomination was mainly a product of politics. If experience with HUD issues had been the top criterion, they say, Bush would have picked former House housing subcommittee chairman Rick Lazio or former Indianapolis mayor Stephen Goldsmith.

LIFE SHIFT: The New York Times reported on Sunday that a Gallup Poll shows Americans considering themselves "pro-life" rose from 33 percent to 43 per-

When CNN wanted information on Sen. Evan Bayh ...
When the Dallas Morning News needed a credible source on Dan Coats ...
who was their Indiana contact?

The Howey Political Report

Prognosticating the 2000 Election was one thing.
Telling you "why" it all happened is the logical next step.

To book HPR Publisher Brian A. Howey before your organization, call 317-254-1533 or e-mail us at: brianhowey@howeypolitics.com for speaking fees and scheduling.

Brian A. Howey thanks the following organizations for the opportunity to speak to their members and guests:

Baker & Daniels
Marion County Democratic Chairman's Breakfast
Union Chapel United Methodist Men
The Otis R. Bowen Institute, Ball State University
Indiana Democratic Editorial Association
Central Soya PAC
Indiana Bankers Association
Sullivan Rotary Club
Indiana Democratic Club
Indianapolis Society of Financial Analysts
Bulen Symposium on American Politics, IUPUI
Public Affairs Council

PERHAPS...

WE WANDER

By Brian Howey

The Bush inaugural (for sons and others)

Indiana's Auditor Connie Nass had an incredible view last Saturday. As she stood on the windswept stands on the west face of the Capitol, she could "observe up close and personal the various emotions displayed on the faces of the Bushes, the Clintons, the Cheneys, the Quayles, the senators, the representatives, the Chief Justice and others." Faces lined by recent political storms.

"I wish I could have shared this event with my grandmother, who was a mentor as well as a history buff," Nass shared with HPR. "The long hours of travel, waiting in line after line, the security checks, all came together, as in a short 30 minutes much was said and done as the transition of power and ideas passed from one leader to another to guide the greatest nation on earth. The closeness of the election probably made all of us aware that Americans must get along together and pursue common goals. On Saturday, there was a sense of togetherness of creeds and genders that perhaps was the start of a healing process. There were a small and insignificant few who behaved inappropriately, but the distraction was overshadowed by the sense of our country coming together."

I had a different view Saturday morning. I sat in my Lazy Boy and demanded that my two sons (10 and 11 years old) pull themselves away from their MicroSoft Flight Simulator 98 on the computer to watch the inaugural. I had to yell out several times for them to "stop horsing around" as the bands played, the choir sang, and the dignitaries streamed into the balcony from the Capitol.

After the oaths were administered,

an uneasy calm came over the room as President George W. Bush spoke. "What you do is as important as anything government does," the fledgling president said. Stephen, my younger son, remarked that Lt. Gov. Joe Kernan had just asked him and 25,000 other Hoosier fourth graders to pick up a piece of litter each day. I was impressed by his connect.

"I ask you to be citizens," Bush intoned. "Citizens, not spectators. Citizens, not subjects. Responsible citizens, building communities of service and a nation of character."

Not quite the clarion soundbite that President John F. Kennedy made in 1961 when he asked us what we could do for our country. But a worthy notion.

The part of the speech I loved was the part where my sons eyes glazed over. It was the spiritual part of the speech. "America's faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea. Now it is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations."

Later, President Bush quoted a letter to one of my favorite presidents, Thomas Jefferson, for whom I named my first son. Following his signature on the Declaration of Independence, Bush reminded us of the letter Jefferson had received from John Page: "We know the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm?"

President Bush continued, "The years and changes accumulate. But the themes of this day he would know: Our nation's grand story of courage and its simple dream of dignity.

"This work continues. This story goes on. And an angel still rides the whirlwind and directs this storm."

Worthy notions to be shared with sons and grandmothers. ♦

TICKER TAPE

cent over the past five years. Those considering themselves "pro-choice" declined from 56 to 48 percent.

HELMKE-MOSES FEUD SIMMERS OVER BOOK: Former Fort Wayne Mayor Paul Helmke's on-line book, *Son of a Son of a Politician* has angered both Democrats and Republicans. But perhaps no one more than State Rep. Win Moses, who the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette describes as "hopping mad" about Helmke's depiction. Helmke defeated Moses in the bitter 1987 mayoral race. "I found it unfactual and insulting, but I intend to take care of it privately," Moses told the Journal Gazette. "I have spoken with Paul and will speak to him again." He might be keeping mum about exactly why the book angers him, but it's likely paragraphs like this: "I was always impressed with how good Win really is. I know a lot of politicians, and Win is one of the best," Helmke said. "Again, he might be lying through his teeth; he might be making it all up. But when he stands in front of a crowd, he knows how to connect with them." Or it could be Helmke calling Moses untrustworthy: "Apparently there were a lot of people who hated Win Moses. And they were out to get him and do him in. I obviously had my concerns about Win but I didn't want

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to be a part of it and wasn't a part of it."

GARTON TALKS OF TAPPING RAINY DAY FUND: Senate President Pro Tempore Bob Garton said the time may be approaching to tap the state's Rainy Day Fund and he might change the law to do it. Garton said at Monday's Third House session in Columbus that the most recent budget estimates show only about \$3 million left of the state budget surplus, not counting the state's rainy day fund, tuition reserve fund and property tax relief fund, which contain more than \$800 million. "It is not raining now, but it is sprinkling," Garton said (John Clark, *Columbus Republic*). Under state law, the rainy day fund can be tapped only under certain economic conditions, which do not exist now. But Garton said he would consider changing the law to change those thresholds, rather than harnessing tobacco settlement or lottery funds for the general fund. ♦

NEXT HPR WEEKLY
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COLUMNISTS ON INDIANA

Sylvia Smith, *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*

Q. What about Hillary Clinton? **A.** The new senator from New York is keeping her head very low. She didn't even have a press conference the day she was sworn in, which is generally on the first-day agenda of any new senator.

Interestingly, though, she's very open to the media when she travels in New York State. This suggests she's serious about wanting to stay in the Senate for at least six years. But there will be no end to the speculation that she has higher ambitions.

Q. Will having a Hoosier at the helm of the Office and Management and Budget help Indiana? **A.** It's hard to see how Mitch Daniels, as head of OMB, could benefit Indiana over another state. **Q.**

Speaking of Hoosiers, what's the real story behind why former Sen. Dan Coats wasn't offered the job as secretary of Defense? **A.** Coats has never managed anything larger than a Senate office. The Pentagon is a big place. Perhaps, in his interview with Bush, Coats did not convey the sense of authority needed to run the Defense Department. I reject the speculation that Coats' rigidity on issues of women and gays in the military soured his chances. **Q.** Wasn't former Indianapolis Mayor Steve Goldsmith supposed to have a Cabinet job? **A.** That was the expectation because he was a close adviser to Bush during the campaign. He wasn't offered a Cabinet spot, however. Most people believe Bush plans to create an office on faith-based programs within the White House, which will go to Goldsmith. ♦

Peter Ciancone, *Terre Haute Tribune-Star*

Lots of talk centers around merging the Seventh and Eighth districts. It's a plan Democrats adore because it would erase one Republican stronghold -- the Seventh -- and in all probability put Vigo County in the Eighth, making reelec-

tion more difficult for John Hostetler. In one blow Indiana would go from a six to four Republican majority to five to four the other way. That's assuming a Republican would lose in a redrawn district with a solidly Democratic county added to it, which isn't necessarily a gimme. One variation on that scenario has Indiana House Speaker John Gregg running for that seat. Lots of gossip about that. In a recent interview about the upcoming General Assembly session, Gregg was lukewarm about the idea. He said he doesn't relish the time away from his family - an enormous occupational necessity for a congressman - plus he said he hates to fly. ♦

Gary Gerard, *Warsaw Times-Union*

I was reading an Associated Press story about the Senate confirmation hearings and how a bunch of Democrats were throwing darts at John Ashcroft. "Ashcroft's personal convictions as a deeply religious, conservative Republican have triggered an outcry of opposition from civil rights and women's groups not witnessed since Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court a decade ago." This struck me as a bit bizarre. What the AP story seemed to be saying is that Ashcroft's opponents believe his deep religious convictions somehow disqualify him for service as attorney general. And you thought religious conviction was a positive attribute. I guess religious conviction is OK with these folks as long as your religion embraces things like abortion and gay rights. The whole episode certainly does show how far-flung we are from the days of the Founding Fathers. Consider what some of them had to say: "Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly implore his protection and favor." That was George Washington. ♦