



# Holcomb steers through virus gauntlet

‘Light at the end of the tunnel’ speech comes as he begins to loosen restrictions toward normal

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Last October, Gov. Eric Holcomb and Indiana Republican Chairman Kyle Hupfer pulled into a parking lot in Shelburn, Ind., where the governor did a media avail with the local press. The power pair then disappeared momentarily into the governor’s black Toyota before emerging adorned in Hawaiian shirts.

It was meant to be a bow to the fashionable Sullivan County Republican Chairman Bill Springer before they addressed his Lincoln Day luncheon. But Springer turned the tables on them out of apparent respect, wearing a three-piece black suit. The conservative, Trump-loving Sullivan County Republicans were partially masked for the meal,



and during about a roughly 20-minute Q&A that Holcomb and Hupfer conducted, nary a complaint was heard on how the governor was handling the pandemic.

The pundit class isn’t needed to validate Holcomb’s job performance during the unprecedented pandemic of 2020-21. A more thorough measure came on Nov. 3 when 1.7 million Hoosiers, or 56.5% of voters, decided to send him back for a second term in a race waged against a former state health commissioner.

The Novel COVID-19 pandemic didn’t create that one moment snapshot of gubernatorial authority, like it did in 1989 when Gov. Evan Bayh led a hundred

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## Political censorship

By **MARK SOUDER**

FORT WAYNE – Censorship of political speech is not new. In fact, in world history freedom of speech is rarer than censorship. In the United States, expanded freedom of speech and freedom of the press (the corollary of free political speech) are among the hallmarks of what makes our nation different. The focus of this is not whether Donald Trump should get his Twitter finger back, though it is certainly a current, visible example of our nation once again re-defining censorship.



Traditional media, in every decision, must pick and choose what to cover. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television have space and time constraints.



**“I’m excited to begin a second term as party chairman and honored to have the trust of Gov. Holcomb and the Republican State Committee to continue serving in this role.”**

- Indiana Republican Chairman Kyle Hupfer, who was reelected on Wednesday.



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**Jack E. Howey**  
 editor emeritus  
 1926-2019



So even does social media, in different ways. One of the biggest constraints is simple; consumers also have time constraints.

When Adolph S. Ochs in 1897 put "All the News That's Fit to Print" on the masthead of the New York Times, he meant it as a statement that stressed the "all" meaning not just partisan newspapers, often owned by candidates, parties and interests jockeying for political control. "Fit to print" is how they sorted themselves from scandal sheets that truly did and still do produce "fake" news, not news called fake by people who disagree with it.

**Slanted news** (i.e. one-sided facts) is not fake, though it can lead to false conclusions. In other words, omission or exaggerated emphasis can easily lead to a false conclusion. Incomplete facts are dangerous because they appear to be true. But they are not "fake."

In today's political debate, the allies of former President Trump routinely refer to news that advocates for the other side as "fake news." This problem on the right is not going away whether or not Trump is relevant in the future. It has become ingrained.

On the left, it is similar but manifests in numerous ways, though not through the usage of "fake."

**They tend to attack** what are called "biases" – the establishment, white supremacy, nationalist, imperialist, capitalist, or other such justifications to deny legitimacy to alternative views.

In fact, the left-wing corollary to right-wing yelling and discrediting of media and those with whom they disagree as "fake news" is the left's takeover of liberalism with the nickname of the "cancel culture." The left-wing political censorship has two approaches. One is to silence former President Trump and his allies.

Disaffected Trump people, who felt that their ideas were rejected unfairly, were vulnerable to being convinced – including by Russian and other sites with a vested interest in chaos – that the election was stolen, the American system cannot be trusted, that everybody who disagreed was part of a "plot," that an individual strong leader was more important than a coalition of a party, etc. Most Trump supporters who feel that way are not Russian dupes nor did they support the storming of the U.S. Capitol Building. Most BLM people also don't support the violence that occurs after their protests. Most are not part of Antifa.

Don't, however, claim one



side is captured and represented by the extremists, but the other is not. Both are penetrated but that does not mean that the majority agree with the extremists. Nearly all conservative media, and the majority of Republican politicians are bowing to hard right pressure feeding the false view that the election and the system are corrupted. Nearly all liberal media, and the majority of Democrat politicians, are bowing to hard-left pressure to jam the enforcement of "cancel culture" with no balanced discussion.

**The danger for** both conservatives and liberals is that when you align yourself with people who

are intent on wrecking trust in the basic American system (deliberate or not), claiming that it is inherently corrupt, that it is evil, that it cannot be reformed, you are well on the path to being a useful tool of those bent on destroying our basic constitutional principles.

**You become part of those** assaulting the system while trying to win reelection or, in the case of media, catering to people who watch you or subscribe. The mantra that, "I can do no good if I lose or go out of business" has truth in it, but if you are essentially assisting the assault on our values, how are you all that different from those who invaded the Capitol or torched buildings in Portland? You are what, in alcoholism, would be called an "enabler."

The lines between trying to overturn an election that has been certified by 60 courts, all states and Congress and that of claiming that the court system is white supremacist and that all police forces are corrupt are basically invisible. It is just the same argument from the other side. Increasing numbers from both sides don't seem to understand that the false premises are the same, and the threat to the system. They are too busy yelling about the threat from the other side.

Sharp differences on major issues always have and always will cause conflict. Our nation was created with an internal contradiction on race – claiming freedom for all but denying it for Black slaves – that was finally resolved by a civil war. But the fact is that before the Civil War and since the Civil War, America has teetered on violent internal conflict many times.

**The Shays Rebellion** (1786-1787) was an early tax rebellion that attempted to capture a Massachusetts armory. The Whiskey Rebellion (1794) in Pennsylvania, another tax rebellion, required President Washington to send in federal troops. Coxey's army of unemployed workers

marched on Washington in 1894, because of an economic depression that was the worst in American history up until that time. The federal government responded rather violently to break it up.

In the early and middle part of the 20th century, there were massive protests and threats to our economic system, including penetration by the Russian-controlled Communist Party. There were massive protests by veterans who sacrificed but were ignored after major wars.

Race riots burned significant parts of downtowns of major cities in the 1960s. There were massive anti-Vietnam war protests and campus violence. JFK was fatally shot in 1963. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. On June 6, 1968 – just two months later – Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. In the '60s and into the early '70s it seemed as though this nation was about to completely come apart at the seams because it was.

**A core question today is this:** Are the institutions that helped hold us together, push desired reforms and avoided civil war still there with credibility? The church? The media? Business leaders? Education leaders? And now, apparently, even respect for the courts and the government itself? Is there any trust or respect left?

Our nation needs politicians and leaders willing to risk losing – not necessarily losing, but risking it – to take stands explaining things to their own side. We don't need more people to explain how the other side should behave. Right now, Democrats are cowering from their left more than Republicans are from the Trump saluting on the right (though not by much). Profiles in courage are hard to find.

We need leadership from those elected to lead. ❖

**Souder is a former Republican congressman from Indiana.**

## Pandemic, from page 1

state troopers into murderous Gary, or Govs. Bob Orr and Mitch Daniels pushing and celebrating their historic education reforms of 1987 and 2011, or Gov. Frank O'Bannon's 1997 coup of trading Indy stadiums for a worker's compensation increase, or even Gov. Joe Kernan regrouping the state after O'Bannon's death in 2003.

If there was that one indelible photo, it was of Gov. Holcomb wearing an Indiana flag face mask, his eyes revealing the weight of the moment.

On Tuesday, a year after he urged Hoosiers to "hunker down" in the face of an unprecedented and deadly pandemic, Gov. Holcomb gave his "light at the end of the tunnel" statewide address. "As we continue to isolate if you test positive, quarantine if you're a close contact, and get vaccinated when you're eligible, the light at the end of the tunnel becomes brighter and



brighter," Holcomb said. "It's up to each and every one of us to do our part to stay on our course."

With Indiana's COVID-19 hospitalizations, positivity rates and deaths all in decline, Holcomb announced that all Hoosiers 16 years old and older will be eligible for the vaccine on March 31, while local officials will begin making venue capacity and social gathering restrictions on April 6.

The governor said the state mandate on face masks will become "an advisory," though Holcomb said he would continue to wear his in public. "When

I visit my favorite restaurant or conduct a public event, I will continue to wear a mask," Holcomb said. "It is the right thing to do. Hoosiers who take these recommended precautions will help us get to what I hope is the tail end of this pandemic."

Holcomb explained:

- Our current cases, positivity rate, hospitalizations and deaths have all dropped drastically since mid-January, and three vaccines have been approved and put to use.

- Our hospital census reached nearly 3,500 COVID patients in early December, but today stands at 600 people. Daily COVID admissions have averaged about 60 people for the past two weeks.

- Last fall, 44% of our ICU beds were in use for COVID patients. Now, it's 4.6%.

- Last spring, we completed only a few hundred COVID tests a day. Today, we can do 50,000-plus if needed.

"And what's been the real, life and death game-changer, has been access to vaccines," Holcomb said. "Our approach to vaccinating Hoosiers has been simple: Vaccinate those who are most at risk for hospitalization and death first, which meant our seniors and all those medically at risk were first in line.

"A year ago to this day, I stood in this office and discussed the unprecedented challenge before us," Holcomb said of the pandemic that has killed more than 12,000 Hoosiers. It has become the most lethal health sequence in state history, out-pacing the estimated 10,000 who were killed during the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-19.

"We didn't know much about COVID-19 back then, and to be sure, we weren't alone," said Holcomb of his decision a year ago to close down most of the state. "From Asia to Europe to Indiana, the world was beginning to experience sickness and death, the likes we'd never seen in over a hundred years. Which is why and what brings me to you today."

### No 'mission accomplished'

The pandemic "is far from over," Health Commissioner Kristina Box said Wednesday, adding that state health officials are "closely watching" variant strains of the virus. "Whether it's called a mask mandate, or it's called a mask advisory, we have made it very clear," Box said. "Wearing our masks to prevent the spread of this virus to other individuals and prevent ourselves from becoming infected.

Holcomb said Wednesday that his team will continue to consult the metrics, emphasizing that "this is by no means a mission accomplished moment — this is proceed with caution."

"We've proven over the last year that we'll let data drive our decisions," Holcomb said in response to a reporter question during his weekly presser Wednesday. "I'm not

pressured, I think was your word, by pundits or politics whatsoever."

### A year ago . . .

In the March 26, 2020, edition of Howey Politics Indiana, Holcomb had told Hoosiers via a Statehouse press conference, "We are going to do everything to throw back COVID-19 that we have. I will tell you this, the numbers don't lie and if they don't put the fear of God in you to act, and act now and fight back, I don't know what would. We're going to continue to lose people and we know what the timeline has been when you look at the coastal states. If you look out at the two-week increments ... now was the time to act, yesterday."

The day before, Holcomb had said, "For those of you who think we are over-reacting, I can assure you we are not. Indiana is under a state of emergency. We will win this war with COVID-19. Make no mistake about it, collectively the actions we are taking today will have a positive impact 30, 60, 90 days later."

The pressers of March became the weekly COVID Zoom press conference in April and continued through this week, giving access to reporters statewide while Holcomb, Box and Health Officer Lindsay Weaver developed credibility and transparency with most Hoosiers.

David Lauter of the Los Angeles Times reported: "The coronavirus pandemic has confronted governments around the globe with the ultimate bad choice: Wreck your economy or lose millions of lives. While some initially hesitated, leaders and legislators in the United States and worldwide increasingly have decided they have to accept the severe economic pain."

In the April 23, 2020, HPI, we laid out what is at stake: "What Gov. Holcomb is facing here in April 2020 is on par with all these financial and war disasters. He has seen his state enter March with a 3.2% jobless rate and record employment involving more than three million workers, and will exit April with perhaps more than 1,000 Hoosiers dead due to the increasingly mysterious coronavirus pandemic, the economy tanking at historic rates unseen since 1929, with perhaps as many as a half million unemployed, while 500,000 small businesses teeter on the brink. And the hard part is just over the horizon, when Gov. Holcomb will have to rely on increasingly sketchy data while under intense pressure ranging from business executives, a revived Tea Party movement, and even the populist President Trump whose calls to 'LIBERATE' neighboring blue states have spilled into Republican Indiana and Ohio.

HPI continued: "If he moves to reopen too soon, with a second and third wave of this pandemic forecast, universal testing months away and a vaccine perhaps



### Primary delayed; what about November?



Pandemic shifts vote from May 5 to June 2; vote by mail for general?

By BRIAN A. HOWEY  
 INDIANAPOLIS — For more than two centuries, Hoosiers have participated in democracy by going to their local polling places to vote. In normal times they shut with their neighbors as they wait in line. These are not normal times. Republican Chairman Kyle Huffer and Democratic

Gov. Eric Holcomb is joined by House Speaker Mike Miller and Democratic Chairman John Zody last week as they announced a delay in the May 5 primary.   
 Chairman John Zody combined in a letter earlier this month calling for expanded absentee balloting in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, but signalled what Gov. Eric Holcomb announced last Friday: A delayed primary until June 2.   
 "The coronavirus pandemic is causing all of us to consider procedural measures related to group gatherings and general interaction with other people, and Election Day is no exception," the letter said. "We recognize that risk to the general public is currently high. However,

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### Our deadly virus test

By BRIAN A. HOWEY  
 INDIANAPOLIS — It is becoming apparent that Indiana and the U.S. will not duplicate South Korea's coronavirus response with widespread testing to determine and isolate vectors and victims, which would then respond society for business and pleasure.

Health experts ranging from the new Science Dr. Tony Fauci to Indiana University's Prof. Aaron Carroll had been telling us for weeks that testing was the way. Dr. Carroll, writing in The Atlantic with Harvard University's Dr. Ashish Jha, said, "We can create a third path. We can decide to meet this challenge head-on. It is absolutely within our capacity to do so. We could develop tests that



"This bill will provide direct funding to Hoosier households and bolster the state of Indiana's response to this unprecedented public health crisis."

- U.S. Sen. Todd Young, on the Senate passage of the CARES Act on Wednesday

more than a year in the offing, he could set in motion circumstances that bring even more death and economic turmoil. If Holcomb moves too late, it could set off waves of business bankruptcies and stress-induced suicides, heart attacks and strokes, as well as mowing through the state's \$2.27 billion rainy day fund, which faces an economic Category 5 hurricane."

## Holcomb's consistency

Holcomb was remarkably consistent early in the crisis, and late.

On March 23, 2020, he said, "I've signed another executive order that calls on all Hoosiers to hunker down, stay at home, unless you're going out on an essential errand, or essential work or essential business and operations. If you're watching this at home, I'm grateful. That means, hopefully, you're social distancing, not spreading the contagious coronavirus COVID-19, for which there's still no cure. That means, you're being part of the solution, not the problem. So on behalf of the state, I thank you. So, stay home, get groceries only when you really need them and buy only what you really need. I'm telling you, the next two weeks are critical – that's March 24 through April 7 – if we're going to slow the spread, and we must slow the spread."

On March 26, the governor prepared Hoosiers for the long haul. "I hope this will remind us that this isn't just a marathon. This is a triathlon," Holcomb said. "This is something that will require us to not let up. We need to do more, not less. It's all in an effort to get through this so that 100% can go back to work, not just the essential companies."

By May, both Holcomb and President Trump were hosting frequent weekly press updates. Holcomb's came on Wednesdays and he was consistent, letting Box, Weaver and other state and medical experts explain the state's course of action. Trump began dominating White House Coronavirus Task Force events that sprawled into hours. With Vice President Pence and epidemiologists shunted to the sidelines, the president began spinning quick fixes like hydroxychloroquine, ingesting bleach and using light to treat the pandemic.

Hoosiers were greeted with fact-backed stability; Americans got Trump channeling P.T. Barnum. Little wonder that their electoral fates parted on Nov. 3.

While Holcomb urged patience with stay-at-home orders and then walked Hoosiers through his five stage recovery plan, Trump threw curve balls at governors, like in mid-April when he took aim at the shutdown orders of states with Democratic governors, even after those orders had begun to flatten the pandemic curve. "LIBERATE MICHIGAN!" he tweeted, and "LIBERATE MINNESOTA! LIBERATE VIRGINIA, and save your great 2nd Amendment. It is under siege!" Trump essentially fanned opposition to stay-at-home orders in red states like Ohio and Indiana.

Dr. Michael Hicks, director of Ball State's Center

for Business and Economic Research, noted in his April 23, 2020, column, "We should judge Gov. Holcomb's decisions on what he and his staff could reasonably have known in March and April as they made and extended the shelter-in-place orders. By that criterion, the shelter-in-place decisions will be judged by history as among the most appropriate and consequential in state history. It may well rank first."

The most controversy Holcomb generated came when he moved the state from Stage 4.5 to Stage 5 in late September, just before the long-predicted autumnal COVID surge began. He dismissed calls for going back to the Stage 1 shutdown. "The shutting-down approach is missing the point," Holcomb said. "There is proof out there that folks are operating responsibly in Stage 5. We need to do more of that. Not less of that. That gets us through this."

Holcomb noted every Midwestern state, including those with 10-person gathering limits, were seeing similar growth in COVID-19 cases. His Democratic opponent Woody Myers said, "By remaining at Stage 5 and failing to institute a true mask mandate, it's not surprising numbers are going in the wrong direction."

## Credibility and election

But Hoosiers watched as the fall surge engulfed just about every state, every nation. Because Holcomb and his team had developed significant credibility, he was able to forge his emphatic landslide victory on Nov. 3.

Basking in his victory, Holcomb said on Election Night, "I couldn't be more grateful that our neighbors, families, friends, and Hoosiers from all across Indiana put their trust in us to lead our great state for another four years. There's no beating around the bush; COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge that slowed us down. But Hoosiers are the most resilient people in the world. We're getting back on track, and our victory today is the first step toward getting our state back to setting records."

The state and nation were in for what President Biden would call a "long dark winter." For Hoosiers, that meant the COVID-19 pandemic had eclipsed the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918-19 which killed an estimated 10,000 people. At this writing, more than 12,500 Hoosiers have perished, 20% of restaurants have closed, and many have fallen behind on rents and mortgages. Food pantries were used by folks who had never needed such aid.

Holcomb took more criticism from Democrats for emphasizing early vaccine front-line public workers, and then a vaccine system tiered mostly by age, not including teachers. Dr. Weaver explained on Dec. 16, "This is a rapidly evolving situation and it's why we have focused our initial vaccination efforts on front-line health care workers and long-term care facilities. As more vaccine becomes available, we want to continue to roll out eligibility."

When Holcomb took his second oath of office during a muted inaugural ceremony in mid-January, it came in contrast to the collapse of the Trump administration and the U.S. Capitol siege when MAGA supporters called for

the execution of Vice President Pence.

"At this moment, our moment, even knowing full well the awful toll of COVID-19 and acknowledging that we are still in its deadly grip, it's important to look to the future – a future for our state and our citizens that I believe is full of opportunity and promise," Holcomb said. "We will remain laser-focused on managing our way through this pandemic and rolling out vaccines with all the energy and resources of our administration. I am reminded that, in midst of the Civil War, the United States was also constructing the first transcontinental railroad. Even as the country was tearing itself apart, we were binding ourselves together in ways that would prove far more meaningful and durable."

During his year-end interview in mid-January, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette reporter Niki Kelly asked Holcomb if there was a single thing he would have done differently?

"I would have worn a mask in Brown County one day when I picked up my food," he said of a summer trip to the Hobnob in Nashville. "I haven't made that mistake twice. I constantly think on one hand how I could do a better job trying to be persuasive about the kind of things we know will help the collective good during a time when it seems to be en vogue to protest what someone else says that is counter to what you feel.

"We have fire codes, but somehow COVID codes are unacceptable," Holcomb said of his state which had about a 72% mask compliance rate, according to the University of Washington's Health Metrics & Evaluation site. "We encourage wearing masks when you're close to someone and there are folks who remain in denial that this is an airborne-transmitted virus. What I try to think about is how can I appeal to them so they understand what we're trying to do is get to the point where we don't have to wear a mask. For one reason or another, I feel I've come up short."

## Contrasts with Trump

On that front, the contrast with President Trump couldn't have been more vivid. Had Trump dedicated himself to stressing the easiest mitigation factors of the pandemic – wearing a mask and social distancing – as Holcomb had, he might have been reelected, as Holcomb was.

Some believe Holcomb ending the mask mandate is premature. Dr. Richard Feldman, who was state health commissioner under Gov. O'Bannon, said he was concerned Holcomb was reacting to pressure to more fully reopen the state's economy, something Holcomb denied on Tuesday and Wednesday. "From a public health and physician standpoint, I really believe that we are not ready to open up fully," Feldman told the Associated Press.



"We're not ready to give up on or discontinue the mitigation strategies of distancing, hand washing – and most of all, masks. I don't think we're ready for that. There's not enough of our population that has been immunized."

While Holcomb is now trying to mitigate efforts by General Assembly Republicans to crimp his executive order powers, in the wake of his "light at the end of the tunnel" address on Tuesday, the Democrat reaction appears to back up the notion that Holcomb, Box and Weaver had relied on the science. Legislative Republicans taking on a popular governor as the pandemic winds down are in tenuous territory, particularly if Holcomb decides to tap the goodwill of his wide support.

"I share Gov. Holcomb's pride in how Hoosiers came together to face this pandemic," Senate Minority Leader Greg Taylor said. "I appreciate that Gov. Holcomb is extending his emergency order for another month. This ensures that our state can get federal funding we need to continue our pandemic response."

Indiana House Democratic Leader Phil GiaQuinta added, "I'm relieved to learn that Indiana is in a place where it can distribute the COVID-19 vaccine to all adults soon. I commend Gov. Holcomb for working so well with the Biden-Harris administration to get Indiana to this point. That being said, the impending repeal of the mask mandate is troubling and leaves me concerned for the health of my fellow Hoosiers. With Indiana so close to the finish line of this pandemic, I would hate for us to crash heading into the final turn."

And Lauren Ganapini, executive director for the Indiana Democratic Party, reacted to Holcomb's address, saying, "From the start of the pandemic, Democrats have been pushing to keep public health above partisan games – and we've been focused on safely getting people back to work, kids back to school, and families and friends together again in person. Tonight's address proves that federal, state, and local partnerships work and we're grateful that the Holcomb administration has been working so well with the Biden-Harris administration in administering a top-notch vaccine program developed by Dr. Kristina Box and Dr. Lindsay Weaver. This shows why unified solutions are always better than one-sided agendas.

"All Hoosiers, regardless of political leanings, should celebrate this historic moment," Ganapini continued. "And as we said on March 3, it's imperative for Gov. Holcomb to ignore his party's demands and put science, data, and the lives of Hoosiers ahead of the dangerous rhetoric that gripped our nation the last few years. There have been some bumps in the road recently – such as Holcomb denying teachers access to vaccines – but we all now see the exit out of the pandemic, and it's because we're all united and fought this virus together." ❖



## Schmuhl takes reins of INDems as party seeks new relevancy

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – When Mike Schmuhl took the helm of the beleaguered and increasingly irrelevant Indiana Democratic Party on Saturday, the clock was ticking ... about 21 months before the 2022 mid-term election.

But in roughly the same time period between January 2019 and March 2020, the 38-year-old South Bend venture capitalist had taken an obscure Mayor Pete Buttigieg from a “why is he running for president” to managing a \$100 million campaign that won the tormented Iowa caucuses.

Indiana Democrats have had attorneys, former congressional and gubernatorial operatives installed as chairs, but

none like Schmuhl’s unique pedigree. In an HPI Interview mid-day Tuesday, Schmuhl appeared undaunted at the towering task at hand and the narrow time frame.

“I feel like a basketball coach who hasn’t been to the tournament in a while,” Schmuhl said toward the end of the the interview. “I’ve got to get the team back in the tourney, man, and then we’ll go from there.”

In addition to Schmuhl’s management of Buttigieg’s meteoric 2020 campaign that helped land him in President Biden’s cabinet, he helped then U.S. Rep. Joe Donnelly fend off then-State Rep. Jackie Walorski in 2010. He was Mayor Buttigieg’s first chief of staff.

He told the South Bend Tribune in February that he intended to “reimagine the future of the Democratic Party,” starting from “blank canvas” and employing the sorts of technology and social media that he used in Buttigieg’s presidential run. “We have had tilted governance for a while,” he said in February. “We are at a turning point for both our party and our state. The Indiana Democratic Party needs a fresh vision and a strategic plan to start winning again to improve the lives of Hoosiers in every part and corner of our state.”

Last Saturday he defeated former Morgan County chairman Tom Wallace after Trish Whitcomb dropped out

of the race the week prior due to a family death. He ran with Marion County Clerk Myla Eldridge, noting that his national and Washington experience along with her local government and voter access profile offered a wide array of talent for Indiana Democrats who are at a historic low ebb.

The party doesn’t hold a Statehouse constitutional office, has just two of 11 congressional seats, has super minority status in the General Assembly, while Hoosier Republicans control more than 80% of all county offices, 90% of county commissioners and a record 71 mayoral offices. In essence, Hoosier Democrats are in a more dire condition than what greeted a young Evan Bayh when he commenced a party resurgence in 1986. Bayh would begin a 16-year Democratic gubernatorial run for the party just two years later.

The difference confronting Schmuhl is that there are no charismatic Democrats like Bayh currently in the wings. Buttigieg fit that profile, but he leap-frogged over Indiana politics to create an indelible national thrust. The good news for Hoosier Democrats is that Schmuhl and Buttigieg talk frequently, and that cerebral firepower is something the party hasn’t had for a number of years.

Here is our HPI Interview with Chairman Schmuhl:

**HPI:** What did you learn over the past two months after you declared to chair in your talks with Hoosier Democrats across the state?

**Schmuhl:** I heard a few things. I felt a lot of excitement. People are really hungry and yearning for a path forward for our party. There’s a lot of excitement and energy to roll up our sleeves and get to work. I’ve started organizing communities and they are working to run campaigns. I also heard a lot of frustration with our fortunes as of late and I think people are looking for more collaboration, more coordination, as we rebuild our party in the cycles ahead. It was a great exercise to talk with folks from different corners of the state to get their ideas, and I will be collecting even more of that once I get into the position.

**HPI:** Was Secretary Buttigieg an adviser during this process and will he play any type of supportive role going forward?

**Schmuhl:** I talk to Secretary Pete ...

**HPI:** He’ll always be Mayor Pete to me.

**Schmuhl:** I talk with him pretty regularly, but obviously he can’t be involved in politics, but he is a great representative for our state as a cabinet secretary. I don’t



think he'll play a direct role, but I think his style of politics is something I've worked on for 10 years and can really resonate across our state. He had a broad message for everybody and a style of politics that might be welcoming. People are looking for something that's new and extremely exciting for our party.

**HPI:** What will your pitch be to rural Democrats and candidates there?

**Schmuhl:** My pitch will be, you'll see us very soon. We have so much to do and I need to work with county chairs more effectively with collaboration and increased communication. One thing that we did, in working on campaigns for Joe Donnelly, is you show up, you engage in those communities and have conversations with people. You're organizing year round. So much of our media is nationalized now and is polarized. At the end of the day, if you're having a conversation and you're talking about issues and ideas, I want our party to be present everywhere.

**HPI:** Is there a technology gap between Indiana Democrats and Republicans?

**Schmuhl:** I need to dig into that, but I have big plans for where we're going. Ten years ago, a website was a big deal. Back then a Twitter button on a website wasn't even a consideration. Now there are literally hundreds of tools as a Democrat, you can use, deploy and upboard. We used some of those tools for Pete For America and even developed some of our own. So I will be digging into that in the weeks ahead to create some really inventive things to help our party. I think it's essential in this day and age that you're not just talking to voters face to face, but you're engaging with them where they are, how they're living their lives. One thing we've seen since the Trump presidency is an increase in disinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories and all of that. It is my hope we create an additional ecosystem that pushes back against that very strongly.

**HPI:** On the redistricting front, what will the party's main emphasis be once the Census data shows up late this summer or fall?

**Schmuhl:** We will advocate for what we always have been for, which is for more fairness, more competition, we will push for an independent commission to redraw the lines. We don't believe that politicians should choose their voters, so we will be talking about that over the summer and during the special session.

**HPI:** With Republicans holding super majorities in the General Assembly, what impact can you have, what kind of leverage can you have?

**Schmuhl:** I can offer our ideas and potential amendments on how we would change things, how we

would approach redistricting, but I think more broadly and at a higher level, we're going to talk about competition and fairness in our government. So much control with one party so long leads to bad outcomes. Some of the worst strains of a particular party (occur) if they are in power for so long unchecked. We're honest, we're fair, we're equitable, we're straight forward people and with more balanced and bipartisan government, you get better ideas, better legislation, better laws and you get better outcomes for people. That's what we'll be fighting for.

**HPI:** What does the delay in the Census data and redistricting do to your candidates in the 2022 cycle?

**Schmuhl:** It tightens the turnaround for how people potentially prepare for campaigns. I think there is so much energy, so much excitement and demand for our party that we'll have a lot of candidates who are ready to go, depending on how the numbers shake out. We'll be prepared regardless of how the data comes out.

**HPI:** How much do you think you can accomplish in the 21 months between now and the mid-term election? It doesn't seem like much time, but then again we watched Mayor Pete raise \$100 million and win the Iowa caucuses in a more constricted time frame.

**Schmuhl:** It will be a gradual but steady process for us to get to a place where we have momentum and, my sincere hope, that our coffers are bigger, we'll have more programs that we're working on. But I'll say this, sometimes there's a huge dynamic in mid-term elections which is the national mood people are feeling. Just look at what's happening over the last few months with Joe Biden as our president. The American Rescue Plan is getting people back to work, getting kids out of poverty, more vaccine across the board in our country and I just think parents are going to be back at work, kids are going to be back at schools, people are going to be getting back together at social gatherings. That is just getting back to everyday life and I can't think of a better platform to run on than that.

**HPI:** How will you measure your metrics of progress heading into the 2024 cycle when there will be gubernatorial, senatorial, congressional and legislative races on the docket?

**Schmuhl:** Predicting the future of politics is impossible . . . .

**HPI:** Particularly during this era.

**Schmuhl:** But I'll say that I like the math ahead of us. In the next year or two there will be some county, statewide and legislative races, then the municipal races for mayor and city councils and then we get to the presidential race. It's my hope the party will be strengthened,



and there's a clearer understanding of our party, our message on what we're doing and what we can do for Hoosiers. My hope is that gradually that all builds to a very, very successful presidential year in 2024.

**HPI:** Talk about your team in place with Myla Eldridge, Rick Sutton and Henry Fernandez. What do they bring to the table?

**Schmuhl:** Henry and Rick were obviously reelected. Myla is new to leadership, just like me, and she is absolutely

fantastic. Picking her as my running mate was the best decision I made for the campaign. We've got a great team. I have a lot of federal and national experience from my work from the last decade and Myla is an elected official who made history in Marion County and she has a strong background in voting rights, access to the ballot. That's a critical issue as well, registering more people to vote, making sure that elections are more accessible. We're really excited to get started. ❖

## Secretary Pete faces a formidable task

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – He's still called Mayor Pete in national TV interviews. Some interviewers try to avoid pronouncing the last name of Pete Buttigieg. And he forever will be associated with the job and city that propelled him to national prominence.



Secretary Pete, as he also now is called, is in a much bigger job. Instead of promoting "smart streets" for downtown South Bend, Buttigieg promotes massive road, bridge, rail and other infrastructure improvements for the nation.

Everybody acknowledges that America needs to do something about its crumbling infrastructure and outdated transportation systems.

Well, that's been known for a long time. President Barack Obama's hopes for a major infrastructure package were sidetracked by partisan opposition in Congress. President Donald Trump's promises for massive infrastructure improvements never were pushed to enactment.

Secretary of Transportation Buttigieg faces a formidable task in helping to write and seek passage of President Joe Biden's package of up to \$2 trillion in infrastructure improvements that would also address climate change.

**"I love my job," Buttigieg** says in interviews. "There's never been a better moment to have this job." But is this a better moment for winning passage of infrastructure in the Senate, with Mitch McConnell leading all the Republicans, half the membership, in solid opposition to Biden's initiatives?

Buttigieg says he has been talking "about every day" to Republicans in both the Senate and House about the infrastructure package and that they know the need and want improvements in their districts and states. There is popularity in red states as well as blue for improvements. Everywhere. In one of the televised interviews, Buttigieg noted the success of the clear and catchy campaign theme of Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer: "Fix the damn roads."

Buttigieg also acknowledges that there are differ-

ences over how to pay for all the projects. He contends also that infrastructure improvement "really does pay for itself."

He and President Biden want bipartisan support for their infrastructure program. So did Obama, who never found it for his big infrastructure hopes. If negotiations fail to bring support of at least 10 Republicans in the Senate – a task seemingly more difficult than the rover landing on Mars – will Democrats again seek to use the reconciliation parliamentary technique to prevail in the evenly split Senate? They used it successfully to pass Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-relief plan without a single Republican voting for it.

**Polls show that plan** is highly popular in the nation, with a whole lot of Republicans giving bipartisan approval, even though every Republican in Congress voted to defeat it.

Would an infrastructure package be just as popular if enacted through reconciliation as well? Also, however, would it be possible? Every one of the 50 Democratic senators would have to vote "yes" in order to overcome solid Republican opposition and enable Vice President Kamala Harris to break the tie. At least one Democratic senator, Joe Manchin, the key moderate from West Virginia, has said he will block infrastructure reconciliation if Republicans aren't included in the process.

They are being included in the process, if Buttigieg is talking to Republicans "about every day." But is there a spirit of compromise on either side that will lead to some Republican votes for a plan?

Buttigieg, who refrains from harsh partisan rhetoric, is ideal for the negotiations. However, even as he stresses the woeful condition of the country's roads, bridges, airports, water systems and power grids, the fate of the infrastructure bill will depend most of all on the political conditions in the Senate. Will some Republicans defect from solid opposition to Biden? Will some Democrats defect from support if it gets down to reconciliation or weakening the filibuster?

More will depend on the condition of Biden's approval rating, staying strong or slipping, than on the condition of any crumbling dam or bridge. ❖

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

# Hupfer elected to second GOP term

## Howey Politics Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS – The Indiana Republican State Central Committee unanimously reelected Kyle Hupfer to a second four-year term as state party chairman. Indiana Secretary of State Holli Sullivan was elected vice chairwoman with Chuck Williams and Mary Martin being elected treasurer and secretary, respectively. Sullivan and Williams were reelected to their positions while Martin is new to the leadership team.



“I’m excited to begin a second term as party chairman and honored to have the trust of Gov. Holcomb and the Re-

publican State Committee to continue serving in this role,” Hupfer said. “The mission in 2022 of protecting our supermajorities in the state legislature, reelecting Sen. Todd Young and our U.S. House delegation, and electing our Republican slate of statewide candidates begins now. I’m excited to work with Holli, Chuck, Mary and the rest of the Republican team to keep our winning streak going.”

Under Hupfer’s leadership, the Indiana Republican Party has smashed party fundraising records and achieved a level of electoral success unprecedented by a political organization in state history. Indiana Republicans hold every statewide elected office, super majorities in both houses of the Indiana General Assembly, both U.S. Senate seats, seven of nine U.S. House seats, 71 mayoral offices and 88% of all elected county offices in the state.

Hupfer was also the campaign manager of Holcomb’s 2020 reelection effort that saw the governor earn the most votes ever cast for a gubernatorial candidate in Indiana history. Last month, he was appointed general counsel of the Republican National Committee by RNC Chairwoman Rona McDaniel.

“We’ve seen enormous levels of Republican success in Indiana at every level, but we still have work to do. The worst thing we can do is be complacent. There are still areas where Indiana Republicans can expand the map and I’m looking forward to running up the score in 2022 and 2024,” Hupfer added.



## HD78: 3 seek to replace Sullivan

GOP precinct committee members in House District 78 will caucus Monday to choose someone to serve

the remainder of Sullivan’s two-year term, which comes up for election next year (Evansville Courier & Press). The party’s filing deadline is 6 p.m. Friday, so the field of candidates, realtor Tim O’Brien and businessmen Alfonso Vidal and Sean Selby, is not final.

Vidal, a native Venezuelan, brings a dramatic backstory to his years of civic involvement. While living in Venezuela in 1997, Vidal was taken hostage by Colombian guerrillas. He was on a fishing trip with a friend who had an airplane. Nearly two weeks later, they were freed, minus the plane. Hoping to put the experience in his rearview mirror, Vidal visited a sister who was attending the University of Evansville. UE officials encouraged him to stay and finish his mechanical engineering degree. He later earned a master’s in industrial management at the University of Southern Indiana. He ultimately became president of Vidal Plastics, a manufacturer of resins used in the injection molding industry. The 48-year-old Vidal’s lengthy list of appointments includes serving as chairman of the Indiana Commission for Hispanic and Latino Affairs; chairman of Growth Alliance, Vanderburgh County’s local economic development organization; and founding member with his wife Daniela, of HOLA (Hospitality and Outreach for Latin Americans), a group created in 2002 to assist the growing Latino population in Evansville. “For me one of the most important things is the defense of our democratic values and capitalism,” he said. “Business, especially small businesses, after all the COVID and the pandemic and the year that we have come through – I think it’s very important that small businesses have the support necessary to navigate the recovery. The economic development of the region is a corollary to that.”

O’Brien is reentering the political arena after an unsuccessful bid for an Evansville City Council seat in 2019. “It would be an absolute honor to follow in the footsteps of Holli Sullivan,” he said. “Her work on the (House) Ways and Means Committee has helped improve our area tremendously, and I would work to ensure that this continues for years to come.” The 28-year-old O’Brien is touting his education, enthusiasm and financial know-how. A real estate broker with F.C. Tucker Emge, he moved to Evansville to attend USI, paying for his education by selling houses.

Selby, a conservative activist and self-described political outsider, delivered pizza and stocked shelves as recently as “the past decade,” he says, to supplement his income from a one-man technology consulting firm he still operates in his home. Selby, 39, has the support of state Rep. Matt Hostettler, an outgrowth of his long relationship with former 8th District Congressman John Hostettler. In a Facebook post, Matt Hostettler called Selby “a dedicated proponent of the conservative cause for more than two decades in southwestern Indiana.” Inspired by Hostettler, Selby casts himself as a renegade standing on principle without regard to political consequences. “The time for pragmatism and platitudes is becoming a less important message of the day,” Selby said. ❖

# State to offer more mass vaccinations at IMS

## Howey Politics Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS – The Indiana Department of Health is partnering with the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and IU Health to host a multi-day mass vaccination clinic at the speedway to protect Hoosiers from COVID-19. The Indiana National Guard will support the operation.

“Getting thousands of Hoosiers vaccinated in a matter of days is a huge undertaking that would not be possible without the medical and logistical support of IU Health, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the Indiana National Guard,” said State Health Commissioner Kris Box, M.D., FACOG. “We are incredibly grateful for their partnership and look forward to getting up to 96,000 shots in arms by the end of April at this special location.” The clinic will provide the single dose Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine and will be held from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on the following days: April 1-3, April 13-18, April 24-30. Because the clinics will offer the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, only Hoosiers age 18 and older are eligible to be vaccinated at this site. Registration is required in advance at <https://ourshot.in.gov> or by calling 211.



## 1 million Hoosiers vaccinated

The Hoosier State reached a milestone Wednesday in its ongoing battle against COVID-19. According to the Indiana Department of Health, more than 1 million Hoosiers are considered fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and protected against hospitalization and death caused by the coronavirus (Carden, [NWI Times](#)). Altogether, some 2.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the state since December, meaning the number of fully immunized Hoosiers should double in coming weeks as individuals receive their second and final dose of the vaccine. “We’re not just on the road to recovery, we’re onward and upward,” Gov. Eric Holcomb said. “And we continue to be able to open up the eligibility to more and more Hoosiers.”

## Jobless fraud bill heads to governor

Legislation, HB 1152, to penalize fraud in the unemployment insurance system passed through the General Assembly and is on its way to Gov. Eric Holcomb. The Department of Workforce Development asked for the changes to go after people gaming the system (Hicks, [Indiana Public Media](#)). If signed into law, people who knowingly underreport wages or falsify facts on unemployment benefits applications will be required to repay it and could face civil penalties. Some advocates worry people who are con-

fused when filing a claim could get caught in the crossfire. DWD’s Tyler Ness testified in a Senate committee that isn’t the intention. “It ensures that we can fight fraud even if the individual does not receive benefits,” he said. “We are not changing the definition of fraud in this bill.” Before the final vote, Sen. Karen Tallian (D-Ogden Dunes) opposed it, saying it does nothing to make Indiana’s unemployment insurance system less prone to honest mistakes or address current identity theft issues. “It’s like a mouse nipping around the edges,” she said in a final discussion before the Senate. “It’s like throwing a nickel in the ocean.” Gov. Holcomb’s office said he is reviewing the legislation.

## Lawmakers face pushback from schools

Lawmakers’ efforts to expand school choice options are facing pushback from more than a hundred school corporations in Indiana, but a top lawmaker says a key piece of legislation that’s part of that effort won’t have another hearing (Lindsay, [Indiana Public Media](#)). House lawmakers put the hotly debated content of House Bill 1005 in the state budget bill, in addition to passing it as a standalone bill. It expands school voucher eligibility and creates a new education fund for families not enrolled in public schools, called Education Scholarship Accounts or ESAs. But Sen. Jeff Raatz (R-Centerville), Senate Education and Career Development Committee chair, said he won’t hear House Bill 1005 in his committee because the concepts have been through multiple hearings in both chambers, through the House legislation as well as Senate Bills 412 and 413. Instead, the future of the proposed school voucher expansion and ESA program will be considered as part of the Senate’s budget-writing process. “If the concept of 1005 lives, it will go across the floor in the budget where everybody will have an opportunity to vote on it,” Raatz said. Senate lawmakers plan to discuss the budget and school funding during public meetings Thursday.

## Senate panel advances Lake judge bill

A Senate committee narrowly agreed Wednesday to advance legislation altering the process Lake County has used for decades to recommend superior court judicial candidates for appointment by the governor (Carden, [NWI Times](#)). House Bill 1453 was approved 5-4 after it was revised to provide equal representation on the Lake County Judicial Nominating Commission to members selected by the governor and members chosen by the county commissioners, along with the chief justice of Indiana or her designee available to break any 2-2 ties. Representatives from multiple Lake County legal organizations told the Senate Judiciary Committee they oppose the legislation, both in its original and amended forms, because it removes Lake County lawyers from the judicial nominating process. Currently, judicial candidates are vetted by a nine-member commission, with four members chosen by Lake County attorneys, four by the Lake County Commissioners, and the ninth picked by the chief justice of Indiana. ❖

# SB373 remarkable in little opposition

By ANNE LAKER

INDIANAPOLIS – Carbon. Indiana excels at emitting it, even though the world needs no more of it – and by 2050, way, way, way less of it. Fifty Indiana economists agreed, in a recent letter sent to Indiana’s congressional delegation. Fact is, Indiana is one of 10 states that produce half of all U.S. emissions.



So we have a lot of carbon to suck up. There are many ways to do so. Plant more trees. Preserve more forests. Farm low- or no-till; plant cover crops. SB373, which was scheduled to be heard this week in Rep. Sean Eberhart’s (R-Columbus) House Natural Resources Committee, would create financial incentives for carbon-absorbing projects. In a past column, I called SB373 the most meaningful environmental bill in years.

If it becomes law, willing landowners, farmers and forest owners will get paid to keep carbon in the ground. The DNR and the Dept. of Agriculture will set up a verification process. The well-loved but heretofore underfunded Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust and Clean Water Indiana program will be expanded to include carbon credit banks so the state profits, too.

This bill is remarkable because of how little serious opposition it’s faced. The agriculture sector is a little jittery, but not too much. The timber industry lobby doesn’t oppose it. The environmental community is bullish on it.

Turns out the bill’s albatross this week may have been a pop-up amendment related to an unnatural kind of carbon capture, geological injection. A company called Wabash Valley Resources LLC has been prepping to build, in West Terre Haute, an ammonia plant. The plant will supposedly have little carbon footprint because extra carbon and other gases will get injected a mile underground.

**In 2019, Wabash Valley** Resources persuaded lawmakers to pass a law allowing the right to inject CO<sub>2</sub> into land regardless of an adjacent landowners’ lack of consent. This week, an amendment was proposed to SB 373 to give injection projects blanket civil immunity for the carbon storage aspect of the project [insert raised eyebrows here].

But Sen. Eberhart did not say that the injection amendment was the reason he pulled the bill this week. He told me: “[The bill] is not in the shape it needs to be to pass committee. The carbon market concept it creates is not acceptable at this point in time to me or a majority of committee members. We’re working on an amendment to

make it more palatable, and we’ll hear it next week [March 30].” Inquiring minds will have to wait.

Meanwhile, a law incentivizing carbon offset projects in Indiana really can’t come too soon for Daniel Poynter. His organization, Carbon Neutral Indiana [CNI], is working to make carbon neutrality a social norm. Although some people still do so, today it’s not socially acceptable to throw garbage out your window. Very soon, it’ll be the same with carbon emissions.

CNI is a non-profit enterprise that provides a free carbon inventory to any household or business that wants one. Those motivated to pay to offset their emissions pool their money and CNI helps select a project to invest in. So far, the collective investment has been in a gorgeous forest project on an island off the coast of Alaska because there are no verified carbon-sucking forest projects in Indiana. Yet.

**A year after Poynter** founded it, CNI has 150 members and about \$40,000 to invest annually in carbon offset projects. And he’s in dialogue with several Indiana businesses about going carbon neutral. “Companies are rushing to proclaim their net-zero emissions,” says Poynter. “That’s a signal to the people who finance projects. There’s going to be an enormous demand for projects that sequester carbon.” Is Indiana ready?

“In a carbon-constrained world,” Poynter continues, “sophisticated investors are shifting money to companies that have a low carbon liability, and those who disclose their impacts. Publicly-traded companies are going to have to disclose their climate risks. For example, if you own real estate and it will get flooded, investors will need to know that. And the SEC is backing that idea.”

Poynter has served on the advisory group that has helped shore up support for SB 373. “Indiana’s all about manufacturing, agriculture and transportation,” he said. “All three have huge carbon liabilities. If we don’t do something, it will drag Indiana way down.”

**“There’s nothing** controversial about the concept of carbon credit programs,” adds Tim Maloney of the Hoosier Environmental Council. “This bill has bipartisan support. It’s voluntary, not regulatory, and benefits farmers and woodland owners who want to take part.”

But questions loom. What mysterious new amendment will Rep. Eberhart propose for SB373?

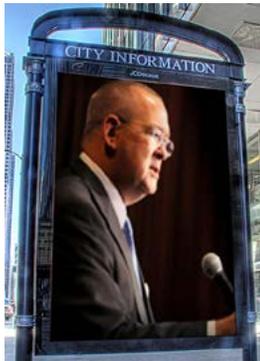
Will Indiana choose to sequester carbon with risky technologies [seismic injectors]...or proven technologies [trees]? Will Indiana lawmakers take the carbon revenue just sitting on the table? ❖

**A consultant and grant writer, Laker is principal of Laker Verbal LLC. Disclosure: she is a volunteer for Carbon Neutral Indiana.**

# Let's be honest about COVID relief package

By MICHAEL HICKS

MUNCIE – On March 12, President Biden signed into law another stimulus bill to address the enormous damage done to our economy through COVID-19. There are principled arguments for and against most details of the \$1.9 trillion bill. I feel Congress could've passed a much smaller bill, maybe half the size, and put in place an automatic second payment should the economy remain at risk through mid-summer. I'd have liked to see fewer regulations tied to spending and I'd have directed a greater share of money to poorer households, among many other concerns.



I'm not alone in having these pretty reasonable objections. However, anyone arguing for a smaller stimulus must admit that one lesson of the Great Recession is the asymmetry of risk. Too little stimulus is far worse than too much. Moreover, at a time when the U.S. Treasury can borrow at a negative real interest rate, too much stimulus is a fairly low-risk affair.

But, this is not a column about the stimulus, or good faith arguments about fiscal policy. Thankfully, many lawmakers are offering substantive criticisms of the bill. Still many are not, and I write today to call out the worst of the bad faith arguments. The most noxious version of anti-stimulus argument is some version of "the economy is recovering well, and this stimulus is nothing more than a bailout of badly run states."

**Though many of us** might feel as if this recession is over, it is not. Among the bottom third of earners, employment is now down 23% since January 2020. Fully one out of every three American families is facing labor market conditions that took almost three years, from October 1929 to Summer 1933, to achieve. For many American households, employment options are really no different than in the Great Depression.

At the rate of employment growth over the past quarter, we won't hit 2019 employment levels until the summer of 2027. Worse still, this final statistic uses Labor Department estimates of unemployment, which likely understate labor market distress by 50%. Even after two historically large stimulus bills and record monetary policy easing, our economy appears several years away from full recovery.

Far worse than downplaying the generational damage of the COVID downturn is claiming that this stimulus somehow bails out a few, fiscally reckless states. That is a lie. Payments will mostly be directed to poorer states,

without regard to state budget shortfalls. Indiana is a poor state.

In the first round of stimulus, the CARES Act, Indiana residents received some \$8.4 billion, along with another \$2.6 billion to state and city governments. Indiana's elected leaders pride themselves on their fiscal probity. And, if the goal is solely a balanced budget and large reserve, they are right in doing so. But, without the CARES Act and later stimulus, Indiana would've faced its worst budget crisis in state history.

**Between lost revenues** and extra costs, the 2020 stimulus payments plugged a budget shortfall of close to \$3.5 billion. That's more than a billion dollars higher than our Rainy Day funds balance last January. This does not account for huge tax losses to local government. The stimulus passed during the Trump Administration kept Indiana from financial catastrophe.

Because of these stimulus payments, the dire need for fiscal relief to state and local governments has eased. What hasn't changed is who will pay disproportionately for this new stimulus.

Residents of every state pay federal taxes, and in return federal tax dollars flow back to each state. But, only eight states pay more federal taxes than they receive back in payments. For every dollar Indiana taxpayers send to the federal government, we get \$1.30 back. We are a top beneficiary of federal government largesse. Moreover, it is useful to compare ourselves to those eight 'donor' states who pay more than they receive in federal taxes.

Among those states, there are not only heavy federal tax payments, but these states tax themselves far more than do Hoosiers. While Indiana collects only \$3,872 per person in taxes each year, the eleven 'contributor states' collect an average of \$6,112 per person. These states also average population growth over the last decade of 6.6%, compared to Indiana's 4.2%. These 'donor' states spend, on average, 43% more per K-12 student than does Indiana. As a result, they enjoy a much better educational attainment, and the typical resident earns 11% more per person than do Hoosiers.

Residents of these 'donor' states receive back from federal coffers \$783 per person less than they paid in taxes last year. Folks from Indiana received a whopping \$2,445 per person more in federal spending than they paid in. With the COVID stimulus, Indiana slid into the eighth most federally subsidized state in the union, stuck right between Missouri and Alabama. We are now ranked well ahead of Mississippi in the amount of federal support we receive.

**It is simply untrue** that these COVID relief or stimulus bills are bail-outs to irresponsible state governments. They are mostly wealth transfers from more affluent Americans to poorer ones. There's no reason to feel sorry for anyone who is affluent enough to miss the stimulus payment. But, we must keep in mind that it is disproportionately they who will pay for it.

That Indiana ranks eighth among these poorer

states is cause for reflection. Hoosier leaders are eager to claim credit for economic success. So, basic integrity requires accepting responsibility for our declining prospects as well. We've now slipped into the bottom of the pack, and are heavily reliant upon the goodwill and largesse of more affluent citizens around the nation.

**Hoosiers would** be far better off to acknowledge these unpleasant facts about ourselves and learn a few lessons from those states who've been more economically successful. We also need to be honest about what the CO-

VID stimulus does, and does not do. Just a few legislators peddling bad faith criticisms of this legislation are enough to crowd out good faith disagreements. Today our Republic needs more principled, good faith disagreements. ❖

**Michael J. Hicks, PhD, is the director of the Center for Business and Economic Research and the George and Frances Ball distinguished professor of economics in the Miller College of Business at Ball State University.**

## Biden's \$1.9 trillion boondoggle

By **CRAIG DUNN**

**KOKOMO** – In this month's issue of "Whistling Past the Graveyard" we will take our annual look at the looming disaster of our national debt and the complete ambivalence of the American public and our government officials at this very real existential threat to most things that we hold dear.



Every year that I have been writing for Howey Politics, I have devoted at least one column to the ever-mounting Red Menace of the national debt. I've written and obsessed about this subject during both Democrat and Republican administrations because irresponsible governmental spending knows no political party. Both Republicans and Democrats are recklessly irresponsible when it comes to the

long-term threat of deficit spending. No one gets a pass.

The latest trigger to my annual rant is the latest \$1.9 trillion boondoggle of President Biden's pandemic response or the Democrat Party's "never let a crisis go to waste" cash grab. I won't rehash the argument that only a very small piece of this "relief" bill is actually pandemic related. Most of us know by now that the spending bill was packed to the gills with mostly pork for the insatiable appetites of voracious Congressional Democrats. Instead, let's take a look at the relief aspects of the bill.

**To hear Democrat leadership** talk about it, you would assume that the recipients of the \$1,400 per person for those eligible would go to buy critical items such as food, utilities, rent, mortgage and clothing. These would all be worthy expenditures for those Americans who are truly in need. However, in most cases, the reality of the final destination for the expenditure of the \$1,400 is much less certain.

In my capacity as an amateur micro-economist,

I set out to do some research on where the money is being spent. First off, I will ignore those who are not in a position to spend the funds. Those would be the approximately 2.3 million incarcerated individuals in our nation's jails and prisons. Yes, I know that amounts to only a little over \$3 billion, but this stuff tends to add up over time. Let's ignore the fact that Ted Kaczynski (Unabomber), Eric Rudolph (Olympic Park Bomber), Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev (Boston Marathon Bomber) and Bernie Madoff (Ponzi King) all qualified for the \$1,400 cash grab. Who says crime doesn't pay?

**I had an interesting** discussion with a regional manager for a retail chain last week and was surprised to hear her say that her sales were up by over 700% because of the \$1,400 relief checks. It would be nice to report that her stores sell vital consumer items for struggling families, but, alas, her stores sell jewelry. I sure would have liked to see Joe Biden go on television and tell the American people that it was necessary to increase our debt by \$1.9 trillion so that struggling families could buy jewelry. My guess is that would have been a non-starter.

A cursory look at the jam-packed parking lots at local shopping malls tells me that most of this desperately needed relief money is being spent like a delayed Christmas spending orgy. From an economic stimulus perspective this may be a good thing, but please don't market those \$1,400 checks as a giant hand up to the needy.

I'm sure those funds are very helpful to many millions of recipients, but there just had to be a better way of addressing the needs of those who were truly damaged by the pandemic. We read of the Kentucky woman who went to Ohio to buy Fentanyl with her \$1,400 and then watched as her two-year-old child ingested the drug and died. In Indianapolis, we learned of the argument that broke out over the \$1,400 received that left four people murdered. Those were unintended consequences that you didn't hear Chuck Schumer or Nancy Pelosi touting.

So the bottom line of all of this malarkey is this: The United States printed up \$1.9 trillion that it did not have under the guise of giving the money to those most affected by the pandemic and taxpayers will be paying interest on this money for the rest of our lives. Note that I say paying interest. There is no current plan to pay off any debt owed by our federal government.

The national debt in 1990 was a petite \$3.2 tril-

lion. It did not double until 2003. The debt doubled again seven years later in 2010. Ten years later and our debt is now north of \$29 trillion. The interest alone on this debt in 2021 is projected to exceed \$375 billion. That is a staggering amount of interest and remember that we currently have historically low interest rates. These low rates will not last forever.

**Suppose that you had a child.** Let's call him Sam. Sam makes a nice salary, but for some reason he spends more than he makes every year to finance things like black velvet Elvis paintings, weekly poodle grooming, a Ferrari, dinners at Fifi LaTour, a new Super Ranger 58-caliber hunting rifle and his Bet Rivers habit. Sam borrows the money needed to cover the shortfall on his credit card. After years of this process, Sam is maxed out on five different credit cards. Sam now begins borrowing against his home equity. A few years later, that line of credit is also tapped out. Things are so bad that Sam asks his son to co-sign on a cash advance loan. Sam now comes to you and demands that you start paying the interest on his loans. What do you tell Sam?

The plain ugly truth is that our federal government is no different than Sam. Our debt is out of control and getting worse. We can handle the debt right now because

we are a wealthy country and better off than virtually all the other nations of the world. However, this will not always be the case. Sooner than we think, our debt and interest payments will force interest rates higher and result in staggering inflation. The question is not if we will have an existential problem with debt, the question is when it will happen.

Neither political party seems interested in dealing with the problem. There are only a few ways: You can reduce spending. You can increase taxes. You can hope that inflation will help pay off the debts. Unfortunately, there is no political will to seriously address the debt problem. Any meaningful effort to reduce the growth of debt will be punished by the American people at the ballot box. We blame the politicians, but each of us is responsible for the problem.

**So to those who indulge** in the milk and honey bestowed by government, and that is virtually all of us, enjoy it while you can. The music of a debt crisis is coming soon and we all will pay the piper. ❖

**Dunn is the former Howard County Republican chairman.**

## Indiana's road needs

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) has retired after 18 years of service. On leaving the Senate, he said, "Lately, the Senate has been like joining the Grand Ole Opry and not being allowed to sing."



His record in the Senate, and previously as governor of Tennessee (1979-87), was informed by walking 1,022 miles across the state in his 1978 campaign for governor. He saw that poverty was related to dreadful road conditions. If getting somewhere is a chore and getting services and visitors to your town is difficult, poverty is reinforced by the highways. He proposed linking each of the state's 95 county seats by four-lane high-

ways to the nearest Interstate.

It's a thought that ought to be considered by Indiana's moribund legislature. It took generations to get U.S. 31 from Indianapolis to South Bend upgraded to four lanes and only recently has partial, additional modernization been completed.

**Similarly, how many had** to die on SR 37 from Indianapolis to Bloomington? In 1970, the four-lane route was still incomplete, still opposed by many in Bloomington.

Now, 51 years later, I-69, over that same route, is still incomplete, still opposed by many in Bloomington. That's how we make progress in Indiana, a half-century at a time.

We've seen the value of connecting Valparaiso via four-lane SR 49 to I-80/90 and I-94 in Porter County. In like fashion, wouldn't residents and businesses of Frankfort and Clinton County benefit from a complete four-lane SR 28 to I-65? Wouldn't Portland and Winchester gain from a four-lane US 27 to I-70 at Richmond? Hartford City to I-69?

**How can we expect** Connersville and Fayette County to prosper without a serious upgrade of SR 1 to I-70? When will Jasper have safer access to I-64, yea verily unto I-69?

Four-lane connectivity is not a guarantee of economic development. U.S. 41 and I-64 give some evidence of that truth. But we lack even sufficient Super-2 roads, those wider, safer two-lane routes for commuters and truckers. With more and more delivery vans fanning out across Indiana to homes and businesses, we have more and more warehouses stocked by larger and heavier trucks. For these services, many of our state and most of our county roads are inadequate.

Many familiar with Indiana's history dwell on the canal "failures" of the mid-19th century. Yet, had Indiana completed its canals as planned, Toledo might have preceded Chicago as the great city of the Midwest and altered the entire dynamic of our region.

We could wait until all the changes expected of

the internet and the electrification of vehicular traffic are realized. After all, there's no reason to spend a dollar today and have our great-grandchildren laugh at our investment "errors."

**Indiana can make choices** today to shape tomorrow or we can withdraw and let the world proceed

without our participation, leaving us in a perpetual state of catch-up. ❖

**Mr. Marcus is an economist. Reach him at [mortonj-marcus@yahoo.com](mailto:mortonj-marcus@yahoo.com).**

## McConnell warns of 'breaking' the Senate

By **KELLY HAWES**  
CNHI Indiana Bureau

ANDERSON – Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell offered a warning. "Nobody serving in this chamber can even begin to imagine what a completely scorched-earth Senate would look like ..." he said. "Everything that



Democratic senates did to Presidents Bush and Trump, everything the Republican Senate did to President Obama would be child's play compared to the disaster that Democrats would create for their own priorities if they break the Senate."

Break the Senate? Seriously?

I hate to tell the senior senator from Kentucky, but the Senate is already broken. Of

course, McConnell knows that. He's one of the guys who broke it. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin of Illinois pointed out that under McConnell's leadership, obstructionism had become the order of the day for Republicans. Where the Senate once dealt with a filibuster once a year or so, he said, it now deals with them all the time.

"When Sen. McConnell and others come to the floor and plead for us to hang onto the traditions of the Senate, I would tell you that their interpretation of the traditions is strangling this body," he said.

McConnell, of course, disagrees.

**"The framers** designed the Senate to require deliberation, to force cooperation and to ensure that federal laws in our big, diverse country earn broad enough buy-in to receive the lasting consent of the governed," he said. "James Madison said the Senate should be a 'complicated check' against 'improper acts of legislation.' Thomas Jefferson said 'great innovations should not be forced on slender majorities.'"

The real story behind the

filibuster is less romantic. In testimony before a Senate committee in 2010, Sarah Binder, a professor of political science at George Washington University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said the rule change that spawned the filibuster came about by mistake. The House and Senate rulebooks initially were nearly identical, she said, and both had what is known as the "previous question" motion, making it possible to end debate with a simple majority.

**The House still has that rule,** but the Senate got rid of its version in 1806 at the suggestion of Vice President Aaron Burr, the man who killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Burr thought the rule was unneeded, but it turned out to be the only thing between the Senate and gridlock. Minority senators didn't figure out right away what the rule change meant, so the filibusters didn't start immediately. The first one came in 1837.

The history of this parliamentary maneuver hasn't always been a proud one. In the 20th century, Southern senators used it as a tool to block civil rights legislation. Now, when many Americans think of the filibuster, they conjure an image of the 1939 Hollywood classic "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" in which Jimmy Stewart's character pours his heart and soul into a marathon performance on the Senate floor. That's not the way things work today.

Now, in Durbin's words, a senator can merely "phone it in," calling for a filibuster and leaving it to the majority to scrounge around for the 60 votes needed to bring the measure to a vote. Durbin and others have suggested that a senator seeking to derail a bill should at the very least have to take the floor for a long-winded speech. The idea is that if senators had to put forth a bit more energy they might be a little more selective about the legislation they chose to block.

Of course, that might not matter to McConnell.

He noted in his remarks that the Senate is an institution that requires unanimous consent just to turn on the lights before noon.

Will the Democratic majority find a way around his parliamentary tricks? I guess we'll see. ❖

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

# '22 mid-terms favors House Republicans

By **KYLE KONDIK**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – So far this year, the Crystal Ball has released its initial ratings for the 2022 Senate races and the 2021-2022 gubernatorial races. We're holding off on House ratings, though, because this is a national redistricting cycle. Without district lines in place, there's no sense in issuing specific ratings.

The redistricting process is also going to be significantly later this cycle. The U.S. Census Bureau has delayed the release of the granular population data that the states use to draw new districts until Sept. 30.

So we won't start seeing new districts until the fall, at the earliest. Just to put that in perspective, by late September 2011, several big states, such as California, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio, had already completed their maps.

We know that Republicans will control the line drawing in more places than Democrats. Based on an analysis of state-by-state redistricting procedures by Justin Levitt's All About Redistricting site, and taking into account anticipated House seat gains and losses because of population changes, Republicans control the process in states that are expected to hold 188 seats and Democrats have control in states expected to hold 73. The remaining 174 seats are in states where neither party dominates, where the process is nonpartisan or bipartisan, or where there is only a single House seat.

Among the big states, Republican redistricting power will likely be most significant in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas, while Democrats will hope to bolster themselves in Illinois and New York. There will be a lot more to say about redistricting as the cycle unfolds.

**Map 1 shows** the states that are likely to gain or lose House seats following the census based on an analysis by Dudley Poston and Teresa Sullivan for the Crystal Ball last year.

Even setting aside likely GOP advantages in the gerrymandering wars, history points to Republicans in the House.

In midterm elections,

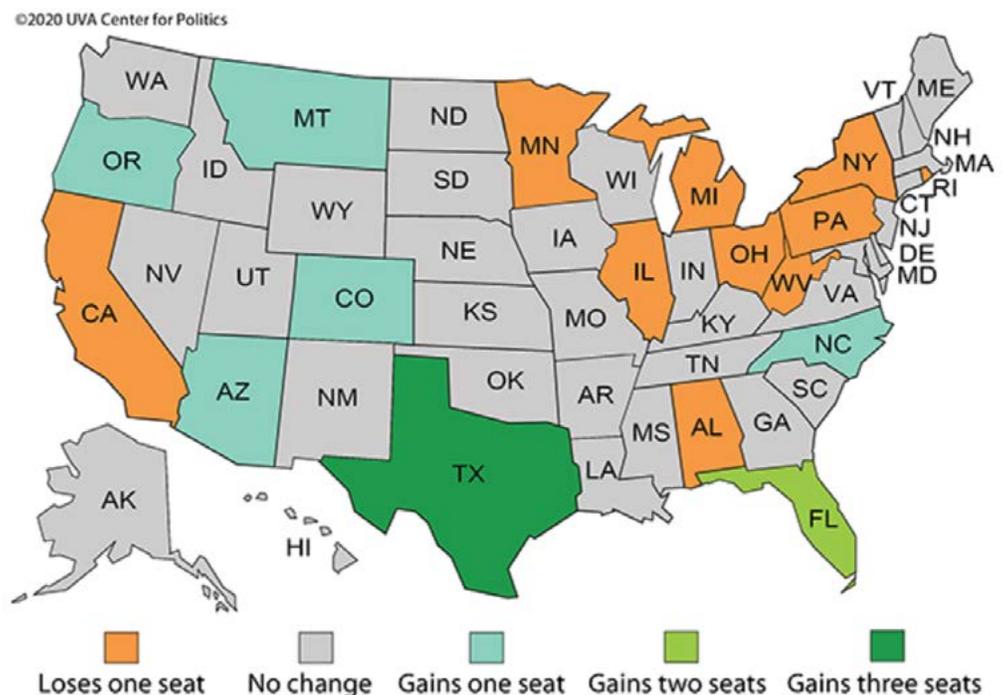
the president's party typically struggles, at least to some degree. Since the Civil War, there have been 40 midterm elections. The party that held the White House lost ground in the House in 37 of those elections, with an average seat loss of 33. Since the end of World War II, the average seat loss is a little smaller – 27 – but still significant.

**As Andrew Busch wrote** in his history of midterm elections, *Horses in Midstream*, "the midterm election pattern virtually guarantees that the president's party will be hurt at regular intervals. The extent of that damage may vary considerably, but the fact of it rarely does." Midterms provide an opportunity for voters to put a check on the White House, and voters very often take that opportunity accordingly.

In 2020, Democrats won a 222-213 majority in the House, meaning that Republicans only need to net five seats to win the majority this year. Just based on history, it would be a surprise if the Democrats kept their majority. Perhaps some confluence of factors – such as an economic boom, President Biden maintaining an approval rating north of 50%, redistricting not going the way Republicans hope, Republican infighting that depresses GOP turnout, and more – could lead to Democrats holding the House. But the bottom line is that Republicans winning the House next year would be an outcome easily foreseeable based on familiar American political patterns, whereas the Democrats holding the majority would be an outcome requiring a special explanation. ❖



**Map 1: Projected House seat gains/losses following 2020 census**



**James Briggs, IndyStar:** I was in Mobile, Alabama, last week and I saw Indiana's future: maskless people walking past doors with futile signs announcing (pleading?) that masks are required in this hotel, coffee shop, restaurant or — whatever, it doesn't really matter because the employees aren't wearing them either. Gov. Eric Holcomb on Tuesday announced that Indiana will drop its mask mandate April 6, putting it in league with other red states, such as Alabama, that are either lifting their mask mandates or never had them to begin with. Alabama previously announced that its mandate expires April 9, but in my experience there, people seemed to be celebrating early. I've credited Holcomb for withstanding the political pressure to institute his mask order and leave it in place for as long as he has. People, especially Democrats, make jokes about the absence of penalties for Indiana's toothless decree, but make no mistake: The order has empowered businesses to ask workers and customers alike to wear masks and blame it on the governor when they don't like it. Businesses are losing that power now, and some likely will lose some customers as well — the ones who have been quietly wearing masks all along and don't want to enter a store or restaurant where masks aren't in use. There is strong evidence showing that what killed businesses has been customers' fear of going into public places. People stopped going out well before state and local governments issued COVID-19 rules and many have regained only a tepid willingness to venture back into public. Holcomb's mandate asks nothing from us, except that we find some masks, remember to take them with us and care enough about one another to put them on while in public. Eliminating it before even a quarter of the state's population is fully vaccinated will lead to less compliance, and that will cause some risk-averse customers to stop spending money in person. If there are any benefits to the move, I can't think of them. ❖



**John Krull, Statehouse File:** Perhaps the saddest thing about the mass shooting in Georgia is that it wasn't at all surprising. The story now is one even the slowest among us could recite without notes. A disaffected white guy — it's always a white guy — stewed in juices of self-loathing and contempt for other human beings buys a gun. He takes out his rage against the world he's convinced has not given him his due on defenseless people. Those defenseless people die. In this case, there were eight of them, women who scrambled to make their way through life. The numbers in such tragedies can vary. Sometimes, it's more than 60 people at a music festival in Nevada. Other times, it's 17 people at a high school in Florida. Upon occasion, it's 26 people — most of the children under the age of seven—at an elementary school in Connecticut. Afterward, we ask the same question. Why? Why? WHY? The answer to that one is easy. It happens because we let it happen. The reality of America's gun problem doesn't change. Year after year, the statistics tell the same story.

We here in the United States are roughly 2000 percent — 20 times — more likely to die by guns than people in other industrialized nations. We lead the world by an Olympian margin in the number of mass shootings. Our gun violence problem has become so bad that Americans now are more likely to die by firearms than they are in automobile accidents. In 2019, there were 37,595 people in the U.S. killed in traffic accidents. The carnage from guns came in at 39,707. In a sane society — in a country that cares about its citizens — this would be a call to action. In this country, it's become a justification for paralysis and indifference. Here in Indiana, our lawmakers want to make it easier for people — even angry, irrational people — to get their hands on deadly weapons. They're pushing through the Indiana General Assembly a measure that would strip away the current requirement that a person carrying a gun must have a permit. Doing away with the permit requirement will mean that, in effect, Indiana will be without gun laws. ❖

**Beverly Gard, IBJ:** Imagine an Indiana without the wetlands that play host to a vast variety of migrating waterfowl, without the estimated 300 nesting pairs of our national symbol, the bald eagle, and without winding nature trails and nature parks built to educate and showcase the ecosystems that result from these wetlands. This would eventually be the Indiana we live in if Senate Bill 389 is passed into law. Indiana did not have an isolated-wetland statute before 2003 because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulated every wetland in the country. In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a decision that created a gap, leaving about one-third of Indiana's wetlands with no federal protection. Realizing legislators certainly could not begin to grasp the depth of the issue in a two-hour committee meeting, in 2002 we studied the issues extensively in an interim study committee. The 40-page final report, which included recommendations adopted unanimously, served as the framework for the wetlands legislation adopted in 2003. As the Senate sponsor of the bill, I spent hours refining the legislation as it moved through the process. The proponents of SB 398 like to tout the fact that Gov. Frank O'Bannon vetoed the legislation, but they never mention why. The governor clearly said the legislation did not go far enough. The General Assembly overrode the veto. Several of us worked during the interim to come to an agreement on the concerns the governor expressed. Those amendments were then adopted in the next legislative session. Indiana's wetlands statute has worked well for 18 years. But now, under pressure from the Indiana Builders Association, some legislators want to remove isolated wetlands protection from state law. The builders association is the same lobbying organization that engineered taking the Indiana State Department of Health's representative off of the Indiana Environmental Rules Board and replacing that position with a builder member of its association. Does this sound like concern for the environment and health? ❖

## Biden to hold first press conference

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden held off on holding his first news conference so he could use it to celebrate passage of a defining legislative achievement, his giant COVID-19 relief package. But he's sure to be pressed at 1:15 p.m. Thursday's question-and-answer session about all sorts of other challenges that have cropped up along the way. A pair of mass shootings, rising international tensions, early signs of intraparty divisions and increasing numbers of migrants crossing the southern border are all confronting a West Wing known for its message discipline. Biden is the first chief executive in four decades to reach this point in his term without holding a formal question-and-answer session. He'll meet with reporters for the nationally televised afternoon event in the East Room of the White House.



## Mayor Prince gets vaccinated

GARY — Following his vaccination, Mayor Jerome A. Prince urged residents to follow his lead in fighting against the pandemic (NWI Times). On Wednesday Prince encouraged residents to get any of the three vaccines and talked about his own experience. Last Sunday Prince was one of the many who received a single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine at Calumet New Tech High School during a mass-vaccination event. "It was important to demonstrate the safety of the vaccine and to set an example of leadership in Gary," Prince said. He also called for other Gary elected officials to get vaccinated as well. "We all know the medical horror stories of what happened decades ago in communities of color, and that's a legitimate concern for everyone," Prince said. "But, this vaccine is safe, and we must get vaccinated to move

our city forward and to protect every one of our residents."

## Marshall County to end mandate

PLYMOUTH — Marshall County likely is finished with mask orders, in the wake of Gov. Eric Holcomb's announcement Tuesday that he's lifting the state's mask mandate on April 6 (South Bend Tribune). The governor's decision doesn't affect orders by local jurisdictions, which can still decide to impose their own COVID-related restrictions. Kevin Overmyer, president of the Marshall County Board of Commissioners, said the county had been renewing seven-day emergency declarations and mandating masks over the course of the pandemic but stopped doing so earlier this month. "We talked to our health officer, he thought it was time," Overmyer said. "Our numbers were better. We have to get back to normal at some point in our lives."

## Allen health official urges caution

FORT WAYNE, Ind. (WANE) — As Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb plans a rollback on the state's mask mandate and capacity restrictions come April, the man who will be responsible for making calls on rules locally is planning his next move. Allen County Health Commissioner Dr. Matthew Sutter urges caution moving forward. "We really continue to be in a race with the cases, making sure the cases don't spike, while we continue to roll vaccines out and get shots in arms," Dr. Sutter told WANE 15. "While I don't think we're going to overwhelm the hospitals with a surge this spring, I think there's a good chance we will see a surge. And I think some of those people will go on to be hospitalized and ultimately die. There's no reason to think that the virus has changed. It's still a respiratory virus and we still stop the spread the same way we did before, which

is by masking, by socially distancing, and by getting vaccines when they are available. I expect that people will make smart choices. I think that there is still some danger here."

## Wayne Co. leaders 'disappointed'

RICHMOND — Two Wayne County commissioners expressed disappointment Wednesday morning in Gov. Eric Holcomb's decision to end his statewide mask mandate April 6. Holcomb still will require masks in state buildings and schools (Richmond Palladium-Item). "I guess I'm a little disappointed," said Commissioner Ken Paust. "I guess I feel it's just a shade early with where we are. The worst fear is that we're going to hit a little uptick again in here. I guess we'll find out." Holcomb has said his statewide mask mandate will end April 6, but local entities may still enforce stricter restrictions. "Now is no time to take down any protective gear and remove the masks," Commissioner Mary Anne Butters said, noting many residents will be returning from spring break trips. "The first week of April is not the time to end our mask wearing."

## Braun says elections are state affairs

WASHINGTON — The first hearings were held on Wednesday in the Senate to discuss a voting reform bill known as "H. R. 1" (Darling, WIBC). Sen. Mike Braun, who is among many ardent denouncers of H. R. 1, said that if there are any problems with elections in the United States, the states are the ones that are supposed to solve them. "Not only constitutionally is this a state prerogative, but we need to learn from the laboratory of states," he said. "We have 50 different states. The constitution says to keep it there. We need to find that sweet spot that works." Braun says the constitution dictates that it is up to individual states to figure out what systems work when it comes to running elections.