



Banks' 'whirlwind' in era of Trump

Freshman Republican surveys volatile president, a coming military buildup, Obamacare and tax reform

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – For more than a decade, Jim Banks has been widely seen in a variety of Republican circles as a rising star.

After seven weeks as U.S. Rep. Banks, the Columbia City Republican enters Congress under the most surreal circumstances since Evan Bayh

joined the U.S. Senate in 1999 just in time to participate in President Clinton's impeachment.

Banks finds a Washington under assault from President Trump's populist movement that brought the stunning upset last November. Unclear is how the Trump administration will mesh with the congressional majorities. Banks not only



has a front row seat, he joins ascendant Vice President Mike Pence, whom he runs into in the U.S. Capitol frequently, and has found an Indiana delegation that is also on the rise. U.S. Reps. Susan Brooks and Luke Messer helped Banks land a seat on the Armed Services Committee, and he joins Congress as the most recent member who has served on a battlefield in Afghanistan. "I want to be a leader on national security issues and the most significant military buildup in a generation," he said. "It's a remarkable place to be."

This "whirlwind" as Banks describes it, is buffeted by President Trump's rhetoric, which the freshman Republican describes several times as "unfortunate." Like other Hoosier Members we've talked with, Banks doesn't

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Maybe a new Trump?

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Maybe ... just maybe, we did see, as Vice President Mike Pence said Wednesday morning, the "real" Donald Trump.

After a couple of months of Trumpian bombast, after scores of lies and alternative facts, after picking fights with the media and U.S. intelligence agencies and our Australian allies, perhaps President Trump is learning that West Wing chaos makes for great tabloid headlines, and a future Tom Hanks flick, but it's a crummy way to govern.

So I liked his address to Congress Tuesday night. I like giving a new president and a



"It's reality hitting home. The number of people on the program? That could be affected."

- Senate President David Long, who with Speaker Bosma warned that the Obamacare repeal could kill HIP 2.0 for 420,000 Hoosiers



Howey Politics Indiana
WWHowey Media, LLC 405
Massachusetts Ave., Suite
300 Indianapolis, IN 46204
www.howeypolitics.com

Brian A. Howey, Publisher
Mark Schoeff Jr., Washington
Jack E. Howey, Editor
Mary Lou Howey, Editor
Thomas Curry, Statehouse
Mark Curry, photography

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 Ray Volpe, Account Manager
317.602.3620
 email: HoweyInfo@gmail.com

Contact HPI

bhowey2@gmail.com
 Howey's cell: 317.506.0883
 Washington: 202.256.5822
 Business Office: 317.602.3620

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new governor the benefit of the doubt and earnest hopes for success. As I told Mike Pence in January 2013 and Gov. Eric Holcomb last December, as a journalist I'd rather cover a successful administration. Writing about the Mitch Daniels governorship was really a blast. One might think that a journalist would thrive on things gone awry, messy scandals and errant rumors. But some of us actually feel a duty to make our state or nation a better place. That happens when there is successful leadership.

On a number of issues, I agree with President Trump. We've spent a generation kicking the can down the road on immigration, and Trump's trial balloon of creating a path for citizenship we saw briefly on Tuesday is a good idea. I like the idea of evolving Obamacare with Republican principles and wished that had happened in the Bush43 presidency. I like the idea of a massive infrastructure program, just as long as this generation pays for it. On these issues, Trump will find support with some Democrats and in the media.

What has been unnerving is the Kremlin interference in the 2016 election and the odd bromance between Trump and Vladimir Putin. I fret when Steve Bannon likens himself as a "Leninist" hell-bent on destroying American institutions, with little thought of what replaces them. I have never understood why any president would seek to alienate the U.S. intelligence sector. The very people he is cracking on could someday save the cheerleader, save the nation, save the world. I am hopeful that Dan Coats will be Trump's beacon.

I appreciated Trump's rhetoric. "The time for small thinking is over," Trump said at one point. "The time for trivial fights is behind us. We just need the courage to share the dreams that fill our hearts." Or

this one: "That torch is now in our hands, and we will use it to light up the world." President John F. Kennedy would be proud.

At another point, Trump said, "My job is not to represent the world. My job is to represent the United States of America." I agree with Trump that after spending trillions of dollars in the Middle East, I'd like to see us spend a trillion dollars on Midwestern schools, bridges, solar



farms and high speed rail. Imagine working in Chicago or Louisville, and returning home to Broad Ripple 45 minutes after clocking out. I'd like to see President Trump build something really yuuuge. We need a symbolic Hoover Dam or a moonshot somewhere.

I want to hear a president call for "a new chapter of American greatness."

Vice President Pence, who has the front row seat to President Trump, observed on Morning Joe Wednesday, "What America saw last night was what I see every day: Broad shoulders, big heart. It gives me great confidence the agenda the president articulated last night is the right agenda. Repeal and replace Obamacare, replace our tax code. It struck me as a moment where Donald Trump stepped up and said where America wants to go."

Yes!

On the Affordable Care Act, Pence said that Trump will "deal with Obamacare right out of the box. It's hurting the American people and American families. You saw him do what great presidents do. He laid out

the framework and principles." On Monday, it was fascinating to hear Trump tell Gov. Holcomb and his colleagues that "nobody knew that health care could be so complicated." (Psssst, Mr. President, most of the rest of us knew that). That one had to have Doc Bowen spinning in his grave. And Trump seemed to embrace chaos and dysfunction. "Let it be a disaster, because we can blame that on the Dems that are in our room – and we can blame that on the Democrats and President Obama," he told the governors. That, Mr. President, is a recipe for a landslide loss.

On Tuesday, Trump did lay out some parameters for a solution. It will be as risky for President Trump as it was for President Obama. Trump will need some Senate Democrats. What none of us needs is a collapse of the health sector, one sixth of our economy, that leaves

millions without coverage, emergency rooms swamped, hospitals going bankrupt.

NBC's Chuck Todd, Carrie Dann and Mark Murray observed, "Maybe the biggest takeaway is that while the tone was a bit softer, the substance was roughly the same. Tough rhetoric on illegal immigration. Repealing and replacing Obamacare. Violence in Chicago. These have been the same themes he's been making for months, either on the campaign trail, from his executive orders, or on Twitter. He just sanded down the edges."

So, Mr. President, nice speech. After months of chaos, we want to see that "fine-tuned machine" of yours. We thirst for it.

And, Mr. President, I want a do-over. Give me a call sometime and let's discuss. ❖

Rep. Banks, from page 1

quite know what to expect. When we asked him point blank if we might see a "President Pence" within four years, Banks responded, "I don't know."

"I'm learning a whole new ballgame," Banks said as we sat outside at a northside Indianapolis Starbucks. "So far I've been remarkably pleased with Speaker Ryan and his leadership style. He's a substantive leader who works hard to empower younger representatives like me to give us a leg up. Give us an opportunity to lead."

Here is our conversation:

HPI: The military background has to be a huge asset for you.

Banks: I believe so. My deployment has been the most recent deployment of any Member of Congress. Two years ago to this day I was serving in Afghanistan; it was a fresh experience knowing what our troops do on a daily basis. It is a significant asset. One of the reasons I think so many supported putting me on the committee, 3rd District has never had a member on that committee. It was a harder case to be. In Indiana, the legacy district was always the 8th or 9th because it represented Crane. Because of the dominoes of Todd Young going on the Ways and Means Committee, that's when Jackie (Walorski) went on the Armed Services and now Jackie is on Ways and Means. That legacy committee really has become important to Indiana. It was the case I made when I pursued it. National defense is really important to Indiana, not just because of Crane and the Air Guard base in Fort Wayne and Terre Haute, Atterbury, Muscatatuck, but also the large defense industry in Indiana. In Fort Wayne we've had a defense cluster that has been diminished substantially over the



past 10 years. Now I have an opportunity to represent them in a unique way.

HPI: When I talked to Jackie last year we talked about the atrophy in the Indiana defense sector. Are there any new metrics?

Banks: Each of the branches has testified before the Armed Services Committee already. The Navy testified last week that they were the smallest in 99 years.

The Air Force testified that more aircraft than not cannot get off the ground due to antiquated systems, or at least aren't capable of going to war. The Army testifying that a number of battalions are unable to be deployed. The statistics are there. That's why Sen. McCain and Chairman Thornberry both advocated \$500 billion to \$700 billion boost in military spending, which I support.

HPI: What other issues are you going to focus on?

Banks: More choice for veterans in the VA. I don't think I'm speaking out of school, but when I spoke with the speaker about wanting to be on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, we talked about the Republican initiative to radically transform the VA, to make it less a medical provider and more of an agency that oversees whether it is the expansion of the Choice Act or providing veterans with a tri-care package where they can choose the best provider in the private market. We have an antiquated system in the VA that traps too many veterans and never gets to the point of care. We'll take a serious look of upending the bureaucratic aspect of VA and advocate more choice in the private market for veterans. That will come with a great deal of controversy with some of veterans' organizations that are married to the status

quo. But I think it's the right thing to do.

HPI: Let's talk about Obamacare. John Boehner said that full repeal was unlikely and that it would be reformed. My stance was it was such an imperfect piece of social engineering taken on a partisan vote that over the last six years, it would have evolved, including more Republican-advocated moves such as sales over state lines.

Banks: Republicans have done a very poor job of articulating what the replacement looks like. That doesn't mean there isn't a replacement initiative that most Republicans have rallied around. Health savings accounts, allowing for purchase of insurance across state lines, the speaker's plan would allow for tax credits for businesses. The more conservative plan in the House which I have co-sponsored would provide for deductions. So that is one of the internal debates, credits versus deductions. It would be substantially better than what we have currently. There would be high risk pools and programs like HIP 2.0 which has worked very well for Indiana. All members of the delegation signed a letter last week advocating for the waiver to maintain HIP 2.0. So there is a replacement plan. Repeal and replace will begin in the committee process on Monday.

HPI: Does the number of insured people rise because there won't be the tax mandates?

Banks: I don't know if I can walk you through how that works. That's why the speaker is advocating a two- or three-year phase-in period.

HPI: That makes sense to me. You're talking about one-sixth of the economy, right?

Banks: That's a reasonable approach. Again, this is a conservative speaker, but he is reasonable.

HPI: I just don't see how you can transform it in just a few weeks or months.

Banks: Some of the more conservative rhetoric I suppose betrays that Obamacare completely upended. You're not repealing back to pre-Obamacare. It's sort of the scorched earth behind Obamacare. We need something substantially different than what we had before. That's why the repeal is important. I think the speaker's replacement plan is rooted in conservative principles of an efficiently driven health care system with the attributes I described. I wish that the medical device tax full repeal would be a component of that. I've been assured that component will be dealt with adequately as well this year.

HPI: We're seeing the ACA popping up in the polls. I think part of that is President Obama is gone. That branding "Obamacare" kept it in a political context. Some of the town hall thing these days is Democratic activism, but I also believe some Republican constituencies are realizing that they could lose coverage.



Banks: I represent the most conservative and Republican district in Indiana, so it's perhaps different from what you might find in other districts. If I could be mildly critical of Republicans, we've done a poor job of relating what the replacement does and why I will provide something substantially better than what we have with the ACA. All the while reminding Americans or Hoosiers that overall we've seen a rise in premiums, we've seen so many of the providers leave the exchange. We have to do something to replace it. But I suppose the anxiety of what that replacement will look like in a tumultuous political environment would contribute to the rise of its popularity.

HPI: Will the White House come up with a plan or will it be the Ryan Plan?

Banks: The president reminds me of Gov. Pence, being largely deferential to the legislative branch.

HPI: Gov. Daniels did that too, laying out broad concepts and urging the people's houses to thrash out the details.

Banks: Vice President Pence is a fixture on Capitol Hill. I have bumped into him a couple of times a week over the past four weeks.

HPI: He has two offices on the Hill?

Banks: He does.

HPI: Does he work out of them?

Banks: Yes. I had the chance to participate in his first private meeting in his House office and we talked

about Obamacare repeal with seven other House members. He also comes to our Republican Conference meetings. He participates with the Republican Study Committee. He visited with the Freedom Caucus and visited with the Tuesday Group. He is making the rounds actively on Capitol Hill.

HPI: Are you going to be in the Freedom Caucus?

Banks: I have not joined the Freedom Caucus.

I joined the steering committee of the Republican Study Committee and that will be my outlet for my conservative activities on the Hill. I've found that to be rewarding and in this environment, I'm looking for opportunities to be a substantive conservative leader and have taken the path of the Republican Study Committee, especially with this Indiana heritage, with Pence and (Dan) Burton both chairing. I think David McIntosh was leader of the Republican Study Committee as well.

HPI: Do you see David much?

Banks: I do. I visited with him last week. He's a conservative in a powerful place. He's a leader and advocate. I talk to Mark Souder all of the time. He is a tremendous source of knowledge. He's become a great source of advice for me. I met with Mike Sodrel a few days ago.

HPI: What are your impressions of President

Trump? I ask as an "enemy of the American people."

Banks: I think those comments about the media are unfortunate and misguided. I've been critical of the administration so far with their rhetoric and posture toward Russia, which I believe is a dangerous position to take in this tumultuous world. As Putin and Russia are on the front lines of disrupting the world order and making the world less safe, for American interests I've urged the administration to be tougher and take a stronger posture toward Russia.

HPI: I couldn't agree more. I am stunned that so many of your Republican colleagues have gone along with Trump on Russia. It's not like Stalinist times, but it is a dictatorship and they murder their opposition. I've been writing politics for three decades and the Trump/Russia thing is stunning to me. Do you have any idea for this attraction?

Banks: I don't know.

HPI: Do you folks in the House caucus ask, "What the hell is going on?"

Banks: In the Armed Services Committee we anticipated hearing from national security experts, and I've drawn a quick conclusion based on instincts I've had before that Russia is a dangerous actor on the world stage and we need to direct a stronger posture toward them. So far this president hasn't reacted in a way I would hope he would, especially with the evidence of his meddling in the election and other evidence we've seen along the way. That is deeply troubling. But with the resignation of Michael Flynn, who was clearly one of those pro-Russian voices in the president's ear and his replacement with Gen. McMaster, hopefully that will provide a reset with a new voice of reason. Never forget, Sen. Dan Coats is barred from ever going to Russia because of his knowledge that Russia is a dangerous actor on the world stage and he wasn't afraid to comment as such. He's on a black list and now he's going to be in a powerful position when he is confirmed later next week. He will be a voice of reason in the president's ear as well.

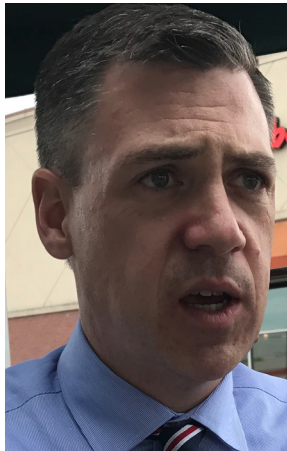
HPI: I was thrilled the president chose him for that, but then you look at the National Security Council's principals committee and Coats apparently won't be included.

Banks: I spoke out about that.

HPI: It was like Steve Bannon was undercutting Coats before he even got there.

Banks: There was a New York Times story last week about Coats and unnamed sources ... I spoke out against the president and requested that he rethink his position on reshuffling the council and taking Coats off and replacing him with more political appointees. That's deeply troubling to me as well.

HPI: During the campaign, Trump's temperament kept coming up. The Clinton campaign focused on it. Watching the last two months, those doubts have not



been allayed in my mind.

Banks: At the same time, the truly remarkable picks he's made on his cabinet; Gen. Mattis is the right person to lead the DoD. Mick Mulvaney doesn't get a lot of attention. He's one of the most conservative budget hawks in Congress to lead OMB. As we talk about the \$20 trillion national debt and empowering, even Mike Pence has been a really terrific pick. In many ways he's shown good judgment despite some of the rhetoric that has been unfortunate.

HPI: I agree there have been good picks by the president, particularly on the national security front, now that Flynn is out of there. My fear is if Bannon and the West Wing keep undercutting Tillerson, Mattis, you may see a quarter of the cabinet exit within a year or so. That would be a troubling telltale. Here's another one: It's 10:30 in the morning and the Leader of the Free World is tweeting about Nordstrom's and Ivanka's fashion line. Doesn't he have better things to do?

Banks: Yes, he has better things to do. That's unfortunate because it detracts from what we can and will accomplish. And this is why I go back to my sentiment toward Speaker Ryan. He is the epitome of a leader and is the adult in the room leading us forward.

HPI: Do you think there's a chance we'll see a "President Pence" in the next two to three years?"

Banks: I don't know.

HPI: Trump was asked last July if he'd serve a full term and he responded, "I'll let you know." A strange, strange answer. As for the nuclear codes, if Trump gets mad at North Korea, he could lob some nukes into Pyongyang and no one could stop him. Does that worry you?

Banks: I'm not sure how to answer that one. Your first question is interesting because someone we know very well is in this extraordinary position. Even earlier this week at the Munich Security Conference, Mike Pence was making the case for NATO and our sustained presence with NATO and working with our partners. He was reaffirming the notion because of the comments of the president.

HPI: And at the very same time Trump was in Melbourne, Fla., signaling the opposite. My takeaway from Munich and Brussels was they liked what Mike was saying but they didn't know if he was truly speaking for the president.

Banks: And Mattis is speaking along the same lines as Pence.

HPI: Jim, I've never seen anything like it.

Banks: I don't think you'll see anything like it again. But for me, to have a front-row seat in history and to be a part of it is really fascinating. Speaker Ryan has a great grasp. He speaks on tax reform with the border adjustment tax. A lot of attention is being paid to the Obamacare repeal, but the border adjustment tax is a 20% tax. What does that do to significant employers in Indiana that are more import based? I have significant employers in

my district who are against it and significant manufacturers in my district who are for it. As Vice President Pence said recently, it could be the most significant legislation since the Reagan tax cuts.

HPI: The president has talked about a sprawling infrastructure plan; a lot of it during the campaign seemed unfunded. So now you have Mick Mulvaney and Rokita who are both deficit hawks in influential positions in the administration and Congress. Are we going to see a collision between the White House and congressional Republicans over that?

Banks: I think conservatives are legitimately worried about that. Conservatives want to know what the infrastructure plan involves. There is really no meat on the bones at this point. As a conservative in Washington I'm looking for the details. I'm somewhat skeptical. Building the wall is another aspect. How much does building the wall cost? I've seen some projections of up to \$100 billion.

HPI: I've seen some video flying over the terrain. It's not going to be easy or cheap. How do you build a wall along the Rio Grande?

Banks: So there are significant questions with that. We have a lot to weigh.

HPI: It seems there are three major fault lines between the White House and Republicans in Congress: Tax reform, infrastructure plan and Obamacare replacement. I don't get the sense that you guys really know where the

White House is. Right?

Banks: Right.

HPI: So, by late summer you'll have a better idea of the lay of the land?

Banks: I sure hope so. I'm the new kid on the block, seven weeks on the job. So much of the focus has been on Obamacare, which really put a mask on what I'm most excited about, which is the tax reform package and what we can accomplish with that. Over the past seven weeks we've passed 20 of these CRAs, or Congressional Review Acts. They roll back Obama era administrative rules. Back to David McIntosh, in 1996 he was the sponsor of the Congressional Review Act. It was used one time during the early Bush years and never used again. Now we've used it 20 times. You've see the stock market respond to that posture of Washington rolling back regulations and the country being more business friendly. Tax reform fits right into that. It should bring an era of economic prosperity and growth.

HPI: Anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked?

Banks: It has been great to be a part of a delegation from Indiana with leaders like Susan Brooks, Luke Messer, Larry Bucshon, Jackie Walorski. They have all been very helpful to me, more than I anticipated or expected. Indiana is widely regarded as having an all-star delegation.



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Wary Republicans avoiding constituents as HIP 2.0 teeters

By BRIAN A. HOWEY

INDIANAPOLIS – Republican Members of Congress faced angry town hall constituents during the recess earlier this month. But here in Indiana, Republicans kept the people away. U.S. Reps. Trey Hollingsworth, Luke Messer, Todd Rokita and Jackie Walorski went on record as refusing to hold town halls.

The reason is becoming clear, when Indiana Senate President David Long and House Speaker Brian Bosma said this week that hundreds of thousands of Hoosiers could lose their health coverage under the Healthy Indiana Plan 2.0, which is funded by Obamacare.

"If they go back ... that's going to cause us to recalibrate HIP 2.0. There's no question about it," Long, R-Fort Wayne, said on Wednesday of President Trump and congressional Republicans' plans to repeal Obamacare. "The number of people on the program? That could be affected. We really don't know what we're facing right now."

Bosma told the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette, "We'll have to re-evaluate the HIP 2.0 program and the number of clients it serves, the state's support for it. I'm not saying it would go away, but certainly a major portion of the funding for that is no longer available. So we'll have to take a hard look at the program. Perhaps something will change at the federal level and we'll have to hit the panic button and reorganize, but I doubt any change will be during this biennial budget."

The federal government through Obamacare will pay \$16.5 billion of an estimated \$18 billion cost from 2015 to 2021. The state contributes the rest through cigarette tax revenue and a hospital assessment fee.

Gov. Eric Holcomb told Howey Politics Indiana in December that legislators might have a "mid-course correction" once the Trump administration's policy intents became clear. Holcomb met with President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence, who has been on rally point for the Obamacare repeal. Holcomb, however, was unavailable for

comment this week.

Holcomb told the IndyStar on Monday after attending the National Governors Association, "We'll run the numbers when we know what the equation looks like. There are a lot of different factors. What we are seeking as states, as Republican governors, is more control to have a better handle on cost."

Republicans in dozens of other states have faced angry constituents who are now realizing they will lose Obamacare coverage. The current "replace" plans are nebulous.

It's the bookend to August 2009 when Democrats, including then U.S. Rep. Joe Donnelly, faced angry constituents at town halls. On one sweltering evening in Kokomo, Donnelly met with more than 100 people. HPI even loaned Donnelly Ray-Ban sunglasses as he looked into the glint of the sun and took hostile questions. Donnelly ended up voting for Obamacare in 2010, was reelected that year and then won his Senate seat in 2012. Messer and Rokita are pondering a challenge to him in 2018.

and Rokita are pondering a challenge to him in 2018.

"The focus is on having meaningful, individual dialogue with Hoosiers rather than ramping up the volume, because I think what a lot of people don't like about D.C. is the screaming and talking at each other instead of the talking collectively about how we get a better outcome," Hollingsworth said during a News & Tribune interview.

Rep. Walorski was pressed by the South Bend Tribune on not only why there are no town halls scheduled this month, but the fact that she has had only one since 2013.

The Tribune called Walorski's office and requested a phone interview with her, or at least her communications director, Jack Morrissey. Morrissey replied that Walorski wouldn't be available for an interview.

Rokita held a number of town halls after the November 2016 elections, according to Lafayette Journal & Courier columnist Dave Bangert. By his own account in the Rokita Report: "I witnessed people's excitement about President-elect Donald Trump. I also heard from Hoosiers who are fed up with Obamacare's rising premiums and other failures. It was an exciting day, and I appreciate the chance to hear directly from Hoosiers and get marching orders for my work in Washington."

Bangert wrote about 4th CD constituents who had been pressing Rokita to attend a town hall. "It's not hard to imagine how Thursday night might have gone had Todd Rokita, unannounced, walked up the steps to the second-floor Walnut Room at the West Lafayette Public



Then U.S. Rep. Joe Donnelly during an angry town hall meeting on a sweltering August 2009 day in Kokomo.

Library for an event billed as the 'Congressional Town Hall With or Without Rep. Rokita.'"

"I believe that the organizers, Vicky Woeste in particular, are committed to civil democratic discourse, and while some of Mr. Rokita's ideas may have been unpopular with the crowd that attended, he had no reason to be afraid," said Amy Austin, a West Lafayette resident who helped lead the discussion. "As (former U.S. Rep.) Gabby Giffords said, 'To the politicians who have abandoned their civic obligations, I say this: Have some courage. Face your constituents. Hold town halls.'"

The rising anger comes as Obamacare has actu-

ally risen in the polls in recent months. The Kaiser Family Foundation's recent poll showed 48% supporting Obamacare and 42% opposed. There have been no recent Indiana polling data on the issue.

Congressional Republicans have talked about providing block grants to states, establishing health savings accounts and allowing insurers to sell policies across state lines. Long said Wednesday, "When you block grant back to the states, you give the states more responsibility, which I support. But when you do that, you also put the costs of that program more squarely on their shoulders. That's going to be our challenge – how do we afford it?" ❖

Proud, not surprised, by President's speech

By TONY SAMUEL

INDIANAPOLIS – Obviously, I was very proud of our president while watching him deliver a great speech Tuesday night. I won't overstate it because I wasn't surprised, and by now almost everyone either watched it themselves and were impressed or have heard or read all of the positive reviews.

Of course there were the haters. That's not surprising as the liberals and most of the media had their opposition planned out before the speech began. They were led by the former Democrat governor of Kentucky and the 10 remaining Kentuckians who don't support President Trump. What was the Democrat party thinking?



I wasn't surprised by the president's performance and message because at every turn during the last two years, he has risen to the occasion and he has shared the same type of positive mes-

sage. That's why he was the last one standing after the primaries. It is why he came back with two strong winning debate performances against Clinton after most thought he lost the first debate (I didn't). And it is why he fought so hard during the last stretch of the campaign to be in states you wouldn't expect. He has always risen to the occasion, and he did again Tuesday night.

This disappointed a lot of critics in the media and on the Democrat side of the aisle. After so many have criticized him for not appearing "presidential," they struggled with how to react. A few, like Van Jones of CNN, gave him some credit and now have to deal with the backlash from the angry left. That exact anger is what is keeping us divided as a country, just as President Trump is calling from his heart for unity.

This anger and hatred won't change immediately but we did see an opening on Tuesday night. We saw a President talk about issues that matter to Democrats such as Paid Family Leave, Affordable Child Care and a \$1 trillion Infrastructure plan – issues he presented during the campaign. We saw members on that side of the Chamber who didn't want to applaud at first, finding themselves unable to help from clapping and even joining in a few standing ovations.

Then again, there were also those that ran out of the chamber as soon as the speech concluded, something I've never before seen. I guess they were excited to go watch their new leader from Kentucky give his retort. Regardless, we did see a slight path to a working environment.

Several pundits agreed with Jones to some extent, but also questioned how long this will last and suggested we all watch when the next tweets begin, setting up the "there he goes again" attack.

The cynicism will persist and the distrust will continue, but at least some of them gave him his due – at least a little.

However, with each impressive speech and with each successful plan explained to the public, more and more Americans will realize that this president cares about them and more pressure will be put on the Democrats to work with him for the good of the American people.

I've said this before, but if Democrat leadership at the national level continues down the path of anger and hatred, it will be to their own demise.

At least this week, they saw what they are up against. If this president keeps doing what he has promised and keeps communicating it like he did Tuesday, and I believe he will, maybe they will realize they must work with him and just maybe, new leadership will emerge. This is the only way for them as a national party to survive, and of course, it's the best thing that could happen for the country. ❖

Samuel is president of Samuel Solutions in Indianapolis. He was vice chairman of the Indiana Trump presidential campaign.

Holcomb's style differs from Pence this session

By **THOMAS CURRY**

INDIANAPOLIS – As Vice President Mike Pence sat looking into the camera at Tuesday's Congressional address, former colleagues at his former stomping grounds at the Indiana Statehouse closed the first half of the 2017 session. Just a few short years ago, it was then- Gov.



Pence who played fast and loose with the state legislature, his mind always focused on that next step into the history books. RFRA, unsubstantial tax cuts and controversial cell phone tower leasing deals dominated Hoosier headlines and

discussions at 200 W. Washington St.

Now it is Pence's successor, Gov. Eric Holcomb, who holds sway in the halls of the Statehouse. Although the players in the state legislature and the party super majorities stay the same, the way state government has functioned under the first half session of Gov. Holcomb differs in its fundamental approach to politics from that of Pence. While Pence made decrees and politically motivated maneuvers, Holcomb has been more hands-off behind the scenes. Combined with Speaker Brian Bosma and Senate President David Long, Gov. Holcomb has orchestrated the Statehouse to move efficiently on his legislative priorities, managing to keep issues that have plagued Indiana's past off the agenda.

Already we have seen much work to tackle Gov. Holcomb's five legislative priorities: Creating a long-term infrastructure plan, making Indiana a strong future-based economy, furthering the state's commitment to education, annihilating Indiana's drug crisis and providing good government to taxpayers. From day one, Holcomb knew the mistakes made by his predecessor and pledged to avoid social issues.

There has been a distinct and not-so-subtle focusing on these tasks by legislative leaders. Already, the House has passed a long-term infrastructure plan with little trouble. The plan will fund Indiana's roads for 20 years and cost the average Hoosier an additional \$60 a year. While Gov. Holcomb has yet to sell the 10-cent-a-gallon increase in the gasoline tax to the Hoosier public, Speaker Bosma and Senate Pro Tem Long have praised the governor for "assessing the situation and then finding out what he can do to help."

Even minority leader Scott Pelath called it a "wise

approach compared to that of his predecessor." By allowing the debate to play out on the House floor and eventually the Senate, Gov. Holcomb can put his weight where it's needed when it comes to the details of the bill, all while staying involved behind the scenes.

On the drug epidemic, Holcomb has shown his acuity to common sense government in comparison with Mike Pence. While Pence adamantly opposed any use of needle exchange programs, thus leading to a massive HIV outbreak in some of the most affected counties, Holcomb has supported them at local levels. Combined with the governor's leadership and a growing understanding of the programs, many legislators say they have changed their minds on the issue, compared to years past. This has led to a shift of focus on the drug issue, from a criminal one to mental health and addiction.

State Sen. Jim Merritt's work on the issue is an example. Merritt pledged to HPI early in session that "19 pieces of legislation will be coming out of this session on the topic." Sen. Merritt's plan to fund pilot programs described as "aiming at assisting the most affected by the crisis" such as single mothers and pregnant women, has already garnered money in the House budget.

And on pre-K, Holcomb has worked hard to as-



sure the continuing of pilot programs to better the lives of Hoosier children. Holcomb promised double funding in the pilot programs and called it "critical to Indiana's future." Many in the Republican Party have followed along, with the House budget giving \$20 million, double even what Holcomb requested, to pre-K programs.

All of this is not to say there haven't been chinks in the armor so far, and that Holcomb doesn't have a lot left to do. Last week, for example, Senate Appropriations Chair Luke Kenley signaled support for reduced funding in the pilot pre-K programs, questioning their effectiveness.

Senate President Long has also suggested that the scope of the pre-K program might change from traditional classrooms to online programs to target rural Indiana.

Education differences have also flared in the Senate with the failure of a bill to make the superintendent an appointed position, a priority of Holcomb. But the Republican super majority makes that a minor issue in the long run as Long has said that "our caucus will discuss bringing this bill back with changes," and that Republicans in the Senate will be having discussions on it.

On top of that, the House-passed budget may run into trouble in the details during the second half of session. Senate lawmakers have traditionally been opposed to a cigarette tax increase, which the House budget calls for increasing by \$1 a pack. The goal of this increase is to fill some of the funding gap left from the road plan, which can obviously raise problems when it comes to finalizing the bills.

More importantly however, social issues began to surface at this week's House and Senate third reading deadline. Two controversial abortion bills passed, one in the Senate and one in the House, that have many opponents questioning the constitutionality of the bills. The House bill calls for making doctors inform women who have had an abortion that it's possible to reverse the procedure through increased hormone intake. Many rose against the bill, with some adamant female lawmak-

ers from both sides of the aisle calling it "junk science and made-up facts." Senate President Long said that he expects the bill to get its "own debate on the Senate floor."

Speaker Bosma has also strongly hinted at the Senate abortion bill getting floor time in the House by saying he "wouldn't be surprised to see it in the House, it's an issue many are passionate about." Long continued that "while we are focused on key issues, we never said we would never hear bills about social issues. We are only talking about a few of more than a thousand filed."

As the first half of session comes to close, the comparisons between Gov. Holcomb and former Gov. Pence have become more apparent. While Holcomb has been quiet so far, it doesn't mean he hasn't been involved or had a large effect on the state legislature.

His influence is quite apparent based on what has been passed so far. Gov. Holcomb has positioned himself to be a major player as details in road funding, the budget and pre-K expansion get ironed out. It hasn't been a perfect session, but in comparison to Pence's rough start, Holcomb's ride has been smooth, and he now finds himself in position to determine the outcome of some of Indiana's most pressing issues, if he can avoid the pitfalls of division.

DNA testing clears Senate

A bill that would allow police to collect DNA evi-

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dence from people arrested on a felony charge passed the Indiana Senate on third reading Tuesday (Rose, Lebanon Reporter). Senate Bill 322 now goes to the House. "One step down and two to go," Boone County Prosecutor Todd Meyer said. "I am very happy to learn this legislation passed the Senate and is on its way to the House." Meyer expressed hope the bill would move on to Gov. Eric Holcomb for his approval. "The house bill and the senate bills are very similar," said State Rep. Donna Schaibley, R-Carmel. "They have some minor differences but nothing that can't be ironed out." Schaibley, a co-sponsor, said she was "very confident" a conference committee would resolve the differences.

* * *

Long not excited about cig tax hike

A dollar-a-pack cigarette tax hike is headed for the Senate, and a chillier reception than in the House (Berman, WIBC). It's the second straight year the House has approved higher cigarette taxes. The idea died without a hearing in the Senate last year. Senate President Pro Tem David Long won't flatly rule it out this year, but says supporters will have some convincing to do. He says he's "not excited" about the idea, and says many Senate Republicans feel the same way. While the tax hike isn't directly tied to road funding as it was last year, House Republicans are relying on it to make up money from gasoline sales taxes, which they want to steer toward roads. Long worries that replaces one declining source of money with another. And he says relying on cigarette taxes tugs the state away from a funding method that reflects how much people drive.

Homeless veterans bill passes

A news item posted to the website of the Indiana Senate Republicans announced that legislation authored by State Sen. Ron Alting (R-Lafayette) to help homeless Hoosier veterans passed the Senate this week by a vote of 50-0 (Howey Politics Indiana). Senate Bill 517 would require the Hoosier Lottery Commission to transfer \$500,000 per year through June 30, 2020 of the surplus lottery revenue to the state treasurer to be deposited in a grant account established within the Veterans' Affairs Trust Fund. Alting added that in Marion County there are 326 homeless veterans, which accounts for 25 percent of the adult homeless population. In Alting's district, the Lafayette Transitional Housing Center has housed 238 veterans and their families since 2013.

Sanctuary campus bill passes House

A bill meant to require Indiana colleges and universities to comply with federal immigration investigations has passed the Senate, though concerns remain about the policy's implication on Indiana campuses (Covington, Indiana Lawyer). Through Senate Bill 423, Sen. Mike Young, R-Indianapolis, and Sen. Mike Delph, R-Carmel, the two main authors, said they are seeking to fill a gap in existing Indiana law, which prohibits "governmental entities"

from adopting sanctuary city policies and instead requires them to comply with federal immigration investigations. That law did not include state-supported universities on its list of governmental entities, Young said, so the intent of SB423 is to bring those schools into the same compliance. The bill was plagued by concerns from both residents and lawmakers from committee to the Senate floor, and now that it has passed its first chamber, immigration attorneys are expressing concern over what SB423 might mean for undocumented students.

Long, Bosma warn of Obamacare repeal

Legislative leaders acknowledged this week that some Hoosiers could lose health insurance funded by the Affordable Care Act if federal lawmakers repeal the program (Kelly, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). And state coffers might have to absorb some of the Medicaid expansion rather than using federal dollars. "If they go back ... that's going to have to cause us to recalibrate HIP 2.0. There's no question about it," said Senate President Pro Tem David Long, R-Fort Wayne. "The number of people on the program? That could be affected. We really don't know what we're facing right now." HIP 2.0 is the modified expansion program Indiana started offering in February 2015 after receiving a federal waiver. About 420,300 low-income Hoosiers now get health insurance through the program. "We'll have to re-evaluate the HIP 2.0 program and the number of clients it serves, the state's support for it," said House Speaker Brian Bosma. "I'm not saying it would go away, but certainly a major portion of the funding for that is no longer available. So we'll have to take a hard look at the program." HIP 2.0 has several cost-sharing components – including an average monthly contribution – aimed at pushing members to seek preventive care and make good health care choices. This is a key difference from traditional Medicaid, which bears all costs of care. The total cost of HIP 2.0 initially was estimated to be \$18 billion from 2015 to 2021, with the federal share being about \$16.5 billion. The state share mostly comes from a hospital assessment fee and cigarette tax revenue.❖

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

Cleveland wins the World Series and other fake news

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – The media told you that the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. They lied. So dishonest. Terrible.

The alternative fact is that the Cleveland Indians won. The Cubs were disqualified for using an illegal immigrant who paid bribes to get to this once-great country to pitch. Cheating. So unfair.



But did the failing New York Times tell you that the Cubs were forced to forfeit? No. So biased. Did you hear on any of those TV networks that nobody listens to anymore that the Cubs still haven't won the World Series since 1908? No. So untruthful.

Did you read in this failing South Bend Tribune that the Cubs really aren't defending champs? No. So slanted. Did Tribune columnist Bill Moor apologize for all his blabbering about "Cubs win!" and flying a "W" flag? No. So disgraceful.

What the media report is fake news. What the media fail to report is true. They never had stories about the Bowling Green massacre. They never reported what terrorists did in Sweden. In case you think the media wouldn't cover up the truth about the World Series, just think of how they covered up all those deaths in Bowling Green. And over in Sweden. Sweden! Who would believe this? Sweden!

If they won't report terrorist massacres, do you think they'd have any trouble in dishonestly covering up the results of a baseball game?

Why fake news about the World Series? Easy. Shows their political bias. They don't want to admit that the Indians really won because Cleveland is in Ohio. That's one of the many, many states President Trump carried in the biggest Electoral College win since Ronald Reagan. Huge. They want you to believe that a team from Illinois, one of the few states that voted

un-American, could have a winner.

Living in Chicago is living in hell. The murder rate is so high. A disaster. Somebody told me it was 8 percent. That means if there were 40,000 baseball fans at Wrigley Field, 3,200 of them were murdered. So dangerous. By the end of last season, nobody went to Wrigley Field. Those stories about big crowds were fake news. The alternative attendance estimates put the number of people in a nearly empty park at more like 2,000. So, at least fewer were murdered.

And attendance for the South Bend Cubs, pathetic affiliate of the Chicago team, is terrible, too. Nobody goes.

Even if the Cubs weren't forced to forfeit for providing sanctuary to an illegal immigrant right out there on the mound, they would be disqualified for a conspiracy to halt the final game for a so-called rain delay just as the Indians were about to win. Remember how the umpires thought a big rain was coming? They halted play. Had the tarp put down. Gave the Cubs a chance to halt the Indians' momentum. And there wasn't much rain at all. Where did the umpires get that report of real rain coming? Fake news. From the lying news media. From radar that was rigged. A conspiracy. Believe me.

One good thing about the media covering up this conspiracy is that some enemies in the media also are Cleveland fans. They suffer, thinking the Indians lost. Like my friend Jim Wensits. Big Indians fan. Huge. Jim also is a long-time journalist at the South Bend Tribune. Somebody said they recently were picked as the worst paper in Indiana. And Jim has been host of fake news shows on

public television. Anybody like that in the media is an enemy of the American people. So dishonest.

Pray for Sweden, even though you won't find in this newspaper any listing of times and places of memorial services for the victims. WNDU and WSBT won't tell you either. And pray for the Cubs. If they re-

pent and reject being a sanctuary team, maybe they finally will win the World Series for the first time since 1908. ❖

Colwell has covered Indiana politics and real news over five decades for the South Bend Tribune.



How does Indiana compare to the nation?

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – How alike the nation is Indiana? One way to judge would be to visit representative Hoosier homes and compare what we find there with what we see in typical American homes.



Without the resources to visit all those homes, let's use some 2015 data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. The first thing we see is the average Hoosier's personal income is \$6,172 (13 percent) lower than that of the average American. This means we have less to spend than those elsewhere in the nation. And so we do. The average Hoosier spent \$4,098 less in 2015 on consumer goods

and services than did the average American.

Right there we see why a town of 50,000 persons somewhere else in the nation will attract more retailers with higher quality (priced) goods than a town of equal size in Indiana. There will be more diversity of services elsewhere than in Indiana for the same reason. For Indiana to be more attractive to retailers and to service providers we need more people with more income to spend.

But that neglects a different issue: Do Hoosiers spend their money differently than other Americans? The answer is "Yes, but not greatly." The biggest place where the average Hoosier outspends the average American is health care. We spent 19.1 percent of our total personal consumption on health care, compared with 16.1 percent nationally. Despite having less to spend, we even out spent our fellow citizens for health care by \$6,501 to \$6,436 per person.

Are Hoosiers prone to more serious illnesses than other Americans? Are medical services, inpatient and

outpatient, priced higher in Indiana than elsewhere? Could pharmaceuticals here, in the proud home of Big Pharma, be higher than elsewhere? We'll have to leave those questions to the health economists and the voices of health care providers.

The other spending category where the average Hoosier laid out more money than the average American was gasoline and other energy goods. Our average spending was 17.2 percent higher than the national average, taking 3.2 percent of our total expenditures versus 2.5 percent nationally.

In one important area Hoosiers do spend far less than their fellow Americans, an area we tout as the great benefit of living in this state, housing and utilities. Spending on housing and utilities in Indiana averages \$5,442 vs. \$6,947 per person nationally. Our average outlay is 21 percent below the national average, considerably more than the 13-percent deficit in income.

Is this because our housing stock is older, in worse repair, less attractive than will be found elsewhere? Is it because our electricity prices are lower due to our heavy polluting of the air with coal fired furnaces? Or does it because our jobs do not pay as well as jobs elsewhere as a result of our firms not producing what the world wants to buy?

What's your answer? ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist, writer and speaker who may be reached at mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com

Public confidence via exemplary performance

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – Public confidence in government can be regained only through exemplary performance.

With so much turmoil in Washington and around the country these days, it's easy to get caught up in the crises of the moment. These are, indeed, worth our attention, but so are longer-running developments that threaten the health of our representative democracy. I want to lay them out in one place, so that the most serious problems confronting our system don't slip from our attention.



First, it has become very hard to make our system work. Our country is so large, so complex – and, at the moment, so polarized and divided – that it's tough to make progress on the challenges that beset us.

In more ways than not, Congress reflects the country that elected its members; all the contrary sentiments and manifold cross-currents that characterize our communities come to rest on Capitol Hill. Ideally, that is where

they should be reconciled, where discerning key facts, negotiating, and consensus-building lead to a common way forward. Congress has failed us repeatedly in this regard, but we need at least to recognize the magnitude of its challenge.

Still, this does not excuse what I consider to be Congress's chief failing: In the face of difficult problems, it has become timid. Its members don't like to make hard choices. So they don't come close to living up to their responsibility to be a co-equal branch with the presidency.

They may criticize the president, but they also defer to him to set the agenda and to make policy. From national security and foreign affairs, to the nation's mounting debt, to entitlement reform, to the long-term economic dislocation that has led so many Americans to feel forgotten, Congress has had little impact.

Which is why it's not surprising that we face a third long-term crisis: People have lost confidence in the institutions of government. This has been building for at least two generations, from the war in Vietnam and the turmoil it engendered back home, through Watergate, Iran-Contra, the war in Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, and the inability of Congress and presidents of both parties to enact comprehensive budgets and significant domestic reforms.

Yet no matter how understandable this lack of trust might be, it is a serious problem for our government and for the democratic system it embodies. Restoring public confidence will take hard, sustained work, starting

with high standards of conduct at all levels. Once public confidence is lost, it can't be regained through rhetoric, only through exemplary performance.

But this won't happen unless we address the fourth challenge: Our elections system needs thoroughgoing reform. At pretty much every level, it's throwing democracy off-kilter. House districts have been gerrymandered to create so many safe seats that many members need only be responsive to their base. Our voting system is fragile and in disrepair, with its patchwork of procedures, obsolete machinery, and legislative attempts to limit access to the franchise in the name of "ballot security." We need to ensure the fairness, integrity and efficiency of our voting infrastructure and procedures, or risk undermining one of the cornerstones of our democracy.

Which is also threatened by our fifth challenge: The powerful and pervasive influence of money on the political process. Our system is awash in money, which is spent to influence elections and gain favorable results. Many Americans feel money is what really runs Washington, as opposed to the ideas and principles we were taught in civics class.

Despite efforts at reform, the money problem is worse than ever; too many Americans feel they've become an afterthought in the political process. Yet if they have, it's not just money that's to blame. My final concern is that too many of us have become disengaged from and indifferent to the political process. That may be changing at this particular moment, but as a historical trend, it's unarguable. As citizens, we have to learn how to solve problems in a representative democracy. We have to learn to work with people who hold different views, forge common ground with them, and hold our representatives to account – not alone for their political views, but for their ability to get things done.

To make representative democracy work, we, as citizens, have to up our game, too. ❖

Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government; a Distinguished Scholar, IU School of Global and International Studies; and a Professor of Practice, IU School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Doug Ross, NWI Times: President Donald Trump's budget will include a 10 percent increase for military spending and a commensurate cut for social programs, the world was told this week. Last week's exercise in balancing the federal budget puts that decision in perspective. U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Ind., and the Concord Coalition, a nonpartisan group promoting fiscal responsibility, asked residents of the 1st Congressional District to make the tough decisions necessary to balance the budget and reduce the national debt. The team I was on made decisions that, if they were made in Congress, would have cut the national debt by just under \$2.4 trillion. If only Congress would do that, too. Visclosky has been in office long enough to remember when, in the 1990s, the budget was balanced. It isn't that Congress can't balance the budget; it's that it hasn't been able to find the common ground to do so in this highly partisan era. The majority of congressmen, including Visclosky, are eager and able to make tough decisions that require compromises. But extremists at both ends of the political spectrum have made gridlock the new status quo when it comes to responsible budgeting. ❖



Dan K. Tomasson, Evansville Courier & Press: The White House disarray we've witnessed of late can't be good for national security. Having a president kept out of the intelligence loop can only invite disaster. Having fired Michael Flynn as his national security adviser for a lack of trust born of bizarre dealings with Russians and subsequent lies, Donald Trump quickly reversed thrust and portrayed Flynn as a victim of the agencies we rely on to keep track of our enemies and often our friends. The spies, he said, took down the good general by leaking his dealings with the Russian ambassador to the hated press. At the same time, the man who during his campaign for the presidency praised WikiLeaks and others for helping get at the truth of Hillary Clinton's misuse of emails that included sensitive classified material, suddenly condemned the insidiousness of such leaks, which are now affecting him. You can't make this stuff up. Hollywood would laugh you all the way to the end of Sunset Boulevard. Last summer, we saw Flynn shouting, "Lock her up!" from the stage of the Republican National Convention. Perhaps it was a prophetic message about his own fortunes and disgraceful performance as a member of the Trump administration, which ended just weeks after it had begun. But this goes much deeper than Flynn, who had no business being named to such a post in the first place, given his penchant for hip-shooting and promoting ridiculous rumors like Clinton running a child sex ring out of a Washington pizza parlor. Then again, maybe the general promoted that wicked, nonsensical trash because he was pushed to do so by his then-chief of staff, his son, who was fired. Whatever. What's important now is that there seems to be a sudden reluctance by the multibillion-dollar intelligence

gathering apparatus to let The Donald know what is going on in the netherworld of spying. For his part, Trump has seemed to welcome that, preferring to skip detailed daily briefings and getting on with his business. Ho hum. Other occupants of the Oval Office certainly had their differences with the cloak-and-dagger set. Jack Kennedy was furious with the intelligence community after the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba, and both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were embarrassed by bad info about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Thankfully, though, our agencies have notched more victories than defeats and have averted more disasters than they've allowed. All those stars on the CIA's wall of honor remind us the spy business will always be an imperfect-but-necessary one. ❖

Aaron Blake, Washington Post: President Trump's speech to Congress on Tuesday night was a nothingburger next to this: Oprah Winfrey is reportedly flirting with running for president. The Washington Post's Helena Andrews-Dyer reports: In a recent interview with Bloomberg TV's David Rubenstein, the businessman and big-time philanthropist asked Winfrey, you know, one billionaire to another, what her plans were for 2020. For her part, Winfrey, who has been in the TV business for nearly 40 years, paused for dramatic effect. "I never considered the question even a possibility," she said, before adding, "I just thought, 'Oh ... oh?'" Without mentioning President Trump's name, Rubenstein then pointed out that "it's clear you don't need government experience to be elected president of the United States." "That's what I thought," Winfrey said. "I thought, 'Oh, gee, I don't have the experience, I don't know enough.' And now I'm thinking, 'Oh.' " Could that be a possible campaign slogan in 2020? "Oh!" Stranger things have happened. ❖

Michael Warren, Weekly Standard: The era of big government is back. That was the clear message from President Donald Trump's first address to a joint session of Congress Tuesday night. His speech, as light on specifics as the White House promised, was nonetheless a call for a muscular response from government to the nation's problems. "Everything that is broken in our country can be fixed," Trump said. "Every problem can be solved. And every hurting family can find healing and hope." The list of solutions Trump presented to the gathered lawmakers was long and contained some conservative policy goals. The president called for school choice, expanding health savings accounts, increasing the defense budget, and reducing the federal regulatory burden. But Trump also made a pitch for more infrastructure spending, paid family leave, and "accessible and affordable" childcare. And there was no talk of reforming Medicare or Social Security, nor of reducing the size and scope of government. He even seemed open to Medicaid expansion. ❖

Sessions met twice with Russian envoy

WASHINGTON — Then-Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) spoke twice last year with Russia’s ambassador to the United States, Justice Department officials said, encounters he did not disclose when asked about possible contacts between members of President Trump’s campaign and representatives of Moscow during Sessions’s confirmation hearing to become attorney general (Washington Post). One of the meetings was a private conversation between Sessions and Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak that took place in September in the senator’s office, at the height of what U.S. intelligence officials say was a Russian cyber campaign to upend the U.S. presidential race. The previously undisclosed discussions could fuel new congressional calls for the appointment of a special counsel to investigate Russia’s alleged role in the 2016 presidential election. When Sessions spoke with Kislyak in July and September, the senator was a senior member of the influential Armed Services Committee as well as one of Trump’s top foreign policy advisers.



on its website that it “only takes 15 minutes a day.” That’s creates a large chasm between the House and the Senate on the issue as this year’s legislative session reaches its midpoint. “I’m doing my best to limit any criticism to anyone I have to work with here for the rest of the session,” said Republican Speaker Brian Bosma, who supports Holcomb’s proposal and thinks the state should set aside even more money. “This is not the first time we’ve had this discussion.”

Pence: Yemen raid will bring ‘victory’

WASHINGTON — Vice President Mike Pence said Wednesday that a report claiming that no significant intelligence was gathered from the raid President Trump authorized in Yemen last month is “wrong.” In an interview on “CBS This Morning,” Pence reiterated what Mr. Trump had said a night earlier in his first address to a joint session of Congress. “This was a strike directed at obtaining information about al Qaeda operating out of Yemen,” he added. “We do believe it will lay a foundation for victories in the future.”

Messer adds campaign staff

INDIANAPOLIS — The Luke Messer for Congress campaign announced the addition of two political professionals to the team (Howey Politics Indiana). Emily Daniels comes to Team Messer after serving as campaign manager for Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-IN2). She is also an alumna of the Lugar Series. Matt Humm, of Hamilton County has been working on political campaigns since graduating college in 2010. In 2015, Humm managed Mayor Winnecke’s re-election campaign in Evansville, the first time a Republican had been and worked on U.S. Sen. Todd Young’s 2016 campaign.

Left threatens to primary senators

WASHINGTON — Progressives are threatening primary challenges for Democratic lawmakers who don’t commit to full obstruction of President Trump’s agenda (Kamisar, The Hill). Democratic sources tell Howey Politics Indiana that progressives have put feelers out about a primary challenge to U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly. Democrats already face a daunting 2018 landscape, with 10 senators up for reelection in states that Trump won. However, the threat of primaries foes going up against vulnerable Democrats such as West Virginia’s Joe Manchin further complicates the party’s chances of coming out with a net victory. But the party’s left flank is convinced that a full embrace of progressivism is the only way to return to power, and it is ready to fight for the party’s soul. “We fundamentally reject the assumption that Democrats can only win in red states by pandering to racists and big bankers,” said Claire Sandberg, a co-founder of the progressive political action committee We Will Replace You. “The way we beat Trumpism and take back Congress and statehouses is offering a coherent vision of our own to put people back to work.”

Rokita served on St. Joseph’s board

LAFAYETTE — U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN) is on the St. Joseph’s College Board of Trustees, but he isn’t speaking about his involvement with the institution or its impending suspension (Holden, Lafayette Journal & Courier). The board voted last month to suspend operations at the private college for an undetermined period of time in response to its long-running financial issues. Rokita, who represents District 4, which includes Rensselaer, is one of more than 30 trustees on the board. He declined an interview with the Journal & Courier.

GOP divided on Pre-K

INDIANAPOLIS — Republicans who control the Statehouse are deeply divided on how - or if - Indiana should move forward on a proposed expansion of a state-funded preschool program for poor kids (Associated Press). The GOP-controlled Senate voted Tuesday to sharply curtail a request by Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb to increase funding for the state’s five-county pilot program by \$10 million and instead offered a \$3 million boost. At the same time, they moved forward on their own \$1 million plan to offer a new - and cheaper - online preschool program designed by a Utah-based company which boasts