

Did Pence's Capitol mojo take a hit?

The RyanCare fiasco exposes veep's weakness, GOP divisions, and a lack of bipartisanship

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

NASHVILLE, Ind. — Mike Pence was supposed to be a congressional asset for Donald Trump when the billionaire mogul picked him for the Republican ticket last July. But the RyanCare fiasco that played out last Thursday and Friday may have exposed Vice President Pence as a paper tiger.

Pence was a member of the Freedom Caucus while in Congress, but when it came to the point of bringing them along on the Obamacare repeal and replace, Pence did not deliver, despite being the Trump administration's point man. Pence spent a great deal of time working out of two Capitol Hill offices, and held dinners at his Naval Observatory residence in an effort to bring the Republican majorities on board with the Trump agenda. And he failed in a spectacular way.

The New York Times reported on Wednesday:



Vice President Mike Pence does a selfie with the House GOP, but couldn't deliver 216 votes on RyanCare.

"During the first two months of the administration, Mr. Pence lingered on the periphery, with Mr. Bannon and the policy advisers Stephen Miller and Andrew Bremberg occupying central roles. Over the past two weeks, Mr. Pence and Mr. Trump's budget director, Mick Mulvaney — another conservative former congressman — have taken on greater

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The party of no

By **MARK SOUDER**

INDIANAPOLIS — In "Conscience of a Conservative," Barry Goldwater famously wrote: "My aim is not to pass laws, but to repeal them." The context of that line was freedom. "I have little interest in streamlining government or in making it more efficient, for I mean to reduce its size. I do not undertake to promote welfare, for I propose to extend freedom." Which was then followed by the famous line.

When one re-reads this, last week in Washington becomes more clear. Well, not really, but the health care bill failure in the House does. The House Freedom Caucus was



"Now is the time for leadership. Now is the time for both parties to pull back from the table and begin anew. Congress and the President need to appoint a bipartisan commission to craft a new health care plan for America."

- State Sen. John Ruckleshaus



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advocating the Goldwater position. Until the Republican Party figures out how to adapt as Reagan did, we are likely to fail in passing major new legislation. The Goldwater/Conscience of a Conservative tradition is one of the stumbling blocks.

Some fundamental history is critical. Goldwater didn't write the book. Brent Bozell, William F. Buckley's brother-in-law, did. Goldwater might have read it and likely would have agreed with much of it. The book was meant to capture what he might have written had he been a writer, but more importantly, the Goldwater that the burgeoning conservative movement dreamed he would be.

It is not 1964 anymore. We aren't going to repeal TVA, Social Security or Medicare. Adaptations maybe, but total repeal doesn't work



after things get settled in. Goldwater lost. Badly. Total repeal wasn't popular in 1964 either. At least Goldwater went out, consistently in the 1960s, and tried to sell his message.

President Trump is not Goldwater. Nor is he Reagan. He promised, at various times, that there would be no cuts to Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid. He said that no one would lose coverage. Trump: "There was a philosophy in some circles that if you can't pay for it, you don't get it. That's not going to happen with us." And this, after he had been elected: "You will end up with great health care for a fraction of the price and that will take place immediately after we go in. Immediately! Fast! Quick!"

Here are a few suggestions to Republicans from a Republican perspective about where to go from here:

The Democrats aren't going to help, unless you don't need it. Their goal is to protect everything they've done, stall until they can re-capture the government, and then move the nation even more toward a Bernie Sanders-Elizabeth Warren government domination.

The Freedom Caucus and outside allies need to realize the difference between lobbying to kill a bill, as opposed to a force to push legislation in a more conservative direction, then move it forward as a gain. Then repeat. In this case, President Trump moved from his position and yet the group rejected anything short of immediate total victory.

Speaker Ryan needs to recognize that "cooking bills in the backroom with the president and the Senate" will not work. Not in these conditions. Work with the president for an initial House bill. Then prepare for the Senate mess. You can't skip

the Senate process for two reasons. One is structural. Republican margins are close, its rules slow things down and empower dissenters, there are Republican members who

are not fans of the president, and it always makes legislation more moderate.

The second reason is now obvious: Conservatives in the House won't accept a pre-cooked Senate deal without at least first showing their constituents that they did their best. But if they demand too much, many other Republicans defect. In other words, getting a House "opening offer" is not easy, even if a bill is going nowhere fast.

The president recognizes that his past statements were not meant to be taken literally. He is a deal-maker who was stating opening offers. The continuing problem will be for him to understand that he will have to make a deal with the House, then the Senate and then re-do the deal. Trump has to think in terms of three deals, which is hard for anybody and particularly for his "get it done" temperament. Pre-conferencing is not a "final vote." Except maybe in this case.

The bigger problem is that many of the president's strongest supporters never believed in any deals in the first place, and don't view getting

a deal as any form of art. They thought ending “deals” was a key part of draining the swamp.

The Republicans need to recognize that failure to act will not be blamed on the Democrats. If ObamaCare explodes, the people will no longer just blame the Democrats. Huff and puff all they want, but every voter realizes the Republicans promised change and they did nothing. So any blame will be at least shared.

But the problems go far deeper than health care. They must be addressed or Republican periods of control will basically be this: Failure to pass laws, executive orders that are slow-walked and repealed as soon as the Democrats re-take control, and no philosophical advance in understanding from voters as to why Republicans are taking the actions they propose.

To succeed in passing law, each faction – libertarians, budget-cutters and tax-cutters, defense hawks, social conservatives, trade nationalists, rural farming interests,

border wall advocates, etc. – will have to realize that their views alone do not have a majority. And, as they just learned again, when you compromise, the result doesn’t result in immediate praise ringing in your ears because compromise cannot be pure.

One solution I mentioned earlier is to let the House pass a hard-core option (the moderates explain back home that without them helping change it, it might become law) and moderate through the Senate.

The other way to do it is to let different factions win different fights. Which is another type of compromise, but these days it seems that everyone wants total victory on every point. Which, of course, leads to total defeat. No one gets anything. Which, of course, is another option. It isn’t going to get easier. ❖

Souder is a former Republican congressman from Indiana.

Pence, from page 1

responsibility as the action has shifted to Capitol Hill. Mr. Pence, a Hill-wise former Indiana congressman who is typically a palliative presence in an administration of piranhas, had been keeping tabs on conservatives, counseling the president not to take anything for granted, and he urged Mr. Trump to take a hard line against his ideological allies who were pushing for a far more radical rewrite of the Affordable Care Act. During the course of the last two trying weeks, as less-experienced advisers floundered — and others skipped town — Mr. Pence emerged as an effective, if not ultimately successful, wingman for a president short on competent help.”

While Pence’s fingerprints are all over the RyanCare blunder, it wasn’t all Pence’s fault. Last week, presidential adviser Steve Bannon stepped in and issued an ultimatum after Pence’s legwork. “Guys, look, this is not a discussion. This is not a debate. You have no choice but to vote for this bill,” Bannon said. Axios’ Mike Allen reported: “But people in the room were put off by the dictatorial mindset. One of the members replied, ‘You know, the last time someone ordered me to something, I was 18 years old. And it was my daddy. And I didn’t listen to him, either.’”

Bannon and long-time Pence aide Marc Short, who is now the White House’s key congressional liaison, pushed Trump hard to insist on a public vote, as a way to identify, shame and pressure “no” voters who were killing their best chance to unravel the health care law, accord-



ing to the New York Times. That turned out to be an epic backfire.

One Republican congressional aide who was involved in the last-minute negotiations said Bannon and Short were seeking to compile an enemies list, the New York Times reported, adding that until the very end, “Mr. Trump’s team was deeply divided over whether he should fully commit to a hard sell on a bill they viewed as fundamentally flawed, with Vice President Mike Pence pointedly advising the president to label the effort ‘RyanCare,’ not ‘Trumpcare,’ according to aides.” Bloomberg News reported: “The GOP whip team, charged with rounding up votes for legislation, never spoke to Democrats in a serious way about the bill. Plus, they used reconciliation to move the AHCA – a legislative mechanism designed to pass with the support of just one party.”

While the national press is rife with stories about internal finger pointing, rampant paranoia and West Wing power plays, virtually none has positioned Pence as in trouble with the boss. That appears to be territory for Chief of Staff Reince Priebus. The Times reported: “Pence has been a utility infielder when the president needs him, and he’s not trying to compete with the loyalists,” said Tom Barrack, one of Mr. Trump’s closest friends and chairman of the Trump-Pence inaugural committee. “He’s doing exactly what he should be doing.”

However, Trump has a history of playing associates off each other. Above all, he values loyalty, and that may be the currency that keeps Pence as a regular fixture in the Oval Office.

MSNBC Morning Joe host Joe Scarborough has repeatedly made this assessment: There is no one in the White House who knows how Congress really works. Scarborough doesn’t mention Pence by name, but that was

supposed to be his most compelling calling card.

If President Trump decides to pivot away from the fractured and fissured Republican House conference and woo moderate Democrats, Pence may not be much of an asset on that front. He played a key role in the shaping of a hard right Trump cabinet, an obstacle for the non-ideological lifelong Democrat Trump to move to the center. In his dozen years in Congress, not only did Pence never get one of his own bills passed, he did little to forge relationships across the aisle. There was no Sen. Dan Quayle working with Sen. Ted Kennedy on job training, or even U.S. Sens. Todd Young and Joe Donnelly working on Iran accountability legislation filed this past week.

Priebus was signaling last Sunday that Trump's disgust with the Freedom Caucus and Speaker Paul Ryan's inability to control his own conference might have him looking across the aisle. "I think it's time for our folks to come together, and I also think it's time to potentially get a few moderate Democrats on board as well," Priebus told anchor Chris Wallace on Fox News Sunday. "We had no Democrat support. At the end of the day, I believe that it's time for the party to start governing. I think that's important."

Pence's congressional slogan was, "I'm a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order." It gave him little common ground to work with Democrats. Pence was a "statement congressman," not a member who actually worked to pass legislation. He was more concerned about his reputation with GOP true believers, always positioning for a presidential primary battle.

Examining Pence's congressional record, we couldn't find any meaningful legislation he sponsored with a Democrat. He sponsored Broadcaster Freedom Acts in multiple years, and Free Flow of Information Act. He sought to prevent the Federal Communications Commission from repromulgating the fairness doctrine. There was his Capital Gains Inflation Relief Act of 2007, and his Child Pornography Prevention Act. But his record is haven to a number of rightward causes on abortion such as the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act, defunding Planned Parenthood, where he vowed to "pick a fight," and a resolution honoring the National Review on its 50th anniversary. Pence had a 7% ACLU rating and 22% with the NAACP. If anything, the Pence congressional record makes him a very unlikely actor making bridges to Democrats.

Former Pence congressional colleague and HPI columnist Mark Souder observes, "Pence could adapt even though he has minimal history in doing so." Souder noted that Pence filed press shield bills "which the Democrats loved more than the Republicans," but added that such legislation "is not really a good example related to the

Trump agenda. It likely would damage not only his personal reputation as a conservative, but be against much of his nature. The transportation bill would be an example similar to his press shield bill – more popular with Democrats in Congress than Republicans – but the vice president knows that if the Dems get the transportation bill as a 'clean' option, they won't be able to use it for packaging with something else. There may be a few things on taxes, but it suggests the administration may use someone else with a businessman (Cabinet member or otherwise) 'fronting' while more obscure staff members do the negotiating. I doubt it will work, but likely the best shot because easier to do without historical baggage."

Souder is skeptical Democrats will have any incentive to come to the table with Trump. The president tried to blame Democrats for the RyanCare demise, despite the fact that Pence and no one in the administration even approached them about reforming Obamacare. It was always about the repeal. Trump has goaded the one Democrat he has a history with, Senate Minor-

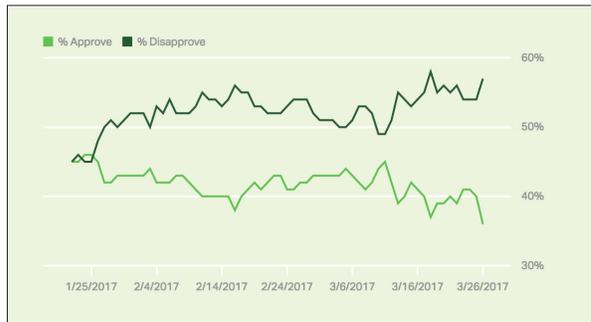
ity Leader Chuck Schumer, whom he criticized for having "crocodile tears" during the immigration/refugee ban order.

Trump suffered a humiliating defeat on RyanCare after just 17 days, with support for the bill falling to 17% in a Quinnipiac Poll, and his Gallup approval stands at a free-falling 35%, down nine points from the beginning of the month (it was 40% in CBS and 46% in Politico/Morning Consult polls this week). Those are the kinds of numbers that prompt opponents to just get out of the way and let a protagonist self-immolate.

"I do not know why any Democrat would bail out the Republicans right now," Souder said. "Perhaps next year for a few if the Republicans can get close to passing something – maybe but still not likely, or they will be primaried for helping Trump pass something."

Trump is preparing to pivot toward tax reform and may find debilitating fissures within the GOP conference on that one. There are already reports that the West Wing and Treasury are at odds over who drives that legislation, as well as consternation between the West Wing and congressional Republicans. A tax reform proposal from Ryan gives major cuts to the wealthy, while Trump is favoring a plan that would give a typical middle class family an \$1,100 cut.

Politico reports: "Is there any role for the Dems? It was pretty clear from the start that tax reform would be a Republicans-only affair. The decision to use budget reconciliation to close the door on a possible Senate filibuster was the clearest sign of that. Priebus threatened that the administration may try to forge a coalition with moderate Democrats on other big items on Trump's agenda, including tax reform. Don't bet on it. Democrats are unlikely to go for the sort of across-the-board tax cuts Republicans want, even though (Treasury Secretary) Mnuchin has



insisted that tax reform will primarily benefit the middle class."

"**The American people** are not crying out for tax breaks on the wealthiest Americans... but thus far it seems our Republican colleagues are headed in that direction," Schumer said on the Senate floor Monday. "The White House says tax reform isn't partisan, but it surely will be if they only propose massive tax cuts for the wealthy."

Less than 100 days into the Trump presidency,

Pence's key attribute as a bridge to Congress has taken a considerable hit. He doesn't appear to be properly positioned to make entreaties toward the center. Vice President Pence may be destined for the "warm piss" portfolio, borrowing a phrase from the late Vice President John Nance Garner if Trump can't find traction in Congress.

There will be state funerals to attend and Third World countries to visit, ribbons to cut and turkeys to pardon. ❖

Hillary, not hillbillies, to blame for Trump

By SHAW FRIEDMAN

LaPORTE – It's become self-evident since the election: Our presidential nominee was absolutely the wrong person to convey a message to working class families and hold together the traditional Democratic coalition that had carried us to success in years like 1992, 1996, 2008 and 2012.



It's time journalists like Frank Rich stop blaming the election loss on supposed ignorant "hillbillies" in rural parts of the country, including rural Indiana, who went for Donald Trump in droves. Rich's recent article for New York Magazine was titled, "No More Sympathy for Hillbillies." It was author J.D. Vance's ode to hillbilly culture and his up-by-the-bootstrap tale from rural poverty in Ohio and Kentucky that got

many to thinking that working class whites were responsible for their own problems and were ignorant and uneducated in not being able to see what was coming with a Trump presidency. Much of the hillbilly analogy suggests that those folks down in the holler and many Trump voters were motivated by appeals to racism and too ignorant in their own misery to understand their own self-interest.

As I wrote just days after the election, LaPorte County is a great example of why the hillbilly analogy just doesn't work, and doesn't explain the tremendous Trump appeal that led to a half million vote margin in Indiana, swamping down-ballot races like that of our outstanding governor candidate, John Gregg.

LaPorte County has been predictably Democratic in presidential elections for 30 years, including 2004 when it was one of just four counties to support John Kerry in Indiana. Same with solid margins delivered for Barack Obama both in 2008 and 2012, yet Donald Trump soundly defeated Hillary Clinton in LaPorte County, carrying traditional white, working class neighborhoods that have been

reliably Democratic for many years.

It wasn't ignorant hillbillies nor was it appeals to racism that cost Hillary Clinton a win in places like LaPorte County. This county is proof-positive that with the right economic message, blue collar, working class voters will give candidates a chance no matter their race, gender, religion or creed. This county not only carried Barack Obama twice with solid margins, but elected an African-American countywide as commissioner in 2010. No, Clinton's was a campaign and candidate so devoid of any powerful economic message of real change as to invite this kind of anti-establishment vote that carried Donald Trump here.

Sure, Bill Clinton's up-from-the-holler roots as the "Man from Hope, Arkansas," helped him to be seen as a "man of the people," who could feel the pain of working families a quarter century ago. Think back to John Travolta's portrayal of Clinton in the movie "Primary Colors" as Clinton sat in that Krispy Kreme donut shop just talking endlessly to the clerk about the clerk's health issues and challenges facing his family. Roll the clock forward 25 years, and both Bill and Hillary were viewed in a completely differently lens as card-carrying members of the Establishment, and that killed any notion that Hillary was an agent for change. Hillary would go into states like Michigan and Pennsylvania and talk about how retail sales were up, corporate profits were good but she conveyed little notion of the tremendous hurt that average folks were still feeling in broad swaths of these states, and how much resentment there was toward Wall Street, the big banks and powerful interests, as well as trade agreements pushed by those same interests.

Along comes Donald Trump who inveighed endlessly (and effectively) against hated trade agreements like NAFTA and TPP and in the worst case of "bait and switch" ever in politics, promised in his closing TV ad to go after Wall Street firms like Goldman Sachs that had helped implode our economy in 2008.

No longer the "Man from Hope," Bill Clinton came to personify in many voters' eyes someone who had traded on his insider credentials and had become incredibly close to Wall Street titans like Robert Rubin, Lawrence Summers and the billionaires who jet off to Davos each year. With Hillary Clinton pocketing nearly \$21 million in speaking fees from big banks and powerful interests since

she left as secretary of state, she had absolutely no credibility to speak to or for the little guy.

The two Clintons, who once campaigned across the nation with Al Gore on a theme of "Putting People First" in 1996, now carried the dead weight of having authored NAFTA, which shuttered 60,000 factories in our country and had idled millions of workers – many living in critical swing states like Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Let's face it – by leading the fight to kill Depression-era protections against big banks' abuse of depositors, and in signing the repeal of Glass-Steagall in 1999, the Clintons had absolutely no credibility in being able to take on Wall Street.

In the process, the Clintons' inept campaign left a vacuum that was unthinkable, allowing this billionaire buffoon from television to somehow champion himself as the voice of the "forgotten man and woman" who said he would shake up the old order that was viewed by many as hollowing out whole communities and stacking the deck in favor of the rich and powerful.

But for some to simplistically assert that racist appeals turned 300 counties in America from Obama to Trump ignores the powerful economic message that many believe was the true motivator. Our former vice president, Joe Biden, who proudly claims blue-collar Scranton, Pennsylvania, as his home, agrees. We needed a much more powerful, more strident economic message – along the lines voiced by Bernie Sanders – to motivate our base and gin up turnout. In real populist economic messages,

there's not a zero sum game that some want us to play. Black, white, straight or gay, male or female voters still vote their pocketbooks, and the failure of the Clinton campaign to put front and center the fact that "middle class working families" were left behind in the gains of the last eight years has lost us the presidency to this charlatan. Trump has made it abundantly clear that his pledges to blue collar workers to go after Wall Street were nothing but snake oil and an illusion, as he stands by his appointment of six former Goldman Sachs execs to his administration and pushes tax cuts that would benefit only the wealthy and powerful.

The swamp isn't being drained. It's just being stocked with new alligators and crocodiles who will take their turns biting the hides of average working families, and the best example of that was the highly unpopular TrumpCare legislation, that has now been exposed as a sham that deserved its ignominious end this past week.

The tragedy is that many working class families fell for an economic message from this huckster because we had the wrong messenger opposing him, who had no credibility to speak to their needs, hopes and desires. That's the real tragedy of what happened on Nov. 8. ❖

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Time for a bipartisan health commission

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

NASHVILLE, Ind. – It took one of the most brilliant humans, theoretical physicist Albert Einstein, to place in proper context the definition of “insanity.”

It is, “Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Last Friday, a true mongrel piece of congressional legislation, the American Health Care Act, also known as “RyanCare” or “TrumpCare,” died a conspicuous death. President Trump, Vice President Pence and Speaker Paul Ryan framed and foisted such a bad bill that they couldn’t even muster 216 Republican votes in the U.S. House. They spent a mere 17 days on this folly, and at the end the American people detected a festering rat in the policy punch bowl. So discredited was the ACHA that in a Quinnipiac Poll, only 17 percent supported a bill that according to Congressional Budget Office estimates would have deprived up to 24 million Americans of health insurance.

We watched President Trump, an alleged epic dealmaker, who was reduced to persistent questions to top aides, “This is a good bill, isn’t it?” and then confessed, “Nobody knew health care could be so complicated.” We squirmed as Pence and every Republican in the Indiana congressional delegation signed on to this mess in rote, party-line fashion. It prompted these Republicans to lament a seven-year promise to repeal Obamacare, but they didn’t know how. U.S. Rep. Jim Banks lamented, “I am hopeful that House Republicans can come together.”

And then there was U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly, who suggested that pesky concept of bipartisanship. “I have been saying for years that we can work together to strengthen the Affordable Care Act and provide even better health care for Hoosiers,” Donnelly said. “I continue to stand ready to work with anyone, Republican or Democrat, to do so.”

By mid-week, there was talk of reviving RyanCare, with Trump declaring it will be “easy.”

This 2017 policy traispe came seven years after Obamacare was passed, on a straight party-line vote. The Republicans attempted to do the same thing, only they spent 17 days instead of 17 months doing it. There are some successes with Obamacare, like being able to buy insurance with a pre-existing condition and the Healthy Indiana Plan 2.0 which has expanded Medicaid coverage to 430,000 Hoosiers. But many of us have seen monthly premiums skyrocket, co-pays grow and deductibles reach

amounts that short of a catastrophic illness, we’re almost sans coverage.

So now what?

Leave it to a Republican legislator from Indianapolis to hit on a novel idea. State Sen. John Ruckleshaus observed, “Both sides have now had a crack at designing and implementing a healthcare system for all Americans, and it appears it has not worked out for either side. I will give both parties their due; designing, implementing, and managing a healthcare system that is affordable and provides good quality for its customers is a very tall order. Republicans will feel their fallback position is to let ObamaCare/ACA fail and say, ‘I told you so.’ Democrats knew the ACA needed major surgery but will blame Republicans for letting the patient die on their watch. We all know this rhetoric is going to dominate the print and electronic media for months. Enough already!”

Soooo, now what?

“Now is the time for leadership,” Ruckleshaus continued. “Now is the time for both parties to pull back from the table and begin anew. Congress and the president need to appoint a bipartisan commission to craft a new healthcare plan for America. President John F. Kennedy declared that by the end of the decade we would put a man on the moon. Kennedy assembled the best and the brightest to get the job done. President Kennedy and Congress, in a bipartisan effort, succeeded in putting a man on the moon by decade’s end. We are not going to solve the healthcare issue overnight as we did not get here overnight. But we can declare healthcare reform as a national goal however long it takes if we agree to work together. Let’s get to work.”

There is precedent. In 1981, President Reagan appointed the National Commission on Social Security Reform, or the “Greenspan Commission” named after Chairman Alan Greenspan. It included Sens. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Bob Dole and John Heinz, Lane Kirkland of the ALF-CIO, Alexander B. Trowbridge of the National Manufacturers Association, among others. They issued their report two years later.

And that’s when the two great horse traders, Republican President Reagan and Democratic Speaker Tip O’Neill went to work, cutting an epic deal that placed Social Security on sturdy footing for two generations with the Social Security Act of 1983. U.S. News & World Report noted that both Reagan and O’Neill had to compromise.

The potential insanity we face is for Trump, Pence and Ryan to make another stab at a party-line solution, with it having little chance of passing the U.S. Senate. It will crater President Trump’s approval, destabilize American politics even further, and if Obamacare does collapse, millions of Americans are going to face harsh economic consequences, if not life and death scenarios.

Sen. Ruckleshaus is on to something. It’s time for a bipartisan commission, and then a spirit of compromise. Or, in short, sanity. ❖



HB1002 rolls, but there's a hitch

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

NASHVILLE, Ind. – The Senate Tax and Fiscal Policy Committee advanced HB 1002 by a 10-2 vote Tuesday afternoon. It is positioned to raise about \$672 million by 2019, with that figure expected to increase since the gas tax will be tied to inflation. It could increase by 1 cent a year. The big change from the House-passed version is that it splits the 10-cent gasoline tax over two years, or 5 cents a year. "This represents a very strong collaborative non-partisan effort to try and move Indiana forward," said Sen. Brandt Hershman, R-Buck Creek.

But from the point of view of Indiana Motor Truck Association President Gary Langston, there are problems that could cost Hoosier jobs and revenue. "We're happy that the surcharge is on the pump, and continue to support the fuel-tax increase as the most immediate, efficient revenue stream," Langston said. "The \$100 TIIF fee, the 50% IRP fee increase and the wheel-tax proposals are problematic. Indiana is unique in the number of carriers and the amount of commercial equipment we have registered here, more than any other state in the nation. Fees of this type hit carriers on equipment that is registered here but never touch our roads. If these are imposed it will drive carriers out of the state to another location that does not impose the fees, robbing Indiana of millions of dollars of ancillary revenue we receive simply because Indiana was chosen as the base state."

In a state where the term "tax increase" could induce hives on legislators and governors, the lack of hue and cry over raising taxes is fascinating. It's partly because gas prices are well below where they were four years ago when they flirted with \$4 a gallon. And second, Indiana local roads suck. Rattle, rattle, thunder clatter, boom, boom, where's my hubcap? Hoosiers appear willing to absorb a nominal tax hike if it results in good roads.

2. Good governors stop bad bills

After Gov. Mike Pence's RFRA disaster in 2015, one sentiment oft expressed is that a powerful governor will keep bad legislation away from his desk. A Gov. Mitch Daniels, facing a tough reelection bid, would never have let a RFRA get anywhere close to his pen. Perhaps we are seeing such a lesson learned with Gov. Holcomb, who was one of Daniels' enforcers. The dubious "abortion reversal" bill by State Rep. Ron Bacon, which posed a first real "divisive social issue" dilemma for Holcomb, who has vowed to keep focus on his steel and concrete priorities,

is now being bottled up in both the House and Senate. Senate Judiciary committee Chairman Rodric Bray says he "doesn't have time" to hear the bill. And House Public Policy committee Chairman Ben Smaltz isn't going to allow similar language in any other abortion bills in his committee. Coincidence? Or, perhaps, we're seeing a powerful governor in the making.

3. Government shutdown clock begins

The government shuts down one month from today, and there are just eight legislative days left to pass a spending bill. Politico Playbook sources say that Congress plans to deal with avoiding a shutdown the week of April 24 -- meaning they will push it off until the last minute, and give themselves five weekdays to avoid a shutdown. What can go wrong!



At 11 a.m. weekdays, Howey Politics Indiana posts The Atomic, five-talking points you can use for your power lunch.

Speaker Paul Ryan said on CBS This Morning today "What I worry about, Norah, is that if we don't [pass a GOP health care bill], then [Trump will] just go work with Democrats to try and change Obamacare and that's not -- that's hardly a conservative thing. ... [I]f this Republican Congress allows the perfect to be the enemy of the good, I worry we'll push the president into working with Democrats, he's been suggesting that as much." On working with Democrats: "I don't want that to happen," Ryans said. "You know why? I want a patient-centered system. I don't want government running health care. The government shouldn't tell you what you must do with your life, with your health care. We should give people choices." This is a pretty striking comment. The Republican speaker of the House acknowledges that the Republican president will abandon their party and work with Democrats if the GOP doesn't step up its game soon.

4. Trump ends Obama climate regs

In President Trump's view, President Obama's EPA "Clean Power Plan" was a "crushing attack" on the U.S. economy. On Tuesday, he issued a sweeping directive to halt regulations aimed at reducing carbon pollution aimed at electric utilities, oil and gas drilling, and coal miners.

"My administration is putting an end to the war on coal," Trump said at the EPA headquarters signing, where he was joined by a group of coal miners whom he promised would be put back to work quickly. "We're going to have clean coal. Really clean coal. Together we will create millions of good American jobs"

This is a dangerous political proposition. "If the Clean Power Plan is reneged upon, I don't think you will see utilities going back to investing in coal because they have already reduced their infrastructure and they already have commitments geared toward natural gas," Tamar Essner, an energy analyst at Nasdaq Advisory Services, told the New York Times. There are about 2,500 coal-related jobs in Indiana and just 75,000 nationally (down from 780,000 in 1920 and 169,000 in 1985), compared to 650,000 in sustainable energy jobs. Coal is losing out to natural gas. It's cheaper. Utilities here in Indiana and across the country are retiring coal-fired plants and switching to natural gas. So this obsession of Trump/Pence on saving coal jobs is setting them up for a lot of disappointed voters in four years in places like West Virginia, Kentucky and Pennsylvania.

5. Trump to expand circle

Friends who talk frequently to Trump tell us the President will make one big change in response to the health-care fiasco: In the constant check-in phone calls for

which he's famous, he's going to talk with a wider array of people -- and include more Democrats (Allen, Axios). Participants say "The Closer" has been having a flurry of "What happened?" conversations which make it clear that he realized far too late how much trouble the bill was in. Why it matters: Between phone calls from his old New York crowd in the residence at night, to the tweets he sends with no vetting or editing, Trump rebels against the filter bubble that surrounds a President. He relishes reaching around the press, and now he's also going to be more intentional about reaching past formal advisers.

6. The Carrier deal

The Indiana Economic Development Corporation signed off on the Carrier deal brokered by President Trump and Vice President Pence, including \$7 million in tax breaks and grants, \$5 million for keeping hundreds of jobs in Indiana, \$1 million for training workers, and another \$1 million if Carrier follows through on plans to invest \$16 million in their local plant. The investment includes plans for automation. Carrier will still cut 500 jobs, while keeping 800 jobs in Indianapolis it had considered shipping to Mexico. Indiana Democratic Chairman John Zody reacted, "Today, IEDC executives approved a deal effectively rewarding Carrier for shipping 550 good-paying jobs to Mexico." ❖

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Resurrected supt bill faces brighter future

By **THOMAS CURRY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Atoning for past sins, the Indiana Senate resurrected the previously failed appointed superintendent bill this week, after its surprise defeat early in session. With a comeback looming, it would be logical to think that Senate leadership has a better understanding of past issues with the bill and how to avoid another surprise. It therefore seems unlikely that lightning would strike twice.



Gov. Eric Holcomb made the appointive position one of his legislative priorities, citing that it would make the position more effective and benefit Hoosier children. Holcomb hoped to have

the position become appointed in 2021 so he could hammer out his education priorities during his second term, but now will be unable to take advantage of the change due to revisions to the bill.

Early in session, state lawmakers quickly got to work on satisfying the new governor's wish, with sister bills popping up in both the Senate and House, HB1005 and SB179. The bills called for the elective position to become appointed in 2021 and left little in the way of requirements or residency rules

In the House, HB1005 sponsored by Speaker Brian Bosma passed easily, even picking up some bipartisan support. When it came time for the Senate to pass SB179, it seemed passage would be little more than a formality, as the Republican-controlled Statehouse was firing on all cylinders. To the shock of Gov. Holcomb and Senate Pro Tempore David Long, the bill fell 26-23, with 19 Republicans voting no and three senators on the elections committee flipping their committee vote from yes to no.

It was a stunning, inexplicable loss. Senate Pro Tem Long was stuck holding the bag, saying that "mistakes were made" and that the bill "was unquestionably defeated." State Sen. Jim Buck, sponsor of SB179 and long-time advocate of the issue, reportedly never even did a head count, rushing the bill to a final passage vote to the surprise of Senate leadership. Sources tell HPI there was little discussion in the Senate caucus prior to the vote, so Buck felt confident. But the vote took place on ISTA Day at the General Assembly, and several of the freshmen senators found themselves in a torrent of advocacy to vote the measure down.

But Sen. Long never ruled out a comeback for the issue, citing that it could return with HB1005 having "substantial differences" from SB179. The Senate rules committee passed the amended HB1005 on Monday, setting up a second try for the issue next week or the week after.

The changes to HB1005 no longer fulfill Gov. Holcomb's wish list, but it does satisfy Senate rules and all but assures the bill will pass. Substantial differences between HB1005 and SB179 include moving the start date to 2025, after Gov. Holcomb's supposed second term, a two-year Indiana residency requirement, and an explicit prior experience requirement in education and administration. All of the requirements were lacking from SB179, which gave the governor a broader ability to select whom he wanted.

With the issue back in play, Buck is confident this time will go better than the last. "I'm not saying it's going to be a landslide bill, but it will definitely pass," said Buck when asked by HPI on HB1005's chances in the Senate. Buck explained the loss by saying, "A lot of the senators who voted no didn't really understand the issue. It's about making the position more effective. Forty-one other states have an appointed superintendent; it bodes better to get it out of politics. A lot of them when it came time to vote didn't understand the totality of the position and how important it is to what we do here at the Statehouse."

Buck continued, "The changes made were some of the very reasons it didn't pass the Senate the first time."

While Gov. Holcomb won't get what he wants, the new head of the Hoosier state is still encouraged by the work being done. Holcomb press secretary Stephanie Wilson told HPI, "The governor is glad to see that making the position appointed by the governor is back in play, and he'll continue working with lawmakers as we approach the end of session to make sure we pass the best possible language."

Senate Democrats, who enjoyed a minor and rare victory when SB179 failed to pass, are left with little recourse when it comes to HB1005. Senate minority leader Tim Lanane has said that he believes the power should stay with the people and that voters make the

right choice. Lanane has also argued that Senate rules say that an issue can't return without substantial changes, and that HB1005 is the same bill at the core as SB179. However, any protest this time will likely prove fruitless with a renewed focus from Statehouse Republicans and a desire for the majority party not to stumble over themselves twice.

State may enforce South Shore pledges

State lawmakers are taking steps to prevent Merrillville, Gary and other Northwest Indiana communities from failing to fulfill their contracts to provide local tax revenue for construction of the South Shore Line's West



State Sen. Jim Buck expects the superintendent bill to pass this time.

Lake expansion (Carden, NWI Times). The Republican-controlled House next week will vote on Senate Bill 128, which now includes a provision requiring the state treasurer to intercept local funds if a municipality or county has not paid its commuter rail obligation to the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority. Under the plan, the RDA would notify Republican State Treasurer Kelly Mitchell when a Region government does not pay all or part of the money it has pledged to help extend the South Shore Line from Hammond to Dyer. Mitchell then would pay the debt using, in order of precedence, a locality's gaming tax revenue, local income tax collections or any other funds belonging to the local government that pass through the state.

The intercept provision was added to the legislation by state Rep. Ed Soliday, R-Valparaiso, after the Merrillville Town Council voted earlier this month to reduce its South Shore contribution to 8 percent of its economic development income tax revenue from 22 percent. The Gary City Council revealed this week that it's eyeing a similar reduction to free up about \$110,000 a year for other purposes. Soliday explained Wednesday to the House Ways and Means Committee that if a community is permitted to unilaterally reduce or cancel its contacted payments, it will be impossible for the RDA to sell bonds for the West Lake project, since there will be no certainty that the money to pay off the debt ever will come in. "We're told by the bonding entities that if we don't have this intercept language ... we either won't be able to sell the bonds, or we'll have to pay a very exorbitant interest rate," Soliday said. The intercept provision was approved 10-0 by the Soliday-led Roads and Transportation Committee, and 21-0 by the Ways and Means Committee.

Holcomb signs 18 bills

Gov. Eric Holcomb signed 18 bills into law on Wednesday, his office announced in a news release (Howey Politics Indiana). These include SEA130 Transfer of Ownership of Motor Vehicles, SEA185 Law Enforcement Training, SEA263 Local Board of Health Appointments, SEA456 War Memorials, HEA1010 Commitment To The DOC For A Level 6 Felony, HEA1019 Controlled Substances, HEA1020 Code Revision Corrections, HEA1023 Public Safety Matters, HEA1039 Right-Of-Way In A Roundabout, HEA1064 Habitual Offender Requirements, HEA1080 Commission On Improving The Status Of Children, HEA1123 Study Of Civil Forfeiture Laws, HEA1189 Crime Reporting Requirement, HEA1245 Notice Of Adoption To Grandparents, HEA1250 Handgun Licenses And Law Enforcement Officers, HEA1268 Traffic Amnesty Program, HEA1335 State Institutions, and HEA1396 Teacher Licensing For

Thomas McDermott Jr. 1 hr · 🌐

Sometime I impress myself with my predictions.

If you guys think Congressman Pete isn't behind this maneuver, you're being naive. It's depressing when our Congressman is working with the Republican SuperMajority to take funds from his constituents.



State may enforce South Shore funding pledges
nwitimes.com

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Military Spouses.

Future Caucus forms

There is a new movement starting in Indiana politics, and it's called "getting along" (Rader, WTHR-TV). A handful of Republicans and Democrats called a press conference Wednesday to announce the creation of the Indiana Future Caucus. It's comprised of Millennials who want to change the status quo in politics. "Right now, the hyper-partisanship in our politics is more extreme than at any time in our history," said Rep. Dan Forestal, D-Indianapolis. "Data has shown us that legislative chambers around our country are more divided and further apart than ever. This presents us with an opportunity." "I

think what Dan said is spot-on about how hyper-partisan our politics have become at the national level, and you can see it start to seep into local and state politics and we need to be encouraging young Hoosiers to get involved in politics. To run for office. To make a difference for our younger generations, but also for the future of our state. That is why our caucus is being formed," added Rep. Dave Ober, R-Noble County. At this point, they may be small in number - seven Republicans and seven Democrats - but they are adding new members and looking to the future.

Judicial selection bill overhauled

Indianapolis voters would elect four of 14 members of a proposed committee to nominate Marion Superior Court judges under a revised bill that eliminates bar group representation on the panel and continues to draw opposition from African-American lawmakers and community members (Stafford, Indiana Lawyer). The Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday overhauled House Bill 1036 and moved it to the full Senate. The amended bill removes four representatives of the proposed Marion County Judicial Selection Committee that had been reserved for members of the Indianapolis Bar Association, Marion County Bar Association, Indiana Trial Lawyers Association and Defense Trial Council of Indiana. Indianapolis Republican Sen. Mike Young's amendment divides Marion County into four districts, each of which would elect a representative to serve on the panel that would recommend candidates to fill judicial vacancies. If the bill is approved, the governor would make appointments to the 36-member bench, and judges would face retention votes. The bill cleared the committee 10-0 despite concerns from members in both parties that it still might not be constitutional.

Black leaders decry judicial selection bill

The Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously passed a House bill Wednesday that would create a committee to select judges in Marion County, a move that was vehemently opposed by black community leaders and legislators who said it would disenfranchise minority voters (Hussein, IndyStar). Black legislative leaders said House Bill 1036 would suppress the vote in largely black and Democratic Marion County and limit diversity on the bench. Faced with vocal opposition of the bill, the Senate committee amended the proposal to include four elected officials on the 14-member committee that would nominate judges. But opponents of the bill said the changes did not go far enough, and if it becomes law, it likely would face a legal challenge. Proposed Marion County judicial selection process could face legal challenge David W Greene, a pastor at Purpose of Life Ministries, told the committee that the bill "takes voter suppression to another level."

Lawmakers aim at infant mortality

Alarmed by the state's still-high infant mortality rate, some Indiana lawmakers want the state to do more to save the lives of babies (Bruce, NWI Times). Indiana has the eighth-highest rate of infant deaths in the nation, with more than seven infant deaths for every 1,000 live births. The state's health department and former governor made saving babies one of Indiana's top priorities in 2013. Still, the rate has edged up since then. Since 2015, the Legislature has allocated more than \$17 million to reducing infant mortality. Much of that money is just now starting to be spent. Some lawmakers say it's not enough. "It has been an issue for the Black Legislative Caucus for several years," said state Rep. Charlie Brown, D-Gary. "We just can't get any traction from the General Assembly for putting serious resources and dollars into tackling this issue." He called all the dead babies in Indiana a "blemish on our record." Brown would like the additional efforts to include expanding education to future parents, addressing the state's food deserts and making sure low-income Hoosiers have health coverage. In Indiana, black infants are more than twice as likely as white babies to die before their first birthdays.

ISTEP replacement advances

The plan to replace Indiana's unpopular ISTEP exam took another step forward Wednesday as the Senate Education Committee finished up

its work for the year (Cavazos, Chalkbeat). The committee killed two bills and passed four, including an amended version of the bill to overhaul the state testing system. The bill passed 7-4, but some lawmakers still weren't happy with the plan — especially because the bill continues to tie teacher evaluations to state test results and removes a requirement for students to take end-of-course exams that many principals and educators had supported. Some of the changes in the amendment came from state Superintendent Jennifer McCormick. Earlier this month, she outlined some of those ideas for the committee, which were similar to ones pushed by former schools chief Glenda Ritz. But that still didn't make it especially popular with the committee.

Cold beer bill advances despite flaws

Despite acknowledging flaws in a bill that could harm other businesses that sell alcohol, a Senate committee pushed through legislation Wednesday to keep cold beer sales only in liquor stores (Lange, IndyStar). The Senate Public Policy Committee voted 8-1 on a bill that would prohibit restaurants within grocery or convenience stores from obtaining a restaurant liquor license. As the bill stands, however, there would be "collateral damage," warned Grant Monahan, president of the Indiana Retail Council. Jeff McKean, an attorney who deals primarily with alcohol permits, said the measure could shut the door on other entities trying to sell cold alcohol, such as golf courses, if 90 percent of their sales are not from nonalcoholic products. He said the state issues more than 1,000 restaurant permits, and a large portion of those would not meet the 90 percent test. "I'm here because it scared the heck out of me," said McKean, who was not lobbying for



any particular group.

Vaping law amended

An Indiana House panel has amended legislation targeting the state's problematic vaping law to reintroduce certain regulations (Associated Press). When it was first sent to the House, Republican state Sen. Randy Head's bill effectively gutted the troubled 2016 law, which created a monopoly and sparked an FBI investigation. A federal appeals court also had struck down much of the law. The House panel's changes address e-liquid labeling, including requiring an identifiable, trackable code and a nicotine warning. The changes also include adding provisions on manufacturer reports, e-liquid flavorings and ingredient lists. The legislative panel voted 12-0 on the bill, sending it to the full House.

New options for failing voucher schools

A Senate panel has approved a bill that has been knocked by critics as reducing accountability for Indiana voucher schools (Costello, Associated Press). Republican state Rep. Robert Behning's bill allows failing private schools to make an appeal to the state school board for a delay in consequences. It also creates a way for private schools to begin accepting voucher students in their first year. He says the appeal gives voucher schools flexibility. Public school supporters argue giving a failing voucher school a reprieve conflicts with the original purpose of the program.

Panel approves solar bill

A House panel has approved a bill that would eliminate much of the financial incentive for installing solar panels in Indiana (Associated Press). Solar energy accounts for less than 1 percent of Indiana's power, but utilities worry it could cut into profits if popularity continues to grow. The bill was approved Wednesday on an 8-to-5 vote and now goes to the House for consideration. It's already been approved by the Senate. Solar panel owners who feed surplus energy to the power grid now are compensated at a retail rate that helps pay off their investments. Republican Sen. Brandt Hershman's bill would significantly reduce that rate in five years, although it would protect current solar panel owners for 30 years.

Tax breaks considered for NBA All-Stars

Lawmakers are working on new tax incentives for the National Basketball Association that would help position the Indiana Pacers to host a future NBA All-Star Game in Indianapolis (Colombo, Indianapolis Business Journal). The Indiana House on Tuesday voted in favor of a bill that would exempt the NBA from all state and local taxes related to property, revenues, expenditures and transactions associated with planning for or holding the All-Star Game and related events. Senate Bill 515 now moves back to the Senate, where lawmakers will consider provisions—including

the NBA language—added by the House. In December, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver told IBJ that he endorses the idea of bringing the event to Indianapolis. And last year, officials from the Pacers, Visit Indy and the Indiana Sports Corp. attended the All-Star Game in Toronto to learn about its operations. Pacers officials have projected that 2021 could be the best year for Indianapolis to host the game, which could result in more than \$60 million in visitor spending and \$100 million in economic impact.

Senate rewrites East Chicago lead bill

A House-approved plan for extensive water and soil testing throughout East Chicago was rewritten Wednesday by a Senate committee to focus testing on the city's water (Carden, NWI Times). House Bill 1344 now would require the Indiana Department of Environmental Management to annually test East Chicago's water supply to confirm it complies with federal lead and copper limits for drinking water. Previously the legislation would have mandated multiple state agencies regularly test for lead and arsenic in soil throughout the city, in addition to annual water testing. State Rep. Earl Harris, Jr., D-East Chicago, said the cost of unlimited citywide soil testing, pegged at \$50 per metal per sample, prompted senators to revise that part of his proposal.

Study approved for Medicaid specialty care

State lawmakers approved a summer study committee Wednesday to review how Indiana Medicaid covers specialty care for Hoosiers with rare disorders (WTHR-TV). The lawmakers are taking action after a 13 Investigates report about a Indiana family fighting for Medicaid to cover specialized care for their son who has a rare disease. Debra and Dan Baker testified before the Senate Health and Provider Services Committee Wednesday to tell lawmakers about their 26-year-old son, Derrian.

Limits for local control over cell towers

Cellphone companies have to follow new local rules regarding where they can place utility poles used to boost cellphone signals, but a bill making its way through the state legislature could take away the ability for local officials to make those decisions (Tellers, Franklin Daily Journal). A bill under consideration by legislators would put in place restrictions statewide similar to those imposed by Johnson County, but would also remove the ability for county officials to make zoning and other decisions about these poles. Johnson County commissioners said the state is overstepping its authority with this legislation. "It has to stay with the local planning and zoning," West said. "All of that stuff has to be coordinated with road improvements and development issues. For the state to take that away from the locals is asinine." ❖

Rating the presidents

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – The votes are in. And the winner is . . . Abraham Lincoln. Once again. Barack Obama finished 12th.

Now, amid surprisingly high interest in an evaluation by historians of our 43 presidents, some national columnists suggest that there is hope ahead for James Buchanan, last on the list. Once again. This recent evaluation by 91 distinguished historians, presidential biographers and other experts in a diverse panel was conducted for C-SPAN.



Why so much attention to a new listing of presidential rankings, not normally a hot topic? It is fueled no doubt by the political divide in America that brings intense interest in and debate over the place Obama will hold in history, and intense interest in and

fears and hopes over the place Donald Trump will hold in history.

There wasn't much if any disagreement over Lincoln winning the top spot, just as he did in the prior C-SPAN survey in 2009. One columnist for Real Clear Politics, however, thought George Washington should have been No. 1. But the latest ranking had Washington second and Franklin D. Roosevelt third. That Lincoln-Washington-Roosevelt trio at the top is becoming standard in historical rankings.

Disagreement came over ranking Obama as 12th best president. Fox News commentators, long critical of Obama, thought the ranking was too high. Fox viewer comments included suggestions that Obama should be listed last and that the top spots should go to Ronald Reagan and Trump. (Last is 43rd because Grover Cleveland was our 22nd and 24th president, with a gap between terms.)

President Trump, just in office, was not listed for evaluation. Assigning a grade to Trump would be premature. Some who questioned the ranking of Obama also thought that was premature. It probably is. Many a president goes up or down significantly from the initial view of the country when leaving office. Harry Truman was in the dumpster in terms of popularity as he left office. With historical perspective, Truman keeps moving up in rankings and is quoted favorably by Republicans as well as Democrats. He was up to sixth place in the latest survey. John F. Kennedy, highly popular and compared to Lincoln as the nation mourned his loss to assassination, is slipping in more recent evaluations, No. 8 in the C-SPAN survey.

A president's ranking is affected by comparison with presidents serving immediately before and after him. Obama's place in history will eventually be evaluated in terms of the circumstances he inherited from George W.

Bush, ranked 33rd but actually up a bit in the C-SPAN evaluations, and with Trump. Obamacare will be one of the measuring sticks. Will it look better or worse in comparison with Trumpcare, the health care under Trump?

While Obama detractors scoff at a rating as high as No. 12, and others say it's too early to rank him, one of the historians in the C-SPAN survey argued that Obama should have been rated even higher because of his high approval rating as he left office.

Columnists also speculate on where Trump will end up eventually as future historians make their evaluations. Steve Chapman of the Chicago Tribune, looking ahead to Trump's effect on the rankings, wrote: "As for other presidents, their fans can take heart from the prospect that they will rate better than Trump in future surveys. There is even hope for James Buchanan."

Gail Collins of the New York Times expressed similar views on whether the hapless Buchanan could escape the traditional dead-last listing: "I cannot tell you how eager Buchanan fans are for the day that Donald Trump gets out of office and into the rankings."

When will that day be? Soon, before completing a first term, Trump detractors suggest. After completing two terms, eight years, his supporters predict. Whenever it is, there will be intense interest again in presidential evaluations, in where Trump is placed initially and whether Obama has slipped or climbed. ❖

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

Absolute power . . .

By RICH JAMES

MERRILLVILLE – One of the most famous political slogans came from Lord Acton way back when. Acton, of British descent, said, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."



I have the feeling those words are emblazoned on the walls of the Republican Senate caucus in the Indiana General Assembly. I think we might be able to say the same about the Hoosier House of Representatives as well. But they don't seem to care.

With Republicans controlling both chambers by wide margins, they apparently think they can do just about anything they want legislatively. Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb seems to have the same train of thought. At issue is the bill to take the office of the superintendent of public instruction out of elective politics and

allow the governor to appoint the secretary of education.

The bill was written by Holcomb. But, much to his surprise, the Senate killed the bill on Feb. 20 on a 26-23 vote. So, that was the end of the grand conspiracy to take over the office of the education superintendent.

So it seemed, anyway. Senate rules prohibit the language of a defeated measure, or any "substantially similar" language, from again being considered for the remainder of the legislative session. But the Senate rule didn't seem to bother President David Long of Fort Wayne, who said changes to the bill were significant enough to allow it to be considered again this session.

The new bill changes the start date from 2021 to 2025 and requires the appointee to have at least two years as an Indiana resident. If Long and fellow Senate Republicans think the change is enough to allow reconsideration of the bill, well ... In essence, it is the very same bill in that it takes authority to name the education chief away from the voters and gives it to the governor.

This power grab ought to enrage Democrats when it comes to mid-term elections in 2018. One would think they will be angered over the Republican move to take the naming of the education chief away from the voters. But Indiana Democrats are a hurting bunch. One would have thought Democrats last year would have reelected Glenda Ritz as superintendent of public instruction.

After all, Democrats have been enraged over the weakening of teacher unions by Republicans. They also are upset about Republican moves to shift considerable amounts of public dollars from public to charter schools. But none of that apparently was enough to get Ritz reelected. Apparently you sometimes can get away with absolute power corrupting absolutely. ❖

Rich James has been writing about state and local government and politics for more than 30 years. He is a columnist for The Times of Northwest Indiana.

Indiana escapes growth turmoil

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Last week the U.S. Bureau of the Census released its 2016 population estimates for Indiana counties. I sat down with Languid Longworth, a local legend in Logansport, to review the new numbers.

"Fundamentally, I'm most pleased with the data," Lang told me. "Cass County is like much of Indiana, avoiding the disruption of population growth."



"Right," I said. "In all, Cass County lost over 1,000 residents since 2010. It was ninth among the 58 population-losing counties in the state."

"Now, now," he said. "Let's not talk about losing. I figure that means at least 500 cars not on our roads. Lines are shorter at the grocery stores and most places. Schools

have fewer students which means each one can get more attention. You've got to think about the blessings that come with slow contraction."

"That's a new argument to me," I said.

"Look," Lang insisted, "we don't have to face the problems of Hamilton County where they've had to build houses, stores, new streets and schools for 40,000 more people in this decade. In contrast, Cass' population has eased by about four persons every 10 days."

"Sure," I said, "but look at how it happened. Just last year, over 300 more people left Cass County for some-

place else in the U.S. than came here to live. If it were not for over 100 people coming from outside the U.S. to Cass County, plus the happy fact that you had more births than deaths, your population loss would have been still greater."

"You make it sound like folks are rejecting life in Cass County," he said. "Not so. Youngsters go to college or somewhere else for a job, while the older folks who have the money head out for Florida or Arizona. I say, 'God bless 'em, and God speed.'"

"Indiana," I replied, "had 81,000 more people leaving than came to live here so far in this decade. Our state has slipped from the 15th most populous to 17th in just six years, falling behind Tennessee and Arizona. On top of that, 85 percent of the population growth of Indiana was concentrated in just five counties (Hamilton, Marion, Tippecanoe, Hendricks and Allen)."

"Don't you see," Lang protested, "this is a free country. People who want to crowd together with other people can do so, and those of us who want elbow room can enjoy that as well."

"Yes, it's a free country," I agreed, "but those areas losing population are getting poorer with a declining quality of life. The growing areas are getting wealthier with an improving quality of life."

Lang raised his voice, "That's your opinion. Your idea of a quality life is different from mine."

"Then why do children and people with money leave these hospice counties?" I demanded. "Why is drug use so high in these 'desirable' places?"

We glared at each other for a few moments and then got down to talking basketball. ❖

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

Tim Ethridge, Evansville Courier & Press: Ten days before Donald Trump's presidential inauguration, I was invited by the League of Women Voters of Southwestern Indiana to talk with them, at their March meeting, about "fake news." In early January, "fake news" seemed pretty simple: Stories that someone made up, posted on a purchased but official-sounding website, and then collected advertising money and created havoc nationwide with thousands of views. That seemed a blatant example of "fake news," again a term you hate to use. If it's news, it isn't fake. If it's fake, it isn't news. Yet from that beginning, and since the likely efforts by Russia to influence our election by planting stories of its own, "fake news" has become a political statement. If a politician, from a local party chief to the president of the United States, does not like or agree with a story, they brand it as "fake." Thus the conversation was launched over lunch on March 23 at McCollough Library on Evansville's East Side. The room was surprisingly, and somewhat frighteningly, full, with around 75 residents and readers eager to listen and, more importantly, share their thoughts. That always helps when you're far from the smartest person in the room, and when you write -- not talk -- for a living. I think it's important to note that, while opinionated, this group of mostly older Americans was not influenced by some outside operator. No matter what a few of our state and national legislators might say, they were speaking from their hearts and minds, not from a script. They're concerned with what appears to be an effort to squelch speech, whether it's Donald Trump declining to speak with news outlets that don't paint him with a flattering light to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson ending the decades-long practice of traveling with the media. They're worried that the dissent sown by false reports will further shatter relationships and splinter our nation and community. They cherish news reporters who shine light in dark corners, and columnists who explain why they believe some governmental actions aren't in our collective best interests. ❖



Patrick Buchanan, Real Clear Politics: Did the Freedom Caucus just pull the Republican Party back off the ledge, before it jumped to its death? A case can be made for that. Before the American Health Care Act, aka "Ryan care," was pulled off the House floor Friday, it enjoyed the support -- of 17 percent of Americans. Had it passed, it faced an Antietam in the GOP Senate, and probable defeat. Had it survived there, to be signed by President Trump, it would have meant 14 million Americans losing their health insurance in 2018. First among the losers would have been white working-class folks who delivered the Rust Belt states to President Trump. "Victory has a thousand fathers; defeat is an orphan," said JFK. So, who are the losers here? First and foremost, Speaker Paul Ryan and House Republicans who, having voted 50 times over

seven years to repeal Obamacare, we learned, had no consensus plan ready to replace it. Moreover, they put a bill on the floor many had not read, and for which they did not have the votes. More than a defeat, this was a humiliation. For the foreseeable future, a Republican Congress and president will coexist with a health care regime that both loathe but cannot together repeal and replace. Moreover, this defeat suggests that, given the ideological divide in the GOP, and the unanimous opposition of congressional Democrats, the most impressive GOP majorities since the 1920s may be impotent to enact any major complicated or complex legislation. ❖

Rich Lowry, Politico: Trumpism is in crisis. This isn't a function of poll numbers, or the Russia controversy, or any other melodrama of the past three months, but something more fundamental: No officeholder in Washington seems to understand President Donald Trump's populism or have a cogent theory of how to effect it in practice, including the president himself. House Speaker Paul Ryan isn't a populist and doesn't want to be a populist. He has spent his adult life committed to a traditional limited-government agenda. He crafted his own platform during the campaign, the so-called Better Way agenda, to differentiate congressional Republicans from Trump. Trump, for his part, has lacked the knowledge, focus or interest to translate his populism into legislative form. He deferred to others on legislative priorities and strategies at the outset of his administration, and his abiding passion in the health-care debate was, by all accounts, simply getting to a signing ceremony. In light of all this, the product of the Ryan-Trump partnership on health care was a bill bizarrely at odds with a national election Republicans had just won on the strength of working-class voters. Under the GOP replacement, fewer people would have had coverage, and workers further down the income scale would have been particularly hard hit. For whatever reason, neither of these facts seemed to exercise the White House, at least not enough to try to do anything to fix them. Maybe Ryan doesn't "get" the new political reality created by Trump's victory, as the president's boosters like to say. But what excuse does the president himself have for evidently not "getting" it, either? ❖

Russell Berman, The Atlantic: "In a way I'm glad I got it out of the way," President Trump told the Washington Post last week in the moments after he and Republican leaders in Congress pulled the plug on their first major legislative priority, repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act. Health care was hard. Really hard. "Nobody knew that health care could be so complicated," the president had said in a now-infamous quote. The health-care legislation was pulled without a vote last week after House Speaker Paul Ryan told the president there were not enough votes from Republicans to pass it. ❖

Senate will conduct Russia probe

WASHINGTON — Senators leading the investigation into Russian interference in the November election pledged on Wednesday to conduct an aggressive inquiry, including an examination of any ties to President Trump, as they sought to distance themselves from the flagging efforts in the House (New York Times). In a conspicuous show of bipartisanship during a fractious time at the Capitol, the top Republican and Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee vowed to forge ahead by interviewing key players connected to Mr. Trump and pressing intelligence agencies to provide all relevant information.



East Chicagoans must move Friday

EAST CHICAGO — Friday, March 31 is the last day for families in East Chicago's lead-contaminated public housing complex to move or be moved — and despite strenuous opposition from residents and lawyers, officials say they have to enforce that deadline (Ropeik, Indiana Public Media). Attorney Emily Coffey of the Shriver Center on Poverty Law calls the prospect "devastating." She's encouraging Daniels and other residents to file grievances with the city over their temporary housing assignments. Coffey says the city shouldn't be forcing the moves with so many families still living in the complex — at least 60 at last count.

Hoosier Sikhs face harassment

INDIANAPOLIS — Sikhs in Indiana say they're being intimidated and harassed at an alarming rate in recent months, but they don't believe they're the intended target (Cox, WRTV). Many members of the com-

munity believe that the "attacks" that have been directed at them stem from a misunderstanding of who they are and the misinterpretation that being a Sikh is the same as being a Muslim. And those attitudes come from the heightened fear of Muslims across the country. Grunder Singh started the Sikh Political Action Committee to represent the 10,000 Sikhs who live in the state of Indiana. He said in recent weeks they have had multiple instances of vandalism against businesses and even a confrontation involving a handgun. Grunder said intimidation and violence against the Sikh community has been on the uptick since September 11 across the country.

Carson skeptical of Trump

WASHINGTON — Rep. Andre Carson (D-Ind.) sees room to work with Trump not only on infrastructure, but on criminal justice reform as well (Barron-Lopez, Huffington Post). But if GOP lobbyists and administration officials think they can slice away votes by circumventing Pelosi and going through the Black Caucus, it's "wishful thinking," Carson told The Huffington Post. "I think the CBC is willing to talk to the administration, but in terms of siphoning off votes in some conspiratorial way, I don't think so," Carson said.

Trump signs Donnelly vet bill

WASHINGTON — Bipartisan legislation authored by U.S. Sens. Joe Donnelly, D-Indiana, and Pat Toomey, R-Pennsylvania, permanently designating March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day was signed into law Tuesday by President Donald Trump (Kokomo Tribune). The Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act represents the first federal statute that specifically provides for the honoring of Vietnam War veterans, according to a press release from Donnelly's office.

"With this bipartisan bill signed into law, we can finally give our Vietnam veterans the additional recognition they deserve," said Donnelly in the release. The Vietnam Veterans Recognition Act was supported by the Vietnam Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Affairs. Effectively, the legislation permanently designates March 29 annually as National Vietnam War Veterans Day. On March 29, 1973, the last combat troops were ordered out of Vietnam.

Trump, GOP face shutdown threat

WASHINGTON — Congressional Republicans are working aggressively to craft an agreement intended to keep the government open past April 28, but their bid to avert a shutdown hinges on courting Democrats wary of President Trump and skirting the wrath of hard-line conservatives and Trump himself (Washington Post). The murky path forward on government funding sparked unease Wednesday within the business community and at the Capitol, where Republicans speculated that Trump's request for money to build a wall along the border with Mexico and \$30 billion in new defense spending may need to be delayed to avoid a shutdown. Several Republicans said Wednesday that there is little appetite within their ranks to engage in a protracted showdown over Trump's call to begin funding a border wall in the near-term spending bill, which Democrats and some conservative Republicans oppose. And they said Trump's wishes would gravely threaten any deal. "It would blow up the great opportunity," said Sen. Roy Blunt. "I'm convinced."

Fed judge extends travel ban order

HONOLULU — A federal judge in Hawaii who temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's revised travel ban hours before it was set to take effect issued a longer-lasting order Wednesday.