

Trump impacts on GOP Senate race

Messer kicks off campaign as meltdown in Charlottesville grips White House, nation

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

MORRISTOWN – Some 800 people gathered on a bucolic, peaceful Indiana farm near here Saturday afternoon as U.S. Rep. Luke Messer officially kicked off his U.S. Senate campaign. Some 600 miles away, the scene couldn't have been more different. Charlottesville, Va., was the scene of an alt right rally that lurched into violence with counter

protesters, with a white supremacist from Ohio driving his car into a crowd, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring 19 others. By late that afternoon, President Trump landed squarely into the contro-



U.S. Rep. Luke Messer kicks off his Senate bid Saturday in Morrystown. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

versy, blaming people "from both sides" for the violence. As Trump thrust himself into Hoosier politics in

Continued on page 3



Ambien on Pacific rim

By **CHRISTINA HALE**

INDIANAPOLIS – Several years ago I was attending a meeting of Asia-Pacific community leaders in Melaka, Malaysia. People had gathered there from all over the region, including South Korea and Guam, but also Taiwan, and even Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Australia, Tahiti and a number of other countries.

Together, we witnessed the reporting on the tsunami that hit Japan, including the terrifying images of coastal cities completely devastated, homes, personal property and loved ones sucked out to sea, never to be heard from again. And if that was not enough, the struggle of the nuclear meltdown of Fukushima, all while our friends and colleagues from Japan could



“I’ve been watching the race between Todd and Luke and wondering if that’s going to carry through or not.”

- Former Wabash College dean of students David Hadley, on the school’s motto “competition without malice.”



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only watch the reports with us, unable to communicate with family back home.

The kinship that these people from all over the region felt for one another was palpable and as heart-warming as it could be under the circumstances and uncertainty. People understood that they all faced that common enemy, Mother Nature, and that she could wreak havoc any place, any time, and that many of these nations were particularly vulnerable.

Today, there may be a run on Ambien in the Pacific Rim. This escalation of rhetoric and posturing regarding North Korean aggression is unprecedented, and our regional military exposure is more vulnerable than in the past 30 or more years. President Trump's toughguy talk to Pyongyang sounds awfully similar to his colleague from the Philippines, President Duterte, and what the Asia Times describes as his "shock and awe diplomacy."

The people of Japan, of Guam, of Taiwan, of South Korea all have been watching the balance of power shift for decades now as the U.S. has somewhat disinvested from our commitments to patrol the South China Sea, and as the People's Republic has controversially begun to fill that vacuum by building up atolls with operative military bases of their own.

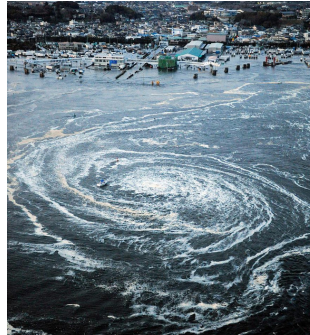
Still, it seemed so far to be in everyone's regional economic best interest to rebuild a high tech, beyond-modern silk road for the next smarter, more efficient version of global trade. It is just so rational and smart. China is very assertive and enthusiastic in their preparations to hyper-invest and double down on its drive to super-power status and global economic dominance.

In fact, just last year Chinese economists claimed at the ASAE Great Ideas conference in Hong Kong that they were not at all concerned about trade deals and the markets to the West as they were developing

such a strong regional consumer class.

That is, until and unless something crazy happens. We can't control Mother Nature, but we can regain significant control over preventable drama and the rhetoric of escalation that could lead toward massive civilian and military casualties in Asia.

It was beyond disconcerting to see Indianapolis news channel WRTV-6 post a story about how to prepare yourself and your family for nuclear attack. It gave me flashbacks to the 1980's when we still had drills in elementary school preparing us for the big one by hiding under desks with textbooks to shield our brains. It



was beyond disconcerting to take my son's call from California this week asking how we should plan to reunite if and when something awful happens on a scale that the United States has not yet seen.

Not many people are sleeping well in the Pacific Rim these days.

Our president and his administration need to calm themselves and signal to their supporters and the world that now is the time for diplomacy.

Tim Swarens of the IndyStar noted that a Central Indiana pastor he follows recently took to Twitter to proclaim: "N Korea can't say they were not warned. One misstep, and we're going to light them up! Thank you, @POTUS." He went on to note that President Trump's own evangelical advisor Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Dallas, said that "God is OK with bombing North Korea."

Perhaps God will be OK with it, but will we? Time will tell. Yet I am sure that my friends in the region have a clear idea how much is at stake for everyone in the region, and I am sure that they are yearning for increased leadership from the United States. We all need to sleep better at night. ❖

Hale is CEO of Leadership Indy and the 2016 Democratic lieutenant governor nominee.

Senate race, from page 1

2016, ultimately aligning with Gov. Mike Pence and their emphatic Election Day wave pulling Eric Holcomb and Todd Young into office, to think that a similar impact isn't in store for the 2018 Senate race is to embrace naivety.

Trump's Saturday statement was in contrast to four tweets by Messer and U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita, who are now engaged in the second member v. member Republican Senate primary in the past two cycles. "We cannot allow hate and bitterness to prevail. #Charlottesville," Messer said. "On a day where we enjoyed the love and friendship of so many in Morristown, it is hard to fathom the scene in #Charlottesville."

"I condemn racism, bigotry," Messer told the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette. "I condemn neo-Nazism and white supremacy. It's un-American. It ought to be denounced. Much of this I think is another example of President Trump not being treated all that fairly in the media. I saw his first comments. It seemed to me like he condemned the atrocities that happened in Charlottesville."

Rokita also addressed the issue on Twitter: "Those engaging in violence should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Our prayers are with those affected by this tragedy. All Americans should come together to condemn the type of violence and hatred we've seen in Charlottesville, VA today."

Kickoff contrast

The Messer and Rokita campaign kickoffs couldn't have been more different. Rokita gathered a couple of dozen supporters on the south steps of the Statehouse just below his former secretary of state office, with signs declaring "Defeat the Elite." It was a Trumpian, populist message as Rokita was persistently sought to affiliate with the president's brand. Messer used his annual barbecue to take aim at U.S. Sen. Joe Donnelly and make his case on behalf of the Trump agenda. "I'm convinced I'm the right person to unite our party and then defeat Joe Donnelly and work with President Trump to pass an agenda that most Hoosiers support," he told HPI. Greg Pence, Vice President Mike Pence's brother, lent Messer the Trump/Pence imprimatur, and a number of red "Make America Great Again" baseball hats speckled the crowd.

On Monday, President Trump was talked into a

more specific condemnation by top aides, saying, "Racism is evil. Those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists and other hate groups that are repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans. We are a nation founded on the truth that all of us are created equal."

AP reporter Jonathan Lemire gave a behind-the-scenes view: "Loath to appear to be admitting a mistake, Trump was reluctant to adjust his remarks. ... He ... expressed anger to those close to him about what he perceived as the media's unfair assessment of his remarks, believing he had effectively denounced all forms of big-

otry. Several of Trump's senior advisers, including new chief of staff John Kelly, ... urged him to make a more specific condemnation, warning that the negative story would not go away and that the rising tide of criticism from fellow Republicans on Capitol Hill could endanger his legislative agenda."

By Tuesday, in a surreal and combative press conference, Trump reverted back to his initial Saturday instincts. "There is blame on both sides, and I have no doubt about it," Mr. Trump said of the confrontation between white nationalist protesters holding a demonstration in the city and the counterprotesters facing off against them. "You had a group on one side that was bad and you had a group on the other side that was also very violent and nobody wants to say that but I'll say it right now," he said, adding that there were "very fine people, on both sides. "You had many people in that group other than neo-Nazis and white nationalists, okay? And the press has treated them absolutely unfairly."

Trump also waded into the root cause for the Saturday rally in Virginia, the proposed removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. He suggested that Presidents George

Washington and Thomas Jefferson, both Founding Fathers and slaveholders, might face the same fate. "You're changing history," Trump said. "You're changing culture."

Former KKK grand dragon David Duke thanked Trump for his "honesty & courage" in a tweet. Duke attended the Charlottesville rally and told reporters, "We're going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump, and that's what we believed in, that's why we voted for Donald Trump, because he said he's going to take our country back and that's what we gotta do."

Asked about the Tuesday press conference and Messer's reaction, spokesman Jason Kneeland told HPI, "He finds the activity and KKK and people motivated by



President Trump goes off on tangents Tuesday as Chief of Staff John Kelly and shocked staff look on.



U.S. Rep. Luke Messer with wife Jennifer and children as his finance director Greg Pence introduces the couple. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

bitterness and bigotry and you can't find the words to condemn them strongly enough. I don't think they have a home in American politics. The bottom line for us is, we're going to interview for U.S. senate and that's what we're going to focus on."

Dangerous territory

But this is dangerous territory for any 2018 campaign seeking to align with Trump/Pence, the latter of whom addressed the Indianapolis Ten Point Coalition last Friday where the vice president portrayed Trump as a champion of the inner cities. With the Trump winks and dog whistles, the alt right backed by media such as Breitbart News is encroaching into the American body politic. Last weekend, it was Charlottesville and this weekend, they gather in Boston.

Axios's Mike Allen explained, "Let's be honest with ourselves: A huge chunk of Trump's base lapped it up, too. That's what Steve Bannon thought would unfold, and what the president knows instinctively. It was a green light for more hatred, and probably more violence — because now the president has put white supremacy on the same level as angry people reacting harshly to it."

Allen adds: "A veteran of several Republican White Houses told me: 'His imprecise and inarticulate speech worked in the campaign. It isn't working as president. It didn't matter until today. Now, it really matters.' It puts Trump's tortured staff in a bigger jam: How do they look their African American friends in the eye, and rationalize their support of Trump?"

Wall Street Journal columnist Holman Jenkins Jr. observed on Wednesday, "If the president or a scraggly someone close to him in the West Wing is soft on white supremacists because he thinks these groups are a vital bloc, this would be the miscalculation of the century. Their adherents couldn't swing a race for dogcatcher."

The Weekly Standard editorial board wrote on Wednesday: "So a sitting U.S. president couldn't condemn neo-Nazi agitators until prodded into it, and even then couldn't do it without circling back to claim falsely that some of the agitators were 'very fine people' who wanted only to protest 'very quietly.' There may be other points to make about this embarrassing episode, but they are secondary and simply cannot be made with any moral force until you acknowledge the primary one: Irrespective of anything else, Donald Trump's behavior since Saturday has been a disgrace."

And the generally supportive Wall Street Journal editorial board observed of CEOs resigning from Trump's manufacturing council: "Their decision to quit now in such public fashion shows the growing political and cultural pressure that CEOs and others in public life are under to distance themselves from Mr. Trump. The disdain for the president in the media and Hollywood isn't surprising, and Mr. Trump wears it like a badge of honor. But the business community is, or ought to be, a natural part of a Republican President's governing coalition. As if to prove this point, Mr. Trump lashed out at Merck's Mr. Frazier on Twitter Monday with what amounted to a political threat: "@Merck Pharma is a leader in higher & higher drug prices while at the same time taking jobs out of the U.S."

Bring jobs back & LOWER PRICES!" This display of pique does nothing but make others less likely to get anywhere close to Mr. Trump's orbit. But then we repeat ourselves. Mr. Trump's ego won't allow him to concede error and he broods over criticism until he ends up hurting himself, as he showed again Tuesday by relitigating his response to the Charlottesville violence. This is how he has achieved a 34% approval rating, as even allies flee and his Presidency shrinks in on itself."

Messer's kickoff

Messer introduced his family at a rally and spent the crux of his speech aiming at Donnelly. "Hoosiers deserve a senator who will look out for them, not just talk like a Hoosier back home, then vote with the liberals in Washington," Messer said. "We're proud of Todd Young, the Marine we sent to the Senate, but too often, on the most important issues, Joe Donnelly votes the other way and cancels him out. Hoosiers need two senators who will vote yes for Hoosier families."

In 2016, Young defeated U.S. Rep. Marlin Stutzman in an intense, sometimes bitter primary battle, then we on to defeat former senator Evan Bayh last November. Rokita and Messer have already engaged in a bitter rivalry, with the latter accusing the former of targeting his wife, Jennifer, for the amount of money she makes as an attorney for the city of Fishers.

Jennifer Messer was introduced by Greg Pence. "Luke lives his faith and his Hoosier values," she said in introducing her husband, noting that he coaches his kids' basketball and football teams. "When you want a leader, Luke does things the right way."

Of Rokita's criticism is that the Messer family has moved to the Washington, D.C., area, Messer said he would concentrate on his own message. "From my perspective our campaign started today," told HPI. "We're going to paint a positive vision of how Hoosiers can come together and get things done. It's a primary to start and I'll make that case to Hoosier Republicans. We're going to tell the story."

Messer said he and his family took time to make their decision, saying it was the rejection of the Obamacare repeal/replace in the Senate that finalized his candidacy. "It was a factor in the decision," Messer said. "I'm convinced I'm the right person to unite our party and then defeat Joe Donnelly and work with President Trump to pass an agenda that most Hoosiers support."

"The truth is, Joe Donnelly is part of the liberal status quo crowd," Messer said. "He's not helping President Trump and he voted for most of the Obama agenda, including Obamacare. Indiana needs a U.S. senator who votes with Hoosiers 100% of of the time. Elizabeth Warren is going to help Joe Donnelly. Chuck Schumer is going to help Joe Donnelly. Barack Obama is raising money to help Joe Donnelly. The national media is going to help Joe Don-

nelly, too.

"We're going to work hard as a family to earn Hoosier trust," Messer said. "We're not worried about who enters or who doesn't enter the race. We're confident when we take our positive message to Hoosiers, a message rooted in conservative principles, Hoosiers really want some fairly simple things. They want to see less government, a strong America and they want leaders who work hard to build that American promise and get away from these stagnant wages."

Messer joins Rokita, Kokomo attorney Mark Hurt, Atlanta businessman Terry Henderson and New Albany educator Andrew Takami in the race. Attorney General



Rep. Todd Rokita hugs Ivy Tech President Sue Ellspermann as Rep. Luke Messer looks on during the governor portrait unveiling of Mike Pence last Friday at the Statehouse. (HPI Photo by Mark Curry)

Curtis Hill hinted he may enter, telling the press last week to "stay tuned."

Rokita campaign consultant Tim Edison reacted to Messer's entry, saying, "Today Luke Messer officially kicks off his campaign for Senate. The Messer campaign will be about trying to fool Trump supporters and grassroots conservatives into believing Luke Messer is one of them. He's not. In fact, there are few who more personify squishy Republican elitism than Luke Messer, both in Washington and Indiana."

The 'nastiest GOP Senate primary'

The slugfest underway between Republican Reps. Luke Messer and Todd Rokita in Indiana isn't just for the right to compete for possibly the GOP's best opportunity to seize a Senate seat from Democrats in next year's midterms (Politico). It's a chance to finally settle the score between two ambitious pols who've been vying to outdo one another politically since they graduated from the same small college more than 25 years ago. Yes, this one is personal. Their campaign didn't officially get underway until last week, but Messer, 48, has already accused Rokita of attacking his wife and "spreading lies" about his record. Rokita, 47, has questioned his rival's mental health, calling Messer "unhinged" and a "ticking time

bomb.”

With 10 Democratic senators from states that President Donald Trump carried up for reelection in 2018, the scale of opportunity for Republican gains has already spawned several no-holds-barred primaries. But few states are as ripe for a Republican challenge as Indiana — where Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly is unusually vulnerable, running in a state Trump carried by 19 points — and no primary has gotten so nasty, so quickly. More than a dozen professional colleagues and personal acquaintances painted the hostility between Rokita and Messer as the product of three decades of pent-up rivalry. The two men, who both declined interview requests, have climbed Indiana’s political ladder alongside each other for years and even attended the same small, all-male Wabash College together in the early 1990s — a school whose unofficial motto, a former dean noted with a touch of irony, is “competition without malice.”

“I’ve been watching the race between Todd and Luke,” said David Hadley, the former dean of students at Wabash College, “and wondering if that’s going to carry through or not.” Over the years, Messer has enjoyed the full embrace of Indiana’s political elite, which appointed him to a seat in the state Legislature and embraced him as part of its leadership. That same elite has always kept Rokita at bay. “Todd has a sense that ‘Messer gets all the breaks and I don’t,’” said one GOP operative. “Now they’re

placed in a zero-sum game, and their underlying feelings come out.”

Sen. Long endorses Messer

Senate President David Long endorsed Messer for the U.S. Senate nomination on Thursday. “I have known Luke Messer for many years. As a young and talented member of the Indiana House, Luke proved his conservative credentials early on by helping us create a new vision for Indiana in partnership with Gov. Mitch Daniels,” Long said. “As a strong and innovative leader for educational choice, Luke fought to ensure Hoosier families and children have the options they need to obtain a world-class education. As a quickly-rising star in the US Congress, Luke has proven he can work with difficult coalitions of interests to move an agenda for the American people. And Luke is a great father and husband. Throughout it all, Luke and I have forged a strong bond of friendship and mutual respect that I personally value greatly. I believe Luke to be the absolute best person to effectively represent the interests of all Hoosiers in the U.S. Senate.”

Braun targets Messer, Rokita

State Rep. Mike Braun called on Messer and Rokita to sign the discharge petition in the House that forces a vote on repeal of ObamaCare. “If Congressmen Messer and Rokita want to repeal ObamaCare, then they should

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sign the discharge petition to repeal ObamaCare and force a vote on the House floor," said Braun. "It's not good enough to just talk about repeal. The people of Indiana want a full repeal of Obamacare and every Republican in Congress needs to sign the petition forcing leadership to bring this bill up for a vote. Congressman Messer and Rokita voted for the same legislation before, so why not do everything possible to get something done? Congressmen do a lot of talking about repeal in Washington. When I'm in the Senate, I'll take action and keep pushing for the full repeal of Obamacare," concluded Braun.

Messer: Donnelly 'doesn't stand a chance'

Messer said Tuesday that Joe Donnelly "doesn't stand a chance" if the two face off in the 2018 general election (Francisco, Fort Wayne Journal Gazette). "Joe Donnelly will have the support of every powerful institution on the East Coast and every Hollywood liberal on the West Coast. But I will have you and Hoosiers just like you. He doesn't stand a chance," Messer told about a dozen local Republicans and several journalists. But A Morning Consult survey of almost 1,200 registered GOP voters in Indiana showed Donnelly is one of the most popular Senate Democrats in the country among voters of the opposing party, with 55% of Republicans in the state approving of him. .

Donnelly bus tour next week

Donnelly is expected to begin a six-day statewide bus tour at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Speedway VFW. He will then officially kick off his campaign at 10 a.m. Monday in Anderson at UAW Local 1963, before heading to Muncie, Winchester and Fort Wayne. The tour will end at the Indiana Democratic Editorial Association convention in French Lick on Friday.

Majority Forward ads for Donnelly

More media spending is pouring into the Indiana U.S. Senate race. Majority Forward is advertising on behalf of Donnelly, urging him to protect Medicare. Donnelly campaign manager Peter Hanscom told HPI that just over \$250,000 has been spent on Indianapolis broadcast and about \$75,000 on cable.

Donnelly reacts to CBO report on ACA

Sen. Donnelly reacted to a Congressional Budget Office report that predicted a 20% rise in insurance premiums if the Obamacare subsidies are not maintained. "Today's non-partisan CBO report confirms again that ending CSR payments would raise premiums and increase the deficit," Donnelly said. "As I've said before, this is about the health and financial-well beings of millions of Hoosiers and Americans. It is critical the Administration not harm our families or take further actions to undermine our health care system. I continue to stand ready to work with my colleagues to stabilize the markets and make health care more affordable." Donnelly recently wrote a letter to

Seema Verma, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), urging the administration to make a public commitment to continue cost sharing reduction payments (CSR), which lower consumers' deductibles and co-pays. Donnelly previously partnered with Verma to establish Indiana's bipartisan HIP 2.0 program through the health care law.

Congress

2nd CD: Arnold out, Hall may enter

With the decision of State Sen. Jim Arnold (D-LaPorte) not to seek the 2nd CD, reliable sources tell HPI say that another potentially contender has emerged who is "seriously considering" a run against Rep. Jackie Walorski, former South Bend businessman Mel Hall. Hall is best known for having grown a small, upstart South Bend firm – Press Ganey – that surveyed patient and employee satisfaction at hospitals, into a national powerhouse that ultimately claimed half the 5,000 hospitals in the country as clients. In 2014, Hall (pictured) moved to Nashville Tennessee to serve as CEO of Specialty Care, a provider of various clinical services, with over 1,800 employees under his supervision. The prospect of a Democratic expert on health care issues matching up against an ardent supporter of ACA repeal will likely excite Democrats who are hungry for a credible candidate to face Walorski. Hall is expected to make a final decision about a candidacy



early in September. Sources tell HPI that Hall has the capability and willingness to invest significant personal funds into making a credible run against the three-term Congresswoman. Hall obtained his B.A. in History and Political Science from Taylor University in Upland, Indiana and received his Ph.D. in research methods and sociology from the University of Notre Dame."

9th CD: Canon gets endorsement

Civil rights attorney Dan Canon announced his endorsement by Our Revolution Indy. This is the group's first and only endorsement since Bernie Sanders' campaign last year. "Our Revolution Indy is proud to endorse Dan Canon for U.S. Representative from Indiana's 9th Congressional District," Our Revolution Indy Chairman John Luta announced. "Dan will stand up in Congress and fight for the interests of regular, everyday Hoosiers. Not for the interests of big business and the 1%." Canon said, "Bernie provided a direction forward for Americans, and Our Revolution Indy has continued to fight for that progress across Indiana. We look forward to working with Our Revolution Indy to engage people across the political spectrum." ❖

Messer kicks off with a message on ‘quitting’

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

MORRISTOWN – All good campaigns begin with the candidate’s story and U.S. Rep. Luke Messer dovetailed what happened in the U.S. Senate this summer with one of his personal upbringing.

Speaking Saturday near Morristown, the 48-year-old Messer said, “It’s time for some straight talk. The United States Senate, just a couple weeks ago, quit on us.



It is not OK to promise for seven years you will repeal Obamacare and replace it with it something better, and then just work on a few days, fail, shrug and walk away. My mother taught me I’m not allowed to quit and I will

never quit on you.”

Then came his story: He was raised in Greensburg by a single mom who worked at the Delta Faucet plant. At age eight, he joined the school football team and then came the first practice.

“You’ve got to picture this with me: I’m ready for my first practice and unfortunately, my pants didn’t fit,” Messer began. “So my Mom, not knowing a lot about football pads, put the pads in my jeans and off we went to my first practice. My coaches didn’t have any sensitivity training either and they were giggling at me. Fifty kids, age seven to nine, running around these three baseball diamonds, and me running last with my pads falling out.

“My mom was sitting on the bleachers and one of the kids came by and said, ‘Mrs. Messer, Luke’s back there crying and he says he’s quittin.’” Last of the pack came me and I was cryin’ and I said I was quitting, but my mother said, ‘No.’” Messer concluded the story: “She didn’t know much about football pads but she knew this: Quitters never win, and winners never quit and her son wasn’t going to be a quitter.”

Messer talked about his sixth generation family, with roots running from Connersville to Evansville to LaPorte County, and a disappearing America, where people can no long guarantee their children would do better than they. “We can’t sit back and accept the drift of the new normal and that American is part of our past,” he said.

“We need two senators who will vote yes for Indiana’s working families,” Messer said. “Joe Donnelly isn’t supporting President Trump and he voted for most of the Obama agenda, including Obamacare. Joe stood silent as President Obama issued regulation after regulation that has weakened America. And he endorsed and supported

the Iran nuclear deal, which not only hurts America, but one of our most important allies, Israel. That’s not good enough. Hoosiers deserve a senator who will vote for Indiana 100% of the time.”

Following his kickoff speech, Messer conducted this HPI Interview:

HPI: Tell me about how you came to the final decision to seek the Republican Senate nomination?

Messer: We approached this prayerfully and even up until the final couple of weeks, we were weighing all the options, trying to determine whether this was the right decision for our state and our family. Ultimately we came to the conclusion, after watching the Senate flounder over the past couple of weeks, that we needed to step forward for this big hard job. I mentioned in my speech, I’m an Indiana Republican, I’ve been a big part of our leadership team over the past 15 years. As an Indiana Republican, things have been a little different. We’ve come together, we’ve stood on principle, and we’ve gotten things done. That’s what we need to do in the United States Senate. It’s not OK to shrug your shoulders and quit, after most Republicans promised they would repeal Obamacare and replace it with something better. As I talked about today and my Mom, I’m not allowed to quit. I won’t quit on Indi-



ana.

HPI: Great story about your Mom. So if the health reforms had passed the Senate, might you have passed on this race?

Messer: It was a factor in the decision. Ultimately I had a reporter from my hometown of Greensburg the other day ask, “Was it about the party that Joe Donnelly’s from?” I said, “Actually, no. Joe Donnelly votes the way Joe Donnelly votes. Joe’s a nice guy. I like him. But he votes with the liberals in Washington most of the time. He votes with Elizabeth Warren 85% of the time. I promise you I will not vote with Elizabeth Warren 85% of the time.

There is a very big difference in having someone with a different philosophy in that Senate seat and I'm convinced I'm the right person to unite our party and defeat Joe Donnelly and then work with President Trump to pass an agenda most Hoosiers would support.

HPI: Politically, it looks like the primary is going to be a five- or six-man field, depending on whether Attorney General Hill gets in. Walk me through how you win the primary.

Messer: First, I'm out of the political prognosticator business. That's not my job.

HPI: That's my job.

Messer: I don't know about all that. What I do know is we're going to work hard as a family to earn Hoosier trust and to earn the opportunity to represent Indiana in the U.S. Senate. We're not worried who enters or who doesn't enter the race. We're confident that when we take our positive message to Hoosiers, a message rooted in conservative principles, as I talked about in our speech, Hoosiers want some fairly simple things. They want to see less government, a stronger America, and they want leaders to work hard to build that American promise to get away from these stagnant wages you've talked a lot about. The biggest issue, when you talk to Hoosiers, is their paychecks.

HPI: There has already been a lot of vitriol in this race, particularly with Rep. Rokita. Talk about the tone you

will set in this primary.

Messer: From our perspective, my campaign starts today. So we're going to paint a positive vision of how Hoosiers can come together and get this important work done. It's a primary to start. We'll first be making that case to Hoosier Republicans. I'm going to tell the story of all the work we've done over the last 15 years to bring people together. I've made my comments clear about how some of my potential competitors started their campaigns and I'll just leave it at that.

HPI: You're leaving a safe House seat and, should you win the primary, you'll be running in a potentially tough mid-term election with a very unpopular and controversial President Trump.

Messer: From my perspective, our service has never been about me. We've never worried about losing a seat that is otherwise safe. A great replacement will step forward and run in the primary, a conservative. I just felt called to this race. It matters we elect a new U.S. senator. We as a party we need to nominate someone who will get that job done. We think I'm the right person to do that.

HPI: I've speculated this will be a \$100 million race, with a lot of outside money. Does it worry you that you'll have no control over that independent message?

Messer: One of the lessons of the story I told today is I've learned in life, control what you can control and then move on. ❖

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Messer, Rokita sticking with Trump

By MARK SCHOEFF JR.

WASHINGTON – Business leaders may be abandoning President Donald J. Trump in the wake of his reaction to last weekend’s violence in Charlottesville, Va., but the two leading candidates in the Indiana Republican Senate primary race are sticking with him.



While CEOs exited White House advisory councils after Trump on Tuesday reaffirmed his stance that there “was blame on both sides” of a demonstration by white nationalists and a counter protest that led to one death and several injuries, Reps. Luke Messer, 6th CD, and Todd Rokita, 4th CD, avoided contradicting Trump.

“Hate, bigotry and racism are un-American and unacceptable,” Messer said in an email statement. “I denounce these groups in the strongest terms. To me, much of the criticism surrounding the president was unfair. President Trump denounced the violence and racism displayed in Charlottesville, and I have denounced it, too.”

Like Trump, Rokita cast a wide net of blame. “Rep. Rokita believes Americans need to come together to reject all hate groups that encourage domestic terrorism and violence,” Tim Edson, a Rokita campaign spokesman, wrote in an email. “Whether it’s white supremacists and neo-Nazi thugs spewing hatred and committing violence against people because of race or religion like we saw in Charlottesville, or radical leftists calling for violence against law enforcement, none of it is acceptable.”

Messer and Rokita are locked in what is already a nasty battle for the right to take on Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly in 2018. Both are trying to win over Trump supporters who likely will make the difference in the primary, which also has drawn state Rep. Mike Braun, Terry Henderson of Atlanta, Mark Hurt of Kokomo and Andrew Takami of New Albany.

Staying aligned with Trump could become increasingly difficult for all the candidates because of Trump’s unpredictability. Earlier this week, he attacked the person who heads the caucus the Republican candidates want to join, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. Trump vented his frustration at the Senate’s failure to pass a bill to scuttle the Affordable Care Act.

“Can you believe that Mitch McConnell, who has screamed repeal & replace for seven years couldn’t get it done,” Trump Tweeted. “Mitch, get back to work and put repeal & replace, tax reform and cuts and a great infrastructure bill on my desk for signing. You can do it!”

The Senate candidates are resisting taking sides between Trump and their possible future boss. “Luke’s not going to get into any kind of discussion on personalities,” said Messer campaign spokesman Jason Kneeland. In an email statement, Messer was careful to stay neutral on the Trump-McConnell tension, while placing blame on Donnelly and Senate Democrats.

“I share the president’s frustration with the results in the U.S. Senate. That’s part of the reason why I’m running for the job,” said Messer, the House Republican policy chairman. “Senate Democrats have decided to ‘foul on every play’ and make it difficult for the Trump agenda to succeed. On the most important votes, Joe Donnelly votes in lock step with his party. Both President Trump and Mitch McConnell are working toward common goals. Now, we have to deliver results and keep our promises to the American people, [which] includes repealing Obamacare. We cannot promise something for seven years, and then shrug and walk away when it gets tough. That’s simply not okay. Hoosier families are suffering under Obamacare.”

Rokita’s campaign stressed that McConnell delivered for Trump “under great political pressure” by holding open the Supreme Court seat that eventually was filled by Trump’s nominee, “constitutionalist” Neil Gorsuch. “Both Trump and McConnell are pushing to repeal Obamacare,” Edson wrote in an email. “Unfortunately, liberals like

Joe Donnelly vote against the interests of Hoosier families and continue to defend Obamacare in lockstep with Nancy Pelosi.”

During the Senate health care debate, Donnelly said that the ACA worked well for many Hoosiers and that the Republican bill, crafted by McConnell, would end the Healthy Indiana Plan 2.0.

“I still believe that by working together we can improve our health care system and, at a minimum, Congress and

the administration should do no harm to the millions of Americans’ whose health and economic well-being are at stake,” Donnelly said after the Senate failed to approve an ACA replacement bill on July 28. “We should do the hard and necessary work to gather the input of doctors, nurses, hospitals, and patients, and work in a bipartisan manner to make coverage more affordable and accessible for Hoosier and American families.”

By next year, Donnelly may have the easier task – running against most of what Trump does and says. The winner of the Senate GOP primary could find himself fighting Donnelly and Trump. ❖



Defending Messer on a midguided attack

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – While today I defend Republican Congressman Luke Messer, it's about one very misguided type of attack. So, don't interpret it as favoring Messer over Todd Rokita, the other Republican congressman seeking the party's nomination for the U.S. Senate. Either would be a formidable opponent for Sen. Joe Donnelly, the



Democrat who seeks reelection in 2018.

Neither would be another Richard Mourdock, the nutty Republican nominee Donnelly defeated to win a first term. A Mourdock type could slip between Messer and Rokita to win in the Republican primary, and there are far-out prospects seeking to do so. But chances are that Donnelly won't be that fortunate a second time.

Now, to defending Messer in one area where he has been attacked in an unfair, but potentially damaging, way. Messer is criticized for relocating his family – wife and three kids – to suburban Washington after election to Congress in 2012. Good for him. Good for his family. Good for Congress.

Many analysts of the bitter stalemate in Congress, with failure to compromise to get anything done, cite how the place has changed: Less comradery, less communication, less understanding of the other side. Those on that other side are regarded as enemies, not colleagues.

When members of Congress more routinely moved with their families to Washington while serving there, Republicans and Democrats often were neighbors, their kids going to the same schools, maybe on the same sports teams. Their spouses socialized and worked together on worthy causes. They talked to each other outside the chamber – actually communicating. Harder to hate somebody whose family took your kid along for a movie.

Now, most members spend as little time as pos-

sible in Washington. They leave family back in the district. They race to the airport immediately upon a Thursday adjournment to spend the weekend back in the district, meeting supporters and contributors and making sure to be seen in some public places to prove they're "keeping in touch" with folks back home. Most don't hold town hall meetings these days to hear from anybody with a different opinion. They not only can dial for dollars but even make personal contact with contributors.

They should get home between sessions, during recesses and on some weekends. But wouldn't it be nice to spend some weekends working in Washington rather than racing away from work so quickly? They could actually concentrate on the nation's business and perhaps get to know and understand some of the colleagues who are there? It's nice for a member of Congress to have a family to come home to during the work week. Nice for the family. Better for the member than getting into the scrapes that some of them do.

Politically, however, it can be harmful to spend too much time in Washington. Not always. Messer says he moved his family to the Washington area on advice from Vice President Mike Pence, who also relocated his family while a congressman from Indiana. That didn't keep Pence from being elected governor and vice president.

There are more important political issues – things like the economy, health care and, now, war or peace – than where a family chooses to live. But not getting home enough can be dangerous. Mourdock defeated Sen. Dick Lugar, long regarded as a statesman, in the 2012 Republican primary, with some Republican county chairmen complaining that Lugar didn't come home to help raise funds at their Lincoln Day dinners. He was instead doing

useless things like negotiating destruction of weapons in the old Soviet Union.

Messer does have one problem with where his family lives. According to an Associated Press report, his wife, Jennifer, has a contract with Fishers, a small city near Indianapolis, paying \$240,000

a year for part-time legal work she does at home. What? Questioning that is fair game. Questioning that he has his family with him in Washington should not be. ❖



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

Meth lab busts decline 58% after new law

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – As a compromise was forged for what would become SEA80, a bill designed to cut into domestic methamphetamine lab production, State Rep. Steve Davisson said, "I think we're going to see a major reduction in meth labs in this state. I've talked to a lot of chain-store pharmacists who said they wanted to be able to deny a sale, but their bosses wouldn't let them."



Davisson is a small-town pharmacist from Salem, living in a state that had led meth production for more than three years,

who had originally opposed legislation that would place pharmacies on the front lines of keeping pseudoephedrine out of the meth lab pipeline. On Tuesday, State Rep. Ben Smaltz, who along with State Sen. Randy Head forged the compromise, announced that meth lab busts declined 58% compared to the same time period last year.

Indiana State Police reports 254 meth lab busts occurred from January through June, representing a 58% drop from the 605 incidents during the same period in 2016. In addition, the number of children removed from meth lab environments went down nearly 68% from 108 to 35 cases. Over the past two years, child removals from Indiana meth labs declined approximately 81%. Smaltz said more children were removed from meth labs during a single month in 2015 than in the first half of 2017.

During the last six months of 2016, meth labs declined by 38%, going from 1,452 in 2015 and 943 in 2016.

"Because of the hard work of law enforcement and pharmacy staff in combination with statewide meth reforms, Indiana has seen a significant drop in meth lab busts," Smaltz said. "Since taking office, one of my top priorities has been to curb meth production in Indiana while working to reduce the number of Hoosier children exposed to meth labs to zero. As these numbers continue to go

down year after year, I'm confident that we are on our way toward achieving those goals."

According to the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council, between 2013 and 2015 Indiana has dismantled 4,477 meth labs, and rescued 1,104 children living in meth lab environments. In the first nine months of 2015, there were 1,302 meth lab incidents involving 278 children. Over the corresponding time period, Indiana has seen a 32% increase in homicides, 26% increase in abuse and neglect reports to the Department of Child Services, a 90% increase in misdemeanor theft.

Kendallville Police Chief Rob Wiley explained in November 2015 that while 362 children had been removed from meth manufacturing homes the previous year, "There are about 10 times that many," meaning that another 3,600 kids or so are living in squalid, dangerous and lethal conditions that authorities haven't reached.

Smaltz told HPI on Tuesday that some of the meth lab decline could come as the result of the heroin/opioid epidemic that is tormenting the state. "Addicts are always going to go for what's the cheapest option," the Auburn Republican said. "We're starting to see it up here. It's been more of a factor in Southern Indiana."

During the 2016 session, Smaltz sponsored a law to combat Indiana's growing number of meth labs. Smaltz said the law makes purchasing large amounts of



State Rep. Ben Smaltz makes a dramatic PSE demonstration on the House floor in 2016.

pseudoephedrine, a common decongestant as well as key ingredient used to manufacture meth, more difficult for criminal networks and meth cooks. The law also empowers local pharmacists to use their professional judgment to ensure law-abiding consumers maintain legitimate access to these cold medications. But Smaltz believes the SEA80 has played a major role in the decline. "You've got to give a head nod to the pharmacists," Smaltz said. "They make the decisions on whether is this the right thing to sell to somebody. The legislative fix helps. When you look at the

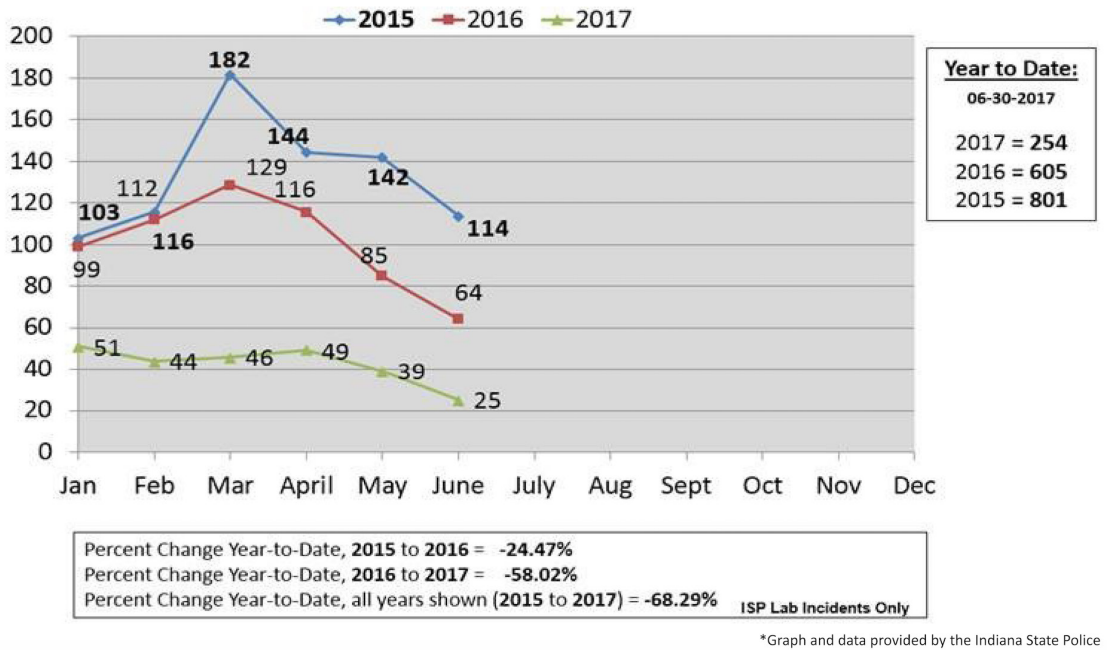
184 kids found in meth labs a year ago, and 35 this year, that's 149 lives that meth wasn't poisoning."

Noble County Prosecutor Eric Blackman told WISH-TV that he's seen this statewide trend in the county, a county commonly in the top 10 of the most meth lab busts. Between 2015 and 2016, the number of meth lab busts in Noble County went from 70 to 40. Blackman credited new legislation and vigilant police. However, he said fewer meth labs do not mean there are fewer drug users in Noble County. He said there's a rise in the sale of pre-manufactured meth. The opiate epidemic has taken over a lot of the county's urban areas. Blackman said the opiate problem is starting to creep into the rural areas, but meth is still king there.

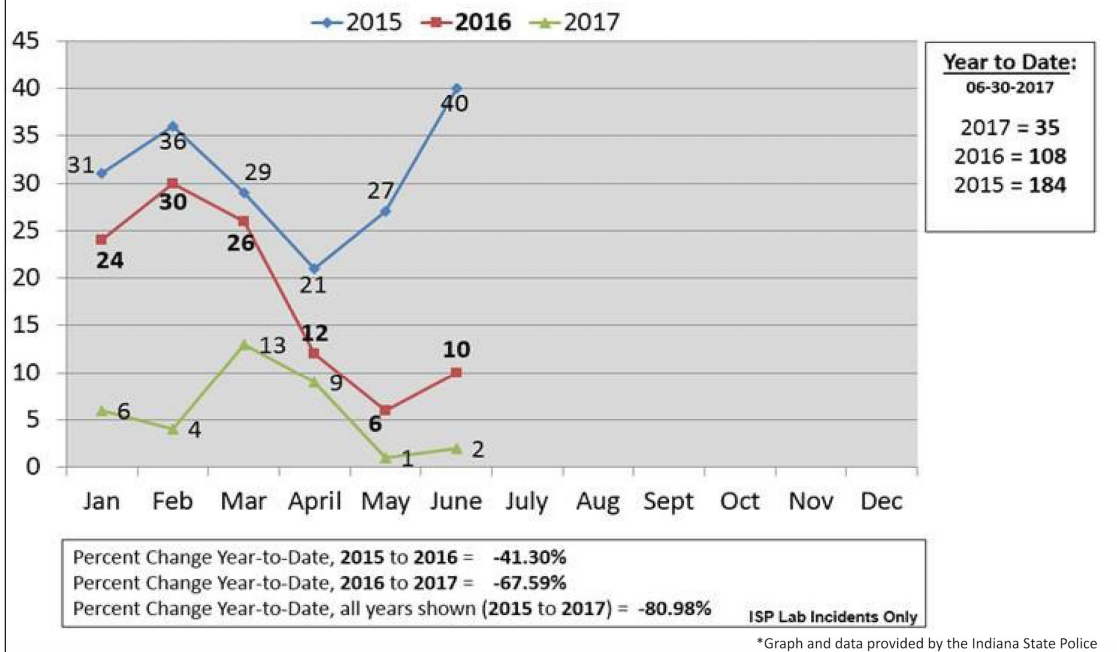
Smaltz said that short term gains won't necessarily solve the problem. "We've seen drops before, notably in 2006 when the federal Combat Meth Act was passed. But addicts figured out a way around it. I don't buy the war on drugs or the war on poverty. It's like a dam holding back water. You fix it, you watch it, and the water will come through somewhere else. Some of those things we're watching now, heroin, prescription painkillers. I just saw someone on spice in the emergency room. We'll just have to adjust."

Smaltz noted that meth labs are dangerous to innocent children and unsuspecting neighbors because they leave behind toxic contamination and can easily catch fire or explode. Meth lab accidents often cause costly injuries to meth cooks and first responders. "Although these sta-

Annual Comparison ISP Clandestine Lab Incidents 2015 – 2017



Annual Comparison ISP Children Identified in Clandestine Lab Environments 2015 – 2017



istics are very encouraging, we cannot relax our efforts in combating other illegal drugs or helping addicted Hoosiers get the treatment they need to return as contributing members of society," Smaltz said. ❖

The Walmarting of Indiana's small towns

By CRAIG DUNN

KOKOMO – The year was 1984 and I was off on an adventure to Atlanta, Ga. The investment company that I worked for was going to be selling municipal bonds to finance the coming Walmart store expansion in Georgia. A group of 10 investment representatives would be visiting a Walmart store in Atlanta on its grand opening day.



Now a Walmart grand opening today surely wouldn't excite too many people, but in 1984 Walmart was the coming thing, the business model that would transform retail forever. Making this Walmart grand opening special for me was that Sam Walton, the Walmart founder, was flying into town to cut the ribbon for the opening.

I had researched Walmart extensively and couldn't help but be amazed by the steamroller of a business mowing down its competition as it grew concentrically from its base in Bentonville, Ark. It would be next to impossible to not respect and admire the self-made man at the helm of the corporation. Sam Walton was a visionary who was turning an entire industry on its ear with innovation, attention to details and an irrepressible enthusiasm and charm.

The mere fact that I was in Atlanta for this event was testimony to Sam Walton's creativity and chutzpah. Wherein Walmart's competition was opening stores using corporate bonds or bank loans to finance the construction, Sam Walton decided that he could talk small town municipal councils into issuing low rate municipal bonds as a tool of industrial development. After all, the average Walmart store in 1984 employed around 125 workers and in small town and rural America, that was big employment. Local councils generally ignored the warnings and pleas from local business owners that the towns who took the bait and authorized municipal bonds to finance the Walmart construction were merely financing the destruction of their own business communities. In politics, new jobs are the best jobs so bond remonstrators were dismissed as anti-competitive and the municipal bonds were issued.

Today, with over 4,500 retail outlets across the United States, it is hard to remember the time before Walmart and what retail life was like in small town America. I'm certainly old enough to remember those times. Towns were centered around a county courthouse or center square with retail shops running outward like

spokes on a bicycle. There were thriving men's, women's and children's clothing stores, sporting goods stores, hardware stores, jewelry stores, houseware, appliance and gift stores.

The best part about having all of the different types of retail stores in your community was that you had the owner, store manager and clerk all living near you. In fact, the owner, store manager and clerk were generally the same person. You could walk into Johnson's Sporting Goods store in just about any American city and find Mr. Johnson helping someone find just the right baseball bat or glove. The charitable fund drives in the towns were usually headed by Mr. Johnson or someone just like him. Local owners were the life blood of any community. They were the planners, the conscience and the energy for any worthwhile project promoted by the many Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions clubs that met weekly in each town.

Life certainly began to transform after Walmart stores were introduced into small town America. The small locally owned shops gradually closed up and died out. Mr. Johnson retired and headed for Florida while leaving his son or daughter the difficult task of trying to compete with Walmart and other big box retailers. Retail competition is brutal business and one by one, stores started to fade away leaving empty Main Streets as evidence of once-thriving communities. The one-two punch to the stomach of manufacturing job losses to overseas production and the retail disintegration of downtown has crippled the quaint and sedate life of living in small town America.

Indiana certainly has not avoided this trend. An early 2017 study by Indiana University Emeritus Economics



Prof. Morton Marcus showed that 297 towns and cities in Indiana lost population between 2000 and 2015.

A person needs only to drive one of the many highways or byways of the Hoosier State and you can see the impact of the destruction of the retail community by the big box retailers led by Walmart. What you can't see by driving through town is the loss of community leadership. Extending beyond the empty storefronts and decaying downtowns is the shortage of leaders with a vested interest in the success of their communities. Let's face it, a

store manager or general manager of a chain store or big box retailer is going to be more focused on the bottom line profitability of their store than the long-term need for recreational facilities for the town's youth. Managers change in a continual revolving door and a community leadership void goes unfilled.

Oddly enough, the problems created by the Walmart-inspired big-boxing of America may just be the tip of a very big coming iceberg. I'm telling you we've got trouble, right here in River City. It starts with "A", goes on all day and flies all night. That's right folks, the form of our ultimate community destructor may just be Amazon. Amazon may well be the neutron bomb of retail. It may kill all of the people and leave the buildings standing all across America. In fact, it is happening as you read this.

I am a laissez faire kind of guy who counts himself as a disciple of Adam Smith, Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek. More competition and the lower resulting prices improve the standard of living for us all. I've studied cross elasticity until I'm dizzy and I still can't find anything that works better or is a more immutable law.

That being said, Amazon does present a particularly nasty set of challenges to life as we know it in Indiana.

Along about 10 every evening, after a long day of work and at-home chores, I finally get a little time to think about things that I need to purchase. I don't have a lot of time to shop and, frankly, I don't like to shop. I've never been one to run to the mall for the thrill of shopping. I'm a buyer and not a shopper. I sit down in front of my computer, pull up Amazon and scan numerous suppliers of the same item that I want to buy. I choose the one with the lowest cost, get free shipping because of my prime subscription and then two days later find the item on my back porch when I get home from work. Pretty quick, pretty simple and pretty cheap! Hard to compete against if you have personnel costs, occupancy costs, operational costs and all of the taxes associated with government helping your business succeed.

We are now seeing the cascading collapse of retail stores and centers in America. Sears has been rapidly closing stores. KMart has been doing the same. J.C. Penney, the original retail disruptor, is heading down the drain. Shopping malls have seen big spikes in vacancies and it has been

estimated that over one half of the large retail malls will eventually go out of business. Even Walmart has begun to close less profitable stores as it scrambles to maintain its margins in an Amazon- and internet-driven world.

Where does this leave the good folks in small town Indiana? First, they have lost their locally owned retail businesses and the leadership its owners provided to the community. Next, they may lose the big box store that provides groceries, hardware, sporting goods, housewares, dry goods, toys, gardening supplies, auto parts and clothes to the community and the surrounding area. What will the people in these small towns do when their big box store closes? They will migrate to bigger cities and leave the small towns behind. We've seen this before when an interstate bypasses a community. It is happening now.

Looking back on my journey to watch Sam Walton open a new Walmart store in a small town near Atlanta, Ga., I can't help but think about the faces on the sales clerks in the store as Mr. Walton led them in the Walmart cheer; "Give me a W, give me an A, give me an L." Well, you know the rest.

These clerks were so excited that they had a new job with a new company and the future looked bright for them and their community. You could see the excitement on every face. Now, I see that every coin has two sides and there are challenges that come with every business or industrial disruption. I wonder if the smaller towns of Indiana are ready for the future that comes with an Amazon drone. ❖

Dunn is former chairman of the Howard County Republican Party.



Mayor's No. 1 job is land use

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – What is the most important job of a mayor? Clearing the streets of snow? Garbage collection? Pothole filling? Providing jobs? Enforcing the law and local codes? Certainly all of these are important tasks. Yet number one on my list is land use. How we use the land in our communities is the basis for the future.

Soon after he was elected I stopped in for a chat with Bloomington's mayor, John Hamilton. I told him, in my opinion, the most important task he faced was the future use of the downtown block where the post office once stood. This property, owned by a nearby church, is one diagonal block from the courthouse.



No doubt there are many ideas of how this property should be used. Some would argue for a park. Others would endorse senior citizen housing. There are those who envision a monumental, mixed-use tower. Perhaps, this being Bloomington, a few dream of a gathering

place for political rallies and evangelical tent meetings, with a dramatic fountain symbolically representing the free flow of ideas.

I have no favorite in this conflict of concepts. Yet what happens to that significant piece of land could shape the future of downtown Bloomington for generations. But the land is in private hands and can be sold to another private party who will be constrained only by Bloomington zoning and, perhaps, virulent public opinion.

In this country, many insist land owners should not be limited by the concerns of others. No matter what proposal comes forth, there will be opposition. This is where a mayor must step forward on principle, unfettered by public opinion or the blandishments of private interests.

Yet I have in front of me a Feb. 16, 2017, email from a "Neighborhood Advocate" in the Indianapolis mayor's office that states, "the mayor's office doesn't intervene in land use cases."

If true, this is an appalling abrogation of responsibility, a clear dereliction of duty. Yes, throughout Indiana we have local committees and commissions to set and maintain land use standards. Frequently they are composed of distinguished persons well-qualified to judge individual cases. But every mayor must be prepared to protect the future from the visionless sluggards who too often occupy the seats of these regulatory bodies.

Land is the only permanent aspect of our communities. People, at best, last for decades. Structures can

survive for generations. How we use the land has an overriding influence on the social, economic, and environmental lives of all those who follow us.

Over the centuries, roads, streets, rails were set down that facilitate and limit our activities today. Existing buildings of all sizes and ages will shape the lives of our great-grandchildren. How can any mayor exclude himself or be constrained by custom from being part of the decision making in critical land use cases? ❖

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

Trump and Pence two peas in a pod

By **RICH JAMES**

MERRILLVILLE – Are Donald Trump and Mike Pence peas in a pod, or is the vice president ready to fly from the nest. Pence, who is one of the biggest defenders of the president, stayed true on Monday after critics ripped Trump for saying there was fault to be found on both sides of the Charlottesville, Va., demonstration last weekend.

So defensive of Trump was Pence that he attacked the media, much like the president has done since taking office. "The media is more concerned in attacking Trump than criticizing the violence itself," Pence said. Besides defending the president, Pence added that there "will be more unity in America" under Trump's presidency.



All that is fairly standard for Pence, who one day would like to be president. And if Pence is going to succeed

Trump, he will need the president's political base to do so. Perhaps that's why we haven't heard from Pence since Monday. Pence, even though he is traveling, hasn't said a word about Trump's Tuesday tirade about what happened in Virginia.

While Republican and Democratic leaders have criticized Trump for defending neo-Nazis, Pence hasn't issued a statement. I don't know how he can continue to talk about Hoosier values unless he says something.

On an unrelated matter, U.S. Rep. Peter Visclosky D-Merrillville, ventured into the national political arena a

week ago when Trump started boasting about the improvements he has made in our nuclear defense system. Not true, Visclosky said.

Visclosky said the advances in our nuclear defense system have been made in the last seven years because of President Barack Obama. Visclosky, who sits on the defense subcommittee of the Appropriations Commit-

tee, said they haven't yet approved any defense finances since Trump became president.

Touche. ❖

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.

Democrat advantage in 2018 governor races

By **KYLE KONDIK**
Sabato's Crystal Ball

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. – A couple of weeks ago, Crystal Ball senior columnist Alan Abramowitz unveiled a model for predicting party change in next year's gubernatorial elections. The results were rosy for Democrats: The model suggested Democrats should gain somewhere between six to nine governorships depending on the Democratic lead in House generic ballot polling.

The Democratic advantage is in large part simply because: 1.) There is a Republican in the White House, and the presidential party often loses ground in midterm elections up and down the ballot; and 2.) Republicans are defending 26 of the 36 governorships up for election next year, meaning that they have a lot of ground to defend while the Democrats have relatively little.

The model does not take into account two other factors, both of which are also positive for Democrats. President Donald Trump is unpopular, and many of the governorships the Republicans are defending next year are open seats, which inherently are harder to defend.

Of the 36 governorships up next year, Republicans will be defending 12 open governorships and an additional four (Alabama, Iowa, Kansas, and South Carolina) where successor incumbents who took over for departed or soon-to-be departing governors likely will be on the ballot next year seeking election to full terms. As the Crystal Ball's Geoffrey Skelley found recently, these successor incumbents historically do not have as much of an incumbency advantage as their elected counterparts. So one could say the Republicans are defending 16 open

seats, while the Democrats are only defending four.

And yet, at this early point, it may be that the Democrats will have a hard time realizing the potential that the Abramowitz model illustrates. For one thing, the average presidential party gubernatorial seat net loss in postwar midterm elections is only four seats, and even in the big wave years of 2006 and 2010, the net change in governorships was only six in favor of the wave-aided side (Democrats in 2006, Republicans in 2010). Additionally, there are some logistical advantages for Republicans. One is the financial might of the Republican Governors Association. In the first half of 2017, the RGA raised \$36 million to the Democratic Governors Association's \$21 million, and the RGA has long held a money edge over its Democratic counterpart. The DGA's disadvantage may be blunted a little bit by the efforts of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee, a new group backed by former President Barack Obama and former Attorney General Eric Holder that raised close to \$11 million in the first half of this year.

Some of that money will presumably go into gubernatorial races given the importance of this cycle's gubernatorial races to decennial redistricting after the 2020 census (many of the governors elected next year will have a role in that process in 2021 and 2022). But still, if Republicans have a poor gubernatorial cycle, it won't

be because their candidates did not have the money to compete. In addition, in many states, Republicans may have the more seasoned candidates. The Democratic bench of potential candidates was hollowed out in many states due to the party's poor performances down the ballot in the Obama years. That's common for the president's party, though it was particularly pronounced for Democrats over the past eight years. So in many states, particularly in the Midwest, the Republican gubernatorial nominees are likely to be more proven electoral performers than the Democratic ones, although that of course is no guarantee of victory. ❖

Map 1: Crystal Ball 2017/2018 gubernatorial ratings

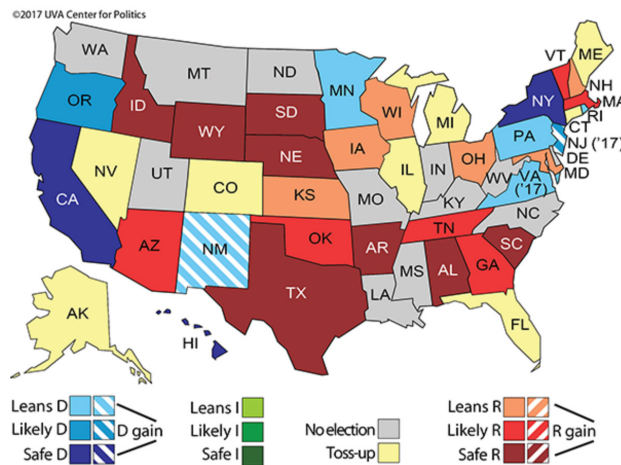


Table 1: Crystal Ball gubernatorial ratings changes

Young, Brooks call for focus on tax reform

Howey Politics Indiana

WASHINGTON – Indiana Senator Todd Young says with a health care bill going nowhere, it's time for Congress to focus on tax reform (Berman, WIBC). Congress left for its August recess right after the Senate rejected the Republican health-care "skinny repeal" bill. President Trump and some House Republicans have been pushing to take another run at health care, and there's been discussion of starting work on an infrastructure bill. But Young says tax reform is the single biggest thing Congress could do to boost the economy. He warns it won't be easy -- he says there's a reason it hasn't been attempted for 30 years. But he says it's an area where Republicans and Democrats should be able to work together.

Tax reform will be a top priority when Congress returns from the summer recess, Rep. Susan Brooks says (de la Bastide, CNHI). Brooks, a Republican who represents the 5th District that includes Madison County and Zionsville, met with area farmers on Aug. 9 at the farm of Andy Bracken to discuss farm and national issues. She said the tax laws have not been reformed in 31 years, and the goal is to simplify, reduce and have fewer tax rates. "I hope tax reform will pass the House with bipartisan support to make passage in the Senate possible," Brooks said. "The tax code is ramping down our economy. The business tax rate is among the highest in the world."

Trump signs Messer veterans bill

A news release from the office of U.S. Rep. Luke Messer (R-IN) indicated President Donald Trump signed into law today a GI Bill reform package which includes Messer's proposal to help veterans impacted by the closure of ITT Tech (Howey Politics Indiana). Spearheaded by Messer and Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA), the bipartisan proposal retroactively restores GI Bill benefits to veterans who were attending Indiana-based ITT Technical Institute and California-based Corinthian Colleges, both of which closed abruptly impacting tens of thousands of students nationwide, including thousands of veterans.

Rokita meets with AIPAC

U.S. Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN) met with leaders of Indiana's AIPAC community to talk about America's relationship with Israel, his office announced in a news release (Howey Politics Indiana). "The Israeli government is one of the only stable democracies in the Middle East and the stability they can bring to the table is something everyone globally should celebrate,"

said Congressman Todd Rokita. "Everyone at this event is proof that our relationship with Israel is something very important to Hoosiers. This organization is working to strengthen our relationship. I am glad to see so many Hoosiers standing up in support of our ally and I am proud to stand with you. I am doing everything I can in Congress to ensure this relationship continues to grow, like when I supported the passage of sanctions against Iran and co-sponsored the Anti-Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Bill. I also am a cosponsor of legislation that encourages the U.S. to work with Israel on peaceful exploration of space."

Walorski calls for unity

On Wednesday, Indiana Rep. Jackie Walorski [R] spoke to the media about the racism and white supremacy that was on display in Charlottesville (Hanold, WNDU-TV). Walorski delivered a message of unity regarding those events, telling the media members, "I have no tolerance for this... We must do better, we have to do better, this is not who we are as Americans, and it has to stop. And there should not be any leeway or parameters granted to anybody to be out there exalting white supremacy neo-Nazism, and racism."

Banks vets success bill signed

U.S. Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN), a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, announced that legislation he introduced in March has been signed into law today as part of a bipartisan legislative package that expands and extends the GI bill (Howey Politics Indiana). A news release stated the Banks legislation makes permanent a pilot program called VetSuccess on Campus, which places counselors on college campuses to assist veterans in navigating their GI benefits and charting their higher education path. ❖

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

Matthew Tully, IndyStar: There's not much left unsaid, and the words of a newspaper columnist in the middle of Indiana won't add up to a hill of beans, but I have a little boy and a conscience and a love for the United States and, so, there's no way I can write about anything else but the damage being done by the madman running our country. The president has spit on the values most of us hold dear. The president has stood on the side of the ugliest forms of hatred and bigotry. This already failed president has disgraced his office and stained our country in ways that will be studied with sadness for centuries. He has put heavy challenges on the long-cherished notion that we should respect the office of the presidency even when we disagree with its current occupant. A president should uplift in moments of crisis and division. A president should seek to de-escalate tense situations and calm fears. A president should wake every day with the goal of convincing America that our tomorrows will be better. Donald Trump does none of that. Donald Trump makes so many situations and so many of our divisions worse. Donald Trump has given powerful fuel to racists and bigots. It's heartbreaking to think that Trump's political career has not only survived but thrived over these past two years — all of the hateful comments, animosity and bigoted policies. I can't see inside a man's soul, so I don't know if the president is or is not a bigot. But he gives voice and cover to those who are, and that's all that matters. A U.S. president found himself unable to fully and forcefully condemn those marching alongside morons chanting Nazi slogans and celebrating white supremacist views. A world leader insisted there were good people among those hate mobs, and seemed furious at the notion that so many refused to blame people protesting against Nazis for the tragedy of Charlottesville. ❖



Mike Allen, Axios: President Trump, with at least two years of full Republican control of government at the national and state levels, has systematically damaged or destroyed his relationship with — well, almost every group or individual essential to success. This has left him on an island inhabited by a shrinking band of true-believer voters, who can help win an election, but can do nothing to help him exploit the power he's wasting: Yesterday's mass exodus of CEOs from his outside business councils was an unusually abrupt sign of the 210 days of rot and erosion in his support. A vivid demonstration of the sudden abandonment of Trump, via CNN's Brian Stelter: Shep Smith said he couldn't get a single Republican to go on Fox News to defend Trump. On MSNBC, Chuck Todd said he "invited every single Republican senator on this program tonight, all 52," plus a dozen House GOPers. None would do it. On CNN, Kate Bolduan said bookers called 55 Republicans, and only one said yes. Why it matters: Trump's undisciplined and incendiary style has left the most powerful man in the world with few friends — not one in the United

States Senate, for instance. Trump started with a pretty clean slate but has methodically alienated: The public: Gallup has his approval at 34%, down from 46% just after the inauguration. Republican congressional leaders — Senate Majority Mitch McConnell in particular. Every Democrat who could help him do a deal. The media. World leaders. Europe. Muslims. Hispanics. African Americans. Military leaders. The intelligence community. His own staff. ❖

Ronald Klain, Washington Post: Vice President Pence denounced a New York Times article suggesting he is eyeing a 2020 run for president, calling it "disgraceful and offensive." Thus, reports that Vice President Pence is going beyond mere "active waiting," to making moves to position himself to run if President Trump does not seek reelection, have created controversy. Though the vice president's office has denied that any conclusions should be drawn from his reported actions, it has not disputed many of the specifics, including a trip to Iowa, meetings with major donors and establishing a political action committee. As the only former chief of staff to two vice presidents, I think this reaction has been misguided in two critical respects. First, what Pence is doing is not beyond the pale for an ambitious vice president. In the 213 years since the 12th Amendment created our system of joint presidential-vice-presidential tickets, no vice president has been elected to the highest office after serving with a president who declined to seek, or was defeated in seeking, a second elected term. And as for coming to office via the president's ouster, the only vice president to follow that path, Gerald Ford, lost when he campaigned to retain the office — and he had far less to do with President Richard M. Nixon's scandals than Pence does with the mess around Trump. This is the vice-presidential prisoner's dilemma: There is no distance he can achieve, no political support he can muster, no congressional chits he can collect, no donor base he can assemble that can survive the fallout from a failed presidency. A vice president is either implicated as being in the loop or looks foolish if he insists that he was out of it. ❖

Dave Bangert, Lafayette Journal & Courier: Todd Rokita's official dive this week into the U.S. Senate race and his "Defeat the Elite" platform certainly left Hoosiers plenty to unpack. That Rokita was positioning himself as a Washington, D.C., outsider wasn't much of a surprise — no matter how big of a stretch it was. Donald Trump rode that theme about rigged systems and swamp-draining all the way to the White House in 2016. With the president's Indiana campaign leaders touting Rokita an all-in Trump fan, the congressman seems more than willing to ride it, too. Whether Rokita can pull off what Trump could, we'll find out by May 2018. Rokita has one ingrained, Trump-like characteristic: He's willing to say just about anything. ❖

Pence cuts SA trip short

WASHINGTON — Vice President Pence will return to the United States early from his visit to South America, according to Pence's communications director Jarrod Agen (Guild, CBS News). Pence will cut his trip short by one night in order to meet with President Trump and the National Security Team at Camp David on Friday. The group plans "to discuss the South Asia strategy," according to White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Pence's Deputy Chief of Staff Jarrod Agen said Pence has canceled all of his weekend events (Associated Press).



Hill spends \$279k on office, van

INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on office renovations and a new state vehicle, sparking criticism from some budget leaders. The renovations underway at Hill's Statehouse office are expected to cost about \$279,000. That includes \$78,000 for new furniture, \$71,000 for historic replica painting and \$2,500 for seven reclaimed chandeliers. The six-room office is home to Hill and 10 to 15 of his top staffers. Hill's office initially declined to release the figures, arguing that there was no budget for the project and that costs could change. The \$279,000 figure is based on invoices and purchase orders later obtained by IndyStar through a public records request fulfilled by Hill's office. IndyStar also found that Hill, a Republican who took office in January, has purchased a new 15-passenger van at a cost of nearly \$31,000 to serve as a mobile office. The van is emblazoned with decals that cost another \$667 and sport Hill's name. The spending is raising eyebrows among some state

lawmakers. "During the budget cycle, Curtis was yelling and screaming that I wasn't giving him enough money to run his office," said Luke Kenley, a Noblesville Republican and outgoing chairman of the Senate budget committee. "But apparently that's not true if he's doing all these things." Jeremy Brilliant, a spokesman for Hill, defended the spending, arguing that repairs to the office were long overdue and would enhance safety.

"The restoration is critical to maintaining the status of this office," he said.

CEOs force Trump to end councils

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump said he's disbanding two advisory groups of American business leaders, after CEOs quit this week as the president faced blowback over comments he made in the wake of violent protests in Charlottesville, Virginia (Bloomberg News). Trump made the announcement on Twitter, less than an hour after one of the groups was said to be planning to inform the White House that it would break up. "Rather than putting pressure on the business people of the Manufacturing Council & Strategy & Policy Forum, I am ending both. Thank you all!" Trump said on Twitter. His remarks were a reversal of what he said a day before, when he tweeted that he had plenty of CEOs who wanted to be on the panels to replace those who quit, and called the CEOs who left "grandstanders."

Sanders to hold rally in Indy

INDIANAPOLIS — Sen. Bernie Sanders will be in Indianapolis on Monday to attend a rally focused on jobs and the economy (Mack, IndyStar). The rally begins at 4 p.m. at Monument Circle and is organized by Good Jobs Nation, an organization with a mission to "end the U.S. Government's role as America's lead-

ing low-wage job creator." During the rally, Sanders, I-Vt., will be joined by former United Steelworkers Local 1999 President Chuck Jones and local elected officials. "What we're doing is trying to get people together and get them to realize what is happening in this country with the loss of jobs," Jones said. "No matter if it's to Mexico or to China or to wherever, we are losing good-paying jobs, and some of these companies responsible are being rewarded with government contracts."

Buncich trial has bribe denial

HAMMOND — Lake County Sheriff John Buncich's lawyers continued to make their case that bribery had nothing to do with Lake County towing (Dolan, NWI Times). Buncich's public corruption trial entered its eighth day Wednesday, although it was cut short when U.S. District Court Judge James Moody recessed at 10:45 a.m. for the day. Three defense witnesses testified in the early morning. Stephen R. "Chip" Lukasik, owner of Stan's Towing in St. John, testified he and his father before him towed for Buncich and other county sheriffs for more than six decades. He said he didn't pay to get on Buncich's tow list. He said he typically bought 10 tickets so he and his guests could occupy a table at Buncich's fundraisers. "I looked forward to going to the fundraisers," Lukasik said. He said he was never pressured to buy tickets.

Man acquitted in hatchet attack

NASHVILLE — Dana Ericson was mentally ill and not able to comprehend the wrongfulness of his actions when he ran up to an 18-year-old Chinese exchange student last year and hit her in the back with a hatchet, a judge ruled Wednesday (Bloomington Herald-Times). Brown Circuit Judge Judith Stewart found 61-year-old Ericson not guilty as a result of mental disease or defect.