

Braun ready to dress up Washington

Senator-elect will change wardrobe, but prepares a no nonsense message for an inert Capitol

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Senate rules require a coat and tie on the floor, so that's one change facing Sen.-elect Mike Braun when he arrives at the Capitol in January.

His campaign trail trademark was a blue shirt. He used it to contrast himself with tie-bound U.S. Reps. Luke Messer and Todd Rokita in their first debate last winter. How many blue shirts did Braun end up with in his victorious races against the congressmen and then Sen. Joe Donnelly?

"Several now," Braun said as we talked in a backroom at Shapiro's Deli on Tuesday. He was there to greet supporters, surrounded by his emerging staff that includes campaign manager Joshua Kelley, who will be his chief of staff; Jasper Mayor Terry Seitz, who comes in as outreach



director; Jason Johnson as state director; Katie Bailey as legislative director; and Jahan Wilcox at communications.

Braun emerged in late summer 2017 as the "outsider businessman," invested more than \$5 million in the

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Pondering 'President Pete'

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – President Pete. I mean, President Peter Buttigieg. That's a pipe dream, right? The gay mayor of South Bend who announced he wouldn't seek a third term this week and who will instead make a Democratic White House bid doesn't have a chance. Right?

Remember all those columns I wrote in 2015 and 2016 that ended with the phrase, "Anything can happen. Anything?" Well, 2020 could be a year that takes that new axiom and cubes it in historic fashion.

We've never had a mayor make the straight jump to the White House, or even the national ticket. Mayors John Lind-



"Faced with this intransigence, with Democrats' failure to take our borders seriously, we will soon take up a simple measure that will continue government funding into February."

- Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, seeking to avoid a government shutdown.



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sey and Sam Yorty couldn't make it happen. Presidents Calvin Coolidge, Grover Cleveland and Andrew Johnson were mayors in the earlier parts of their political careers, but got to the White House from higher stations.

Buttigieg announced

Monday he won't seek a third term. There's not a realistic path in Indiana for him. He's not interested in Congress, and with Gov. Eric Holcomb's current popularity and the Indiana Democratic Party's shattered foundation, a 2020 challenge there doesn't appear to be in the cards. Instead, the mayor is using a failed run for DNC chair to become one of up to three dozen Democrats seeking to challenge President Trump (or, perhaps, "President Pence"). Buttigieg said Tuesday, "For most of the decade now, I have given everything that I can to helping this city get to a new future. And I love this job. And I'm mindful that it may well be the best job that I will ever have. But it's also not the kind of job you do forever."

Buttigieg has been doing the things a potential POTUS hopeful does. He's given speeches in Iowa and other early primary states. His addresses channel President Kennedy's "pass the torch" oratory, saying about the March for Our Lives last winter, "Go ahead, dismiss this generation. I dare you. But I do think that people are looking for something new. They're looking for something fresh and different. And I think that, as a party, we can't just — first of all, we can't only trot out people who go to work in Washington every day, as representatives of the party."

Does Buttigieg have a

ghost of a chance? Did Jimmy Carter in 1974? Bill Clinton in 1990? Barack Obama in 2006? Or Donald Trump in 2014? The big difference was they were governors and senators (and a billionaire). This, however, is an era of broken molds.

In 2006, Hillary Clinton was in such a commanding position over Barack Obama and John Edwards that our Sen. Evan Bayh folded his cam-

paign just as it was getting started. In 2014, Jeb Bush had 23% in an early CNN poll, some 10% ahead of New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, with Ben Carson, Rand Paul and Mike Huckabee in the next tier. Trump was a joke.

An Iowa poll last week anointed former vice president Joe Biden, Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Beto O'Rourke as the "frontrunners." Mayor Buttigieg didn't even register in Des Moines.



But two observations this past week jumped out at me. First, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, watching the 75-year-old western order crumble on the riotous streets of Paris while Britain is roiled over Brexit and President Trump gnaws at the post-World War II construct, wrote about an anxious middle class on both sides of the pond: "I don't think there are national solutions to this problem — simply cut taxes or raise taxes — in the way there were in the past. I think the countries that will thrive in this era are the ones that have the most nimble cities, with the most nimble local leaders, who build adaptive coalitions of businesses, educators and social entrepreneurs, who can compete locally, regionally, nationally and globally."

And Purdue President Mitch

Daniels told me last week that Americans have a tendency after years of rule by a person or party to select a vastly different president than the one before, who portrays strengths in the areas where the predecessor had weakness. Think JFK following Ike, Reagan after Carter, Trump after Obama.

I cannot think of a more vivid contrast to President Trump (or Vice President Pence, for that matter) than Pete Buttigieg. Trump speaks in mob boss parlance; Buttigieg is a cerebral Rhodes Scholar. Trump embodies an aggressive masculinity; the mayor is softer spoken and gay. Trump had five military draft deferments; Buttigieg volunteered for the Navy and served in the Afghanistan war. Trump goes by the gut; Buttigieg is analytical by nature. Trump is skeptical of intelligence assessments; the mayor is a military intelligence analyst who devours the information.

The volatility of the day is evident on so many fronts, as the scandals continue to encroach on the president. It was instructive that Pence's chief of staff Nick Ayers took a pass on serving President Trump in that capacity. What did I take from that? Ayers made the astute

observation that Trump is a spectacular political Titanic in the making, so why waste your limelight time when the Marine band is playing, "Nearer, My God, To Thee"? That tells me that Ayers thinks there's a decent chance there will be a "President Pence" sometime between now and Jan. 20, 2021 and he's keeping his powder dry for that.

Am I predicting that Pete Buttigieg has a chance in 2020? Could there really be a President Buttigieg? It's a bet I wouldn't be inclined to make at this point, but virtually no one was betting on a President Trump in December 2014. I also won't be laying any money down on Biden, Bernie or Beto at this point.

What I will be watching is how Buttigieg staffs up, should he take the plunge. During his run for DNC chair, he had the ear and guidance from people like David Axelrod and Howard Dean. If you see that caliber of talent gravitate toward his campaign, then get out the Drudge siren.

What I do know is that in this era of unpredictability, with conventional wisdom on its heels and a raging bull preening and lashing out in the White House china shop, well, you know what can happen. ❖

Sen. Braun, from page 1

primary race, more than \$11 million before the last shrill TV ad aired on Nov. 6, and upset Sen. Donnelly by 5%. HPI listed the race as a tossup, but with President Trump and Vice President Pence coming into the state in the homestretch, their brand and Donnelly's vote against the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh put him over the top.

"Mike was closing the gap all along," said Kelley, who had run campaigns for Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and 2016 Senate candidate Marlin Stutzman before he signed on with Braun. "Sen. Donnelly started out in a strong position and there's a reason why incumbents win 90% of the time. But we felt we were ticking along on that trajectory. The thing that always gave us great confidence was that in whatever poll that was out there, Sen. Donnelly was never higher than 43 to 45%. We knew that the remaining chunk of undecided voters, Republicans, independents and conservative-leaning voters who hadn't

made up their minds, were likely to come our way."

Braun believes that the Kavanaugh issue hurt Donnelly. "I think we would have won the election anyway," Braun said. "It wouldn't have been with as wide a margin."

Kelley said that the Kavanaugh hearing with accuser Karen Blasey Ford just sped up their process. "It escalated what we saw was trending internally. We felt it was coming our way, but escalated it several weeks in advance. We could see the enthusiasm rise. It fired up our base. We probably raised the most money online, outside of those last few days, in those 72 to 96 hours after the Kavanaugh vote."

Donnelly became exposed, Braun and Kelley believe, with Kelley saying, "Indiana is a right-leaning state and that really put him on display on what was at stake. Are you with the radical left that was dragging Kavanaugh through the mud? When he chose to side with that obstructionist, radical wing and his party, that really clarified things with Hoosiers."

Some progressive Democrats were upset



Senator-elect Mike Braun with campaign manager and incoming chief of staff Joshua Kelley at Shapiro's on Tuesday. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

with Donnelly over his late TV ad where he vowed to fund President Trump's border wall while separating from the most liberal wing of the party. But Kelley said Donnelly's base held steady, yet more Republicans turned out and came home. "I don't think our polling showed he had problems with his base," Kelley said. "To us that indicated a sign of desperation."

The other telltale was Donnelly's aggression in the two debates, where he challenged Braun on his stance on preexisting conditions and whether he backed the Texas lawsuit that would end such coverage. "Joe Donnelly's demeanor in those debates told us he was seeing similar numbers that we were," Kelley explained. "He became very aggressive. It's a situation where if you're the incumbent, if you're in a winning position, you're going to take a more measured approach. That aggressive approach proved to a lot of people that Mike could really back up what they were seeing in the TV ads, that he was unflappable, and reinforced that argument during the campaign that it was time for a change."

Braun called health care "the issue I ran on to distinguish myself from other conservatives, and I said it early, you should never go broke if you get sick or have a bad accident, you have to cover preexisting conditions, and no cap on coverage. I don't think it made it through because a lot of people thought it was political mumbo-jumbo that I couldn't back up once I got elected."

Kelley was asked about the primary campaign TV ads against Messer and Rokita – the twin cardboard cutouts – that were some of the most effective ever seen in the state, and the different tenor of the fall campaign against Donnelly. "When you look at the dynamic we had in the primary, ideologically there weren't a lot of differences between three relatively conservative guys with similar backgrounds," he said. "We had to find opportunities to draw a contrast that were a little different than people were used to. Whereas in the general election it really becomes more of a red v. blue question about Joe Donnelly's record and not being in touch with Hoosiers."

Braun also benefited from a GOP hitting on all cylinders. "We had such great support in the state from Gov. Holcomb and Chairman Hupfer. The day after the primary, the whole statewide structure was locked down and focused on a single goal. The president was in town. It was something I haven't seen before. Just in my time, I haven't seen a state party come even close to what they



pulled off. It was just an unprecedented effort of marshaling resources and solely focused on a goal. They contacted hundreds of thousands of voters."

"It's been a misnomer that the Democrats had a better ground game," Kelley said. "I think we created a cycle, with the right candidate and with the right people at the helm of the various organizations, our state party leadership, they went out and made hundreds of thousands of voter contacts. It's just

amazing. If this was going to be a close race, I always felt confident we were going to squeak out that extra 25,000 to 50,000 votes statewide because we had the superior ground game."

That was conspicuous in rural Indiana where Braun carried dozens of counties with 65 to 75% of the vote. Braun said, "Joe's voting record was what did him in." He also believes his "real world experience" got "above the clutter a little bit and most voters could see a difference."

Here is our HPI Interview with Sen.-elect Braun:

HPI: You just found that opening and crease in the primary that Reps. Rokita and Messer didn't have.

Braun: I think for a lot of people ... it had never happened before in this state for the U.S. Senate, or someone from the outside who ran the gauntlet and made it. I think there will be more in the future. I think that was reflected in President Trump's margin. Hoosiers wanted something different than business as usual. They were willing to put up with some disruption along the way. I might be wondering if there was too much of that chaos that would come with it. I think that was all a matter of discussion. It was because government had not been delivering for a long time good results in D.C. to address problems. Places like Indiana have run a state government with a lot more raw functionality, doing the things you need to do to live another day to be able to try something else with balanced budgets and cash balances, and tackling some things and not trying to do everything. Run it with accountability.

HPI: Sen. Donnelly kept saying he backed Trump 62% of the time. After the election, it became obvious that a majority of Hoosiers want that to be in the 95 to 100% range.

Braun: Hoosiers were wanting him to be behind them on important issues. In his defense, he was in a tough spot on all of them because then he would be bucking Chuck Schumer and leadership. So those statistics are

very, very tricky, because in our state government, Democrats and Republicans both vote over 90% together. A lot of it is technical stuff. On the important stuff, when it came to something related to education or you remember infrastructure, obviously we parted company, even when it was a good idea. I was always amused when state Democrats, none of them other than one or two, voted for the road funding bill, when that would have been their ideal piece of legislation until it was rolled out by Republicans. So that's mild compared to the dynamic out in D.C. So when it came to all the important topics, tax reform, health care, I don't think he had much latitude, including the Kavanaugh vote.



HPI: Was the Kavanaugh confirmation vote the decisive turn of events?

Braun: I think we would have won the election anyway. It wouldn't have been with as wide a margin. Where Gorsuch was the first, the first judge replacing Scalia, that was different. Chuck Schumer knew that was going to get across the finish line, so he allowed Heitkamp, Donnelly, Manchin to vote for Gorsuch. This was different. This was going to be the balance of the court. The whole proceedings in its rawness, really was shocking to many Hoosiers. Before then it was really neck and neck. We could measurably feel the difference not only from the polling we were doing, but the number of small contributions that came in. There was a big difference once Joe said he was going to vote against Kavanaugh. Then he was going to reconsider for a few days and then came back and said no. That was a big deal. I still think we would have won, but not with the margin we did.

HPI: I didn't ever see the Kavanaugh confirmation getting derailed. The Republicans had the votes. Dianne Feinstein just made a bad bet.

Braun: I think they did. They gambled, too, on tax reform. Now we've had a year of it and that's not an issue you hear them talk as much anymore because it's been a year of better withholding. It's not crumbs; it's \$1,500 and \$2,000. Many companies like mine have taken tax reform ... are sending less money to the federal government and that's great because they never deliver anything in return. But let's start sharing those benefits, if you can, with your employees so they don't look to government to solve problems. We gave two mid-year bonuses and I don't know if you remember, we lowered health care costs by \$1,400.

HPI: Oh yes, I remember.

Braun: I don't even think they thought it was true. It was like how can you do that? I also took on the health insurance companies 10 years ago and got a system that's sustainable, that's affordable, that lowered costs, covers preexisting conditions and no cap on coverage.

HPI: Did all the "China Mike" and "Mexico Joe" stuff work? I don't think those issues decided the election. A lot of people found all that stuff irritating and they also felt it was unfair to your company, one of the flagship enterprises in Jasper. It got pulled through the mud.

Braun: Anybody in my hometown and home county knew that was nonsense. I lived

there, was born there, and other than two years out East, have been there. They got hurt by that. They knew it was 90% lies and the rest distortions, but you know the game of politics, if you have any personal peccadillo ... I was in luck there. Then they turn to your business. All I can tell you is I never heard an ill word about my business until I ran for Senate. I mean, wow, zero. It's the lowest unemployment county in the state. We actually do well attracting people to work there. Some of that stuff that was trotted out was just crazy. I knew it was coming. I knew that was the way campaigns were litigated. The negatives we directed against Joe Donnelly was on his voting record. He did have involvement in a company, hadn't worked there in a while and was a part owner, but you can see there he paid the extreme price because it did send jobs to Mexico, and other companies did the same, but that all gets blown up into a major production. I think a lot of people did get sick and tired of it, on both sides.

HPI: Sen. Donnelly worked rural Indiana hard during his terms in office. His staff was respected on issues impacting rural Indiana.

Braun: It was because of his voting record.

HPI: You carried dozens of rural counties with between 65 and 75% of the vote.

Braun: I think I did that more effectively. I always look at what you've done throughout your life before you try to do something new. That's the only thing that's out there on the record that kind of gives an indication on what you're going to be doing next. Joe's voting record was what did him in. He never could turn the fact that he was a nice individual who didn't tee anybody off while at the time he was in politics. He had that going for him and not many politicians can do, but when it came down to sell Hoosiers that he was going to understand agriculture, really do something about health care costs, know something about infrastructure, I think that's where my real world experi-

ence got above the clutter a little bit and most voters could see a difference.

HPI: We had President Trump's tariff issues playing out right in the heart of the campaign, and yet you hung in there. The farmers I talk to believe the president has a long-term plan, they're sticking with him even though they were taking some hits. Was the tariff impact a problem for you at all?

Braun: I think I heard more about it from business owners than I did from farmers. Farmers had the most reason to complain about it because the Chinese are smart. Who did they aim the tariffs at? President Trump's most loyal political group. They like what he was doing in general but then they had to fight through the fact that their business has been challenging for three, four or five years due to low commodity prices. This even took soybeans down to a new low. They did not want any government help because they've been mostly weaned from that over the last several years. It was difficult. They hung with him. Most of them did.

HPI: Still are.

Braun: Yes, they still are. The help that was given through soybean subsidy was not as important in the fact that they had faith this was going to work out. What has happened with Canada, Mexico and the E.U. ... there's been a discussion and I don't know how many details have been worked out, but they came around several months ago. China was digging in and slapping counter tariffs out there. Of course, the Chinese have run out of things to do now.

HPI: The Chinese are starting to get a little nervous.

Braun: It's about a four-to-one ratio on imports and exports. They rely on them more than we do. Now they've come to the table and said, "We want to talk about it." Whether that's going to happen or not, who knows. There the main issue is down the road, and I've said it publicly, if tariffs don't fix it and get it to where you solve the issues with China, you're going to start hurting too many parts of the economy. There are other ways you made the peace with Mexico, Canada and the E.U. and you surround your wagons to force China through everybody being on the same page to change your behavior, stealing intellectual property, subsidizing key industries, manipulating currencies, all the things they do that nobody



else does.

HPI: You had the president in Evansville in late August and then the two late MAGA rallies ...

Braun: Southport on Friday and Fort Wayne ...

HPI: When Mark Souder and I were making our final forecast, we saw those rallies and the strength of the Trump brand and yet we saw the Fox and NBC/Marist Polls that showed Donnelly leading ...

Braun: Where were you guys? (laughs).

HPI: We knew the state pretty well and knew the Trump brand was strong. Did that seal the deal for you?

Braun: There's no doubt his coming in, as he did in Missouri as well, and it's ironic that we both ended up winning by

the same margins. We were both by the touters expected to lose in a close race or in a tossup at best. I think that along with the fact that I ran as an outsider; somebody who was coming from a different pathway than most politicians, the Kavanaugh hearings, it all took it to a 6- to 7-point margin early in the evening; high single digit plus until the urban counties came in late in the evening. All of that combined to give us a surprisingly wide margin of victory.

HPI: So you ran your campaign talking about how you handled health care for Meyer Distributing, and lo and behold on Friday, a federal judge in Texas strikes down Obamacare. So you have your work cut out for you when you get to Washington.

Braun: If there was one issue I ran on to distinguish myself from other conservatives, and I said it early, you should never go broke if you get sick or have a bad accident, you have to cover preexisting conditions, and no cap on coverage. I don't think it made it through because a lot of people thought it was political mumbo-jumbo that I couldn't back up once I got elected. I did it in my own business and this is kind of the formal nail in the Obamacare coffin because it didn't work. It was big health care and big health insurance in cahoots of big government, and never have I seen that work. It now, whether this is the official constitutional demise ... I don't think it makes that much difference. The American public wants you to cover preexisting conditions, no cap on coverage, keep their kids on insurance or have the option to do it until they're 26. Now we have to do what it never addressed, which is how do you lower the costs? That's not going to happen in big government until the health care industry gets more like most other industries, where it is transpar-

ent. They shrink themselves because they become more efficient and they don't want to do that naturally, and to me, this is in the hands of the health care industry or else it will just keep moving progressively to a one-payer system.

HPI: When you got to Indianapolis and the Indiana House, you were a self-described impatient freshman. Can you claim the same mantle in Washington? Can you elbow some of the longer serving senators and say I've been there/done that, I've impacted my business and become a significant voice on that issue as a freshman?

Braun: I got a bill passed, the regional infrastructure that I was told by my mentors, Tim Brown and Ed Soliday, it would take two or three years. I listened and then I decided to do it in one session, and we did it, Sen. Messmer and I. We got that teed up in our neighborhood. We've raised the money privately and local governments do the same and we've got a road project number and we're on the radar for that bypass and now regional corridor. I'm going to take that same kind of I-know-it-can-be done and not accept the inertia and status quo and see if it might work there. I know if it doesn't, the federal government is going to be even lower in its stock value than the 15% approval rating and there might be more people like me who get in there and aren't worried about getting reelected and make real change.

HPI: Have Sen. McConnell or Sen. Young pulled you aside and said be careful?

Braun: They know I'm smart enough to know you've got to pick your battles and not solve the world's problems because you're there. You've got to remember you've got a guy like Rick Scott, Mitt Romney from Utah ... we've got five business people in the Senate. I spent two and a half days with Mitt Romney because he was in on freshman orientation.

HPI: So will you be working with Sen. Romney?

Braun: Yeah, I think he comes from a different pathway from the corporate world and I'm a Main Street entrepreneur. I think Main Street entrepreneurs



may have a better understanding of how all this stuff works.

HPI: Anybody else in the Senate fit that profile?

Braun: Currently?

HPI: Yeah.

Braun: I don't know. David Perdue from Georgia is a business guy and Ron Johnson from Wisconsin. I think they'd be somewhat like that.

HPI: How many blue shirts do you have now?

Braun: Several now.

HPI: Did you ever wear anything but a blue shirt?

Braun: Nope. It became my brand after that first debate because I refused to put on a tie and wear a sport coat.

HPI: Good luck in Washington.

Braun: I'll try to get on committees that weigh in on infrastructure, weigh in on health care, bring some sanity to our budget process and agriculture. It's a big industry in Indiana and Donnelly was on it. So, hopefully that will all fall in place. ❖



CONTENT BY CARTER
strategic content creation and deployment

Holcomb discusses his 2019 priorities as his power expands

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Gov. Eric Holcomb loves his job, even a day after a school shooting in Richmond left a student dead, even after a year of watching his state grapple with the opioid crisis.

He calls being governor “the most fulfilling job I have ever had” and used Taylor University’s “Silent Night” basketball game earlier this month as a case in point. “You don’t have to wait until March to experience basketball madness,” Holcomb began. “When you go 10 points in silence in a basketball game, it’s completely silent, 1,800 people, standing

room only, silent until the tenth point is scored, and then the fans erupt, storm the court ... they’re all dressed up in costumes. It is crazy. And then at the end of the game, they all sing every verse of ‘Silent Night.’ It is goosebumps crazy.”

A governor needs a night like that when the day job can mean consoling and encouraging a middle-aged female heroin addict, or praising a school teacher for disrupting a school shooter, or consoling the mother of a student who committed suicide after tipping off the school.

Holcomb ends his second year in office with his approval rating in the Ball State University Hoosier Poll at 52%, with just 13% disapproving. He will welcome back General Assembly Republican supermajorities in January after spending part of the fall stumping for the ticket. And seasoned legislative leaders like David Long, Luke Kenley and Brandt Hershman are giving way to a new generation of leaders, presumably giving the governor greater clout.

Holcomb spent last Friday conducting year-end media interviews, and this one for HPI took place mid-afternoon, with First Dog Henry making an entrance. Last week HPI exclusively reported that Eric Holcomb for Indiana had posted \$3.6 million while Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch

has \$750,000. He said the two will likely run again in 2020 after he makes a final decision following the 2019 session. There is no obvious Democrat challenger on the horizon, when in past cycles at this juncture one would see conspicuous characters building campaigns and raising money.

So, it would appear to be a foregone conclusion, though one media competitor wrote last week that Holcomb is being considered for an ambassadorship to Italy.

Press Secretary Rachel Hoffmeyer told HPI, “Don’t know where that rumor came from.” HPI pressed: “Not under consideration? Governor will fill out his term? Just making sure.” Hoffmeyer responded: “You are correct. That is not accurate info.”

The governor faces a tough legislative session even with the super-majorities. He ordered reports on the Department of Child Services, another on school safety, and is preparing to dedicate an additional \$300 million to protect Hoosier kids. That could keep him from prioritizing more funds for teacher salaries.

A week earlier, he and ISTA President Theresa Meredith presented a united front as he unveiled his agenda at Trader’s Point Creamery. Meredith didn’t appear to be on the same page the following Monday, with reports she was getting pushback from her members.



“Many teachers have gone as many as 10 years without a meaningful pay increase, all while facing increased insurance costs, paying for their own classroom supplies and taking on second and third jobs just to make ends meet,” Meredith said. “A walkout, a day of action in their home

communities, any number of things could happen. If that's what our members decide to do, then we will have to work within that."

Holcomb will also implement 18 school safety recommendations, will push for hate crime legislation with an "active voice," and can further extend his power by pushing up the appointed school superintendent post in 2020, as opposed to 2024. This will allow him to choose his own superintendent, a dream of many past governors, some of whom had to work with an official from the other party.

Holcomb governs in a decisive manner. He shocked some of his supporters by unveiling a toll road increase for truckers last summer that was prepared under the radar. Some legislators are pushing back on that type of authority.

But Holcomb finds himself in about as strong a position as any governor can be. His mentor, Mitch Daniels, found the final two years of his first term and first two years of his second with a Democratic House led by B. Patrick Bauer. Holcomb finds his party firmly in control with Speaker Brian Bosma and President Pro Tem Rod Bray in place, along with an emerging fiscal team of Sens. Ryan Mishler, Travis Holdman, and Reps. Todd Huston and Holli Sullivan shaping the upcoming biennial budget.

Holcomb calls them all "friends" and seems confident he will steer events in the coming year to his advantage.

Here is our HPI Interview with Gov. Holcomb:

HPI: Are you enjoying being governor?

Holcomb: Yes. It wears well. It's the most fulfilling job I have ever had. I've enjoyed in life everything I've done to date. But the scale of good in which you can help affect in other people's lives when you have a good team, and we do, or if you have the right head and heart – there's no close second. I served in the Navy and I used to say all the time that was my favorite time in life. I had some pretty good duty, too. That was another experience where you felt like you were part of a greater cause. This, with multiple agencies of incredible leaders, who could be going on and doing other things in life, but they are fired up and revving the charge daily and they are feeding off it.

HPI: We seem to be seeing some stability in the administration. I'm not hearing about many departures. Do you expect most of the crew to stay on?

Holcomb: I hope so, but I also realize – and I'm one of two kinds of leaders, there are some against people leaving and there are some that are prepared for it and want to help others in development. I love the leadership we have in place. I'm in constant communication with all of them. Those lines aren't just open, they are busy. But I get that if someone is called to a higher purpose or the grind is just too much, these are 24/7 jobs. You don't wake up and say, "Today's going to be an easy day." Ever. But that is the type of people we've attracted from across the spectrum of all agencies. And, by the way, I don't stress this enough, if you come to one of our ugly Christmas sweater receptions, we have a little fun along the way.



HPI: I've noticed.

Holcomb: We all have a sense of humor. You need it in this job. You get to see the dark side of life, too.

HPI: We saw that yesterday in Richmond with the school shooting there. I fear there are others coming. Two issues, the school safety thing and the report where you will be instituting those 18 recommendations, and then the opioid crisis. When you have a day like yesterday, what goes through your mind and what should you be communicating to Hoosiers who want to send their kids to school and believe they will come home that night? Even though the active protocols have been in place and followed, we are damn lucky ...

Holcomb: You took the words right out of my mouth. It is days like yesterday, and/or days learning about what Tia Coleman is going through, or days like learning that a school bus waiting to pick up children on their way to school and don't come home... these are tragedies on a scale I have a hard time comprehending. Or someone who fails in their attempt to beat the battle

of addiction. So for as many good times as we have, or as many records we break, there are constant reminders the world offers a different side of life, too. Yesterday we saw a young man struggling with demons – we'll know more later – erupt on school grounds. So the one thing that we're reminded, and I see these reports up close in Indiana and I see the reports nationally almost on a daily basis, these shootings at schools, or bomb threats that have been defused, or knives or violence of all sorts and what I think it reminds us of: A) there is no one solution that if implemented will erase evil from striking. B) It requires us to look at this holistically. Even doing a better job of recognizing and acting on all the early warning signs that we see as the investigation unfolds. I am optimistic that because of these two unfortunate incidents, that through some technology and some different practices in the future, we might be able to prevent, not eliminate, but prevent some of these actions before they get to the eruption. So for that, I am optimistic. As you say, through luck or divine intervention or protocol, all the above. I mean, Jason Seaman threw something. They went through the proper protocol and acted courageously. And yesterday, what we saw yesterday, actually saved lives. Another heroic effort from someone who tipped off; but for that, we would've had a different outcome. Life and death. My point is what we have to do is not just learn, but what more can we be doing? And not just saying something, we're doing something that gives people false hope that will eliminate a cause of the violence in the first place.

HPI: On the opioid crisis, I see (Drug Czar) Jim McClelland is saying that prescriptions are down 10%. Give me a snapshot of where we're at.

Holcomb: We're on the path to progress, but it's a long road ahead. This is ... the toughest part of the job. The number of people that, unfortunately, I meet that are in some stage of this struggle, the number from all walks who are just a few steps away from full recovery, but we're not there. So, yes, while prescriptions are coming down and the volume going into the funnel is narrowing, and Naloxone being administered is coming down and ER visits are coming down, in some places it's not coming down. One area that shows improvement are the number of local communities, county by county by county by county, who are coming together and being well conducted. That's where the most progress is being made. Those are the best practices that are bouncing around the state, whether they are in Bartholomew County or Clark County or others around the state ... of moving away from denial. We better get our arms around the problem, get our arms around a solution. All of them – law enforcement, the courts, local hospitals, schools, state government, federal government – how we align our efforts,

because it's abundantly clear that folks who are struggling with addiction or drug abuse of any sort, they can't do it alone. It's the struggle of their life.

HPI: Have you ever reconnected with the gentleman from Delphi? (Holcomb had talked of a man battling addiction during a 2017 HPI interview.)

Holcomb: No. I hope to one day. Someone a couple weeks ago told me, and it just kills me, they said it's just a lot easier to get off the road to recovery than to stay on it.

HPI: Your reelection bid. When do you make that decision?

Holcomb: After session. I kind of pride myself on staying focused and not getting distracted. And I can chew gum and walk at the same time and prepare for an ultimate decision. Obviously, Henry will make the final decision and my wife will chip in more than I.

HPI: Do you run with Suzanne (Crouch) again?

Holcomb: If I run, I hope she's my partner.



HPI: There's a good chance they'll move up the date on the appointed superintendent (of public instruction). I'm assuming you'll have a candidate in mind for the ticket in 2020.

Holcomb: I want to make sure of first things first, that we do in fact move up from 2025 to 2021. And that there is a seamless transition. So, we do need to be thinking about who the ideal ... candidate might be. We were pushing this for 2021 before and it didn't happen.

HPI: How do you resolve the situation with Attorney General Hill? Is this something you're going to live with? Have you met with him?

Holcomb: No, and I won't resolve it. Obviously, I spoke my mind. I haven't changed my opinion one iota. In fact, after reviewing the first investigation, then the second and the third, and I've said this before, I'd be a hypocrite. I was just a few steps away from Chief Justice Loretta Rush and we talked about a zero percent tolerance for sexual harassment. We cannot have any statewide

elected official, or any elected official for that matter, a lower standard than our employees. I haven't changed my opinion one iota. The case before him is his case. I have a job and I will stay focused on mine.

HPI: We're watching somewhat of an evolution on the teacher pay issue. You were pretty buoyed when you talked about meeting with Theresa Meredith from the ISTA. She appears to be getting pushback from her membership. Is this an evolutionary process?

Holcomb: I don't quite understand why she's getting the pushback from her members. I thought I was very clear in articulating ... we need to make progress in the short term with this budget, and we have to have systemic change and sustainable, structural change in the future, so we weren't every two years in terms of getting our teachers not just fairly compensated, but putting them in a leadership position in regards to our neighboring states and our region. I'm convinced next week when our budget forecast comes out, that's going to inform me on what percentage increase we can send to K-12 that I hope gets into the teacher paycheck, into the classroom. That forecast will inform what budget we submit in January.

HPI: While your team is intact, you'll be finding new players in the General Assembly, Sen. Ryan Mishler and Travis Holdman, Rod Bray. Obviously Dr. Brown won't be fully in the saddle. We've got Reps. Todd Huston and Holli Sullivan helping there. Talk to me about the new faces on the fiscal front you'll be dealing with. Will it make things harder or easier?

Holcomb: Longer nights for them. While they may be new to their posts, they are not new friends. I've known them all for years and have full confidence in them. I appreciate the camaraderie we have. That won't be the first time we've sat around the table, had coffee and talked about the issues that have far-reaching implications for our state. I have a high level of confidence in each and every one of them and look forward to 2019.

HPI: I was with Brian Burton and the manufacturers the other day and he dropped the most astounding statistic, that 45% of Indiana's workforce is going to retire in the next decade.

Holcomb: Yeah, opening up a million new jobs.

HPI: That's stunning.

Holcomb: It's the silver tsunami that I keep talking about everywhere I go.

HPI: Do you do what the governor did in Russia



and call for a "Day of Conception." I'm actually going to suggest that in a column coming up here.

Holcomb: You need to do that. You need to look at the birth rate and death rate of any county. Pick a county and look at birth rate and death rate. Howard County's birth rate/death rate is like plus 12. Or, pick out Rush County and do the same, or pick out the projections and people get giddy or happy when it's plus four. People! Not percent, people! This is part of the challenge. Yes, we have to attract those from outside to our state and welcome them.

HPI: This is happening in other states, too, right?

Holcomb: That's exactly right. So, what are we doing about it? Certainly we have to encourage people to have

more babies.

HPI: I'm going to do my part.

Holcomb: That is, of course, part of the equation. In addition to that, I want to do all I can while we're here... we're not flying over any rural, or suburban or urban area. Because part of what makes this state so cool, frankly, is we have diversity of options of where you can live.

HPI: So, broadband expansion and the bike trail.

Holcomb: It all fits in. Our infrastructure is all about quality of life and place. It's not that sexy a topic when you're talking about connecting, but when you're talking about 400,000 Hoosiers are living in an Internet darkness who are not connected, who are unserved in 2018, (that's) unacceptable. And when you can do it anywhere, if you are connected to the world, and you can be in Hope, Ind., with technology that's available, how do we as a state with public/private partnerships make the business model work? We are going to prove in the State of Indiana we are, in addition to trails, stitching together communities like never before, with large legacy projects, in addition to smaller projects like hiking and biking trails, these are all factors that feed off themselves. When businesses are looking, or people are looking at where do they want to live, and grow, a state like Indiana with its act together fiscally, also has to have its act together in terms of community development. Because people want to move to vibrant growing areas that offer in your backyard or Mass Avenue, or in Brown County in the middle of the woods in a cabin – you can have them both. ❖

Roberts influence could eclipse Pence

By MARK SCHOEFF JR.

WASHINGTON – Vice President Mike Pence is the Hoosier with the highest profile in Washington, but in 2019, the most influential person from Indiana likely will be Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts Jr.



Just before Thanksgiving, Roberts had an enough-is-enough moment when it came to President Donald Trump's repeated bashing of federal judges who hand down decisions that contradict his policies. "We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges," Roberts said in a Nov. 21 statement. "What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them."

Trump wielded the cudgel against the federal bench again late Wednesday night, as the White House released a statement criticizing a judge who struck down a Trump administration asylum rule.

Roberts is the steward of an institution that is still willing and able to provide a check and balance to Trump. The Republican-led Congress didn't offer any resistance during the first half of Trump's term until late this year, when the Senate rebuked him by passing a resolution implicating Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Roberts is poised to be the court's swing vote now that conservative Justice Brett Kavanaugh has replaced retired Justice Anthony Kennedy.

Following the fierce battle over Kavanaugh's confirmation – which contributed to the losses of several Democratic Senate incumbents who voted against him, including Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly – polls show that Americans view the high court as another partisan outpost.

Roberts wants to restore the perception that the Supreme Court rises above politics and is an independent arbiter of policy brawls rather than a participant in them. How he goes about this task will help define the last two years of the Trump presidency.

"The Supreme Court has been quiet in the months since Justice Brett Kavanaugh's wildly polarizing confirmation," Axios reported on Wednesday. "And that's how Chief Justice John Roberts seems to want it. With Justice Anthony Kennedy's retirement this summer, Roberts is

more in control of the court's direction than he has ever been."

Roberts may again be the decisive vote in a ruling on the Affordable Care Act, which was recently struck down by a Texas district judge in a decision sure to be appealed – perhaps all the way to the Roberts Court.

How will Pence's role evolve?

The primary achievement of the Trump administration so far has been to create uncertainty – from domestic, economic and foreign policy to the constant churning of White House and cabinet personnel. Pence is now getting caught up in this whirlwind, with speculation over the last couple of weeks about whether he will remain on Trump's ticket in the 2020 election.

A CNBC report on Wednesday said that Pence is safely ensconced as Trump's running mate and that Pence indicated he's "ready to defend the administration against a Democratic onslaught."

If Pence becomes Trump's election attack dog, it could tarnish Pence's image as the more stable and able alternative to Trump. But so far, at least publicly, Pence has kept his head down and stayed out of Trump's way – seemingly in an effort just to get through this administration intact so that Pence can run for president himself.

Rather than trying to rein in Trump's pugnacious and divisive tendencies or steer the president toward policy victories, Pence has been more of a loyal bystander. That's good for survival in Trump's mercurial world. But it diminishes Pence's gravitas.

In 2019, Pence's challenge will be to carve out a policy area – or some kind of initiative – that is uniquely his and that he alone brings over the finish line. Space policy, while important, is not that issue. It will take something that has more of an immediate impact on American's daily lives.

Governance has never been Pence's strength. He's always been more comfortable as an avatar of Christian conservatism. But in 2018, Pence didn't seem to have a good political touch, as Democrats pummeled the GOP in suburban districts to gain more than three dozen House seats and take control of the chamber.

Yes, Republicans added to their Senate majority. But the Trump-and-Pence roadshows helped the party garner only two more seats in an election atmosphere that could not have been more favorable.

Trump's 2020 re-elect, with an economy that could be stumbling rather than galloping, will be a much tougher slog. Trump may not want to admit it, but he will need Pence's help to win a second term.

That means Pence will have to raise his game. ❖

Schoeff is HPI's Washington correspondent.



Mayoral races unfold in Elkhart, South Bend

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Decisions, or lack thereof, are now roiling several mayoral races around the state.

Elkhart Mayor Tim Neese abruptly pulled the plug on his reelection campaign as a police scandal was poised to engulf his effort. "Serving as mayor of the City of



Elkhart has been a great honor," Neese was quoted in the news release. "Each day presents a new opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of others. That has been my number one priority since the

day I decided to run for mayor. My greatest achievement, however, has always been my family. The titles of dad and grandpa are more important than the title of mayor."

Neese asked police Chief Ed Windbigler to resign earlier this month. Neese told WSBT-TV he felt there were inconsistencies when it came to discipline and felt he should have known earlier about the video that shows two police officers punching a handcuffed man. But he said there was "no one issue" behind his decision to end his reelection bid.

ProPublica reported that Elkhart County Republican Party chairman Dan Holtz said he had heard of Neese's decision only minutes earlier, when the mayor's office released the announcement. Holtz said he was "sort of surprised, a little bit disappointed, because I thought he was running for reelection and I think he's done a good job." Republican City Councilman David Henke said Tuesday he plans to run for mayor next year.

In South Bend, Mayor Peter Buttigieg's decision not to seek a third term was expected as he's flirted with a presidential bid, and there are at least five candidates already working to replace him. Councilman Oliver Davis, James Mueller, Jason Critchlow, Lynn Coleman and Aaron Perri confirmed their interest Monday to the South Bend Tribune. Mueller, 36, Buttigieg's executive director of community investment and the mayor's friend since they graduated together from St. Joseph High School, said he will

form an exploratory committee and hopes to announce a decision in early January.

Davis had a campaign website up and running within hours of Buttigieg's announcement. "South Bend is the epitome of a transformation. The goal of all our community, safety, infrastructure, and economic work is for our residents to thrive in all of our neighborhoods," Davis said. "Through extraordinary perseverance, achievement, and innovation, Oliver Davis fully expects the city of South Bend to continue to blossom into one of the premier cities in the Midwest."

In Indianapolis, State Sen. Jim Merritt had been expected to challenge Democrat Mayor Joe Hogsett, but instead of entering the race, Merritt quit as Marion County Republican chairman. "I feel this is the perfect time to pass the baton of leadership to those who will take our county party to the next level," Merritt said.

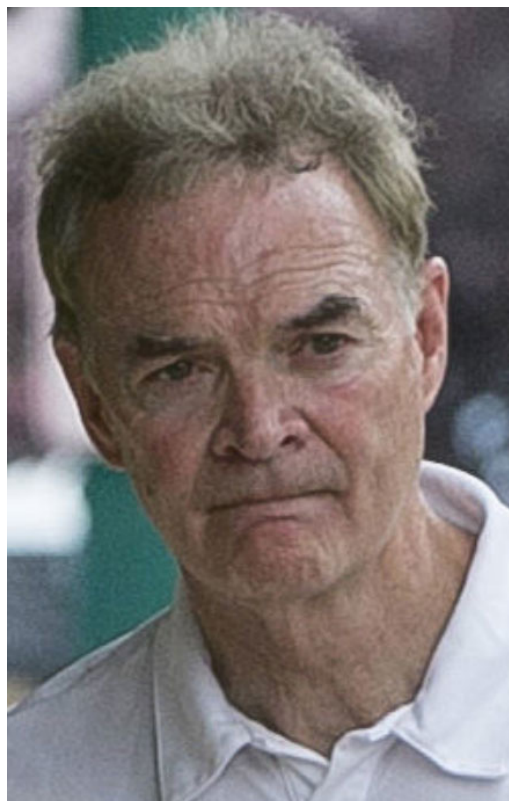
When Hogsett declared for reelection in early December, Merritt characterized it as a "seemingly reluctant decision to seek reelection." But he now finds himself in a similar mode. Last August, Merritt told HPI, "If I get reelected in November, I'll take the month of November and seek out opinions, seek out money sources and create a vision for the future of Indianapolis. I will be thinking, as a state legislator, how I can help Indianapolis to become a better place to live. The month of November will be a very busy month for me." But Merritt defeated Democrat Derek Camp 51.4% to 48.6%, or by just 1,609 votes on Nov. 6.

Republicans Christopher Moore and John Schmitz have declared, but have little experience. Former councilman Jose Evans and State Rep. Cindy Kirchhofer are mulling a run.

There are also races brewing:

Muncie: A longtime local business owner has joined the race for the Muncie mayor's office. Andrew Dale announced Friday afternoon (Muncie Star Press). The Democrat will challenge Mayor Dennis Tyler in the primary. Republican Nate Jones is the second candidate to announce he will seek the Republican nomination.

Portage: City Councilwoman Sue Lynch (D-At Large) announced her candidacy Friday for mayor. Lynch, a 23-year resident of Portage and a lifelong resident of Porter County, has served on the Portage City Council since 2008. According to Lynch, her campaign will focus on restoring trust in local government, after three long years of endless negative headlines, and refocusing attention on the City's financial health and future. "After many months of consideration, I have decided to run for mayor because I



Elkhart Mayor Tim Neese abruptly pulled the plug on his reelection bid as a police scandal widened.

believe citizens have lost trust in our government," Lynch said. "For years, Portage has suffered from a lack of strong leadership at the top. It is time to bring civility, honesty and good government back to our City. For the past 11 years, I have been a full time Councilperson and that will continue if I'm elected Mayor." Portage Mayor James Snyder, a Republican, is facing a Jan. 14 corruption trial.

Kokomo: Democrat Mayor Greg Goodnight will make his plans known in January. Dave Trine, a former Howard County Commissioner, Kokomo police officer and Department of Revenue agent who now runs Choo Choo McGoo's, is the latest to publicly confirm his interest in next year's mayoral election. Trine said Monday that he is "thinking about" running for mayor and expects to announce his decision "probably around the first of the year." He will run as either an independent or a Republican. Last week, Kokomo Police Capt. Kevin Summers declared his sudden and immediate retirement, one day after rocking the city's political landscape by announcing his intention to seek the Democratic nomination for mayor in 2019 (Kokomo Tribune). Summers, one of the most visible and familiar law enforcement officers in Kokomo as recently as last week, ended his time as a KPD officer with a brief, unceremonious letter submitted to the department's leadership: "Effective immediately, I am retiring from the Kokomo Police Department," he wrote, closing the book on a two-decade career.

Logansport: Mayor Dave Kitchell is wrapping up his third year, a position he said he does not consider a job, but a calling as he announced for reelection (Logansport Pharos-Tribune). "Because I feel called to continue to serve you and further our community, I'm asking you tonight to take this path further with us," he told colleagues and supporters Tuesday at Boondocker's. "I believe in the people that define Logansport, Indiana, and I will seek a second opportunity to serve you as your mayor in 2019." Kitchell went on to express his gratitude toward his administration's department heads, appointees and those who serve on city council along with the boards, commissions and authorities the city is involved with.

Washington: Washington Fire Chief David E. Rhoads announced Friday he is seeking the Democrat nomination for mayor (Grant, Washington Times-Herald). "I've worked for the city of Washington for the last 27 years and have served as fire chief for the last 12," said Rhoads, who is a lifelong resident of Washington. "I've worked under three mayors and four administrations of both parties. I've seen and have been a part of a lot of projects through city council and have seen our city grow through the years." Rhoads is the first Democrat to announce running for the mayor's seat. Republicans Diana Snyder and Jerry Sidebottom announced their intentions to run earlier this month.

Tony Bennett returns to Clark Council

Current Clark County council member Dr. Tony Bennett was caucused in on Monday to a familiar role

(Goforth, [News & Tribune](#)). As of Jan. 1, 2019, the Republican will continue serving on the county council, but in a vacated at-large seat rather than the District 2 seat he's held since fall of 2017. Republican Terry Conway currently holds the at-large seat that Bennett will assume. Conway's term expires Dec. 31, 2020. However, he submitted his resignation effective Dec. 31, 2018, so that he can fulfill



his role as the county's recorder. He was elected to that office in November and will take over the role on Jan. 1, 2019. Noel said the Republican party is filling the vacancy because Conway was voted into the council's at-large seat as a Republican. Conway provided a 30-day notice for his resignation, Noel said, and the Republican party posted the vacancy on Dec. 5. He added they are required to give a 10-day notice. Bennett was the only one to submit the paperwork

needed to fill the spot, and he was unanimously approved at the Monday caucus, Noel said. Bennett did not run for his District 2 seat this past November. Instead, Democrat Janne Newland defeated Republican James "Bubba" Dispo-nett and Libertarian Greg Hertzsch for the spot. Noel said he is pleased Bennett wanted to continue serving on the council. "I've been very impressed with him on the council," he said. "He brings a lot of experience with numbers and finances." Bennett said he is excited to remain on the county council. "I was happy to do it," he said.

General Assembly

HD7: Deal replaces Rep. Taylor

Indiana's top Democrat, citing state law, said Tuesday that he won't let a South Bend man run in a caucus vote Thursday to replace outgoing state Rep. Joe Taylor because of his 1996 murder conviction. As a result, Mishawaka Common Council Member Ross Deal will become the new state representative for House District 7 (Parrott, South Bend Tribune). Jas (pronounced Jazz) Alexander, 45, who served 17 years in prison after a jury convicted him of fatally shooting a man in South Bend in



1995, had filed his candidacy for Taylor's House District 7 seat, along with Deal. But state party chair John Zody, who is overseeing the caucus scheduled for 5:30 p.m. at UAW Local 5 Headquarters in South Bend, said he didn't know about Alexander's conviction until reading about it in a story The Tribune posted on its website Tuesday. "I called Mr. Alexander, we had a conversation," Zody said. "I informed

him of what the state law said, that it was a disqualifying factor. He appreciated me letting him know that, and that's why we couldn't accept his candidacy." ❖

It's not a certainty Trump will lose in '20

By JACK COLWELL

SOUTH BEND – Democrats should nominate an avocado for president, if it offered the best chance to defeat President Trump. Campaign slogan: "Make America Guac Again."

Thus writes New York Times columnist Frank Bruni. A facetious suggestion, of course. Where would one find a viable avocado meeting the constitutional requirement that a president be at least 35 years old?

The point Bruni is stressing is that it's not a certainty that Trump will be defeated if he seeks reelection in 2020. So, Democrats better seek a nominee with the best chance to win, not necessarily the one with the best presidential qualifications on paper or longest admirable service to party and nation.



He praised Joe Biden highly informed, affable, real and superbly qualified. And, urged Biden not to run. Because ... well, how did Hillary Clinton's "impeccable credentials" work out last time?

Other political analysts also theorize that Democrats could lose again to Trump if they nominate someone beloved by sections of their party but with a lot of baggage accumulated over many years and lacking broad appeal beyond the Democratic East Coast and West Coast. They cite dangers in nominating someone like Biden, 76; Bernie Sanders, 77; or Elizabeth Warren, 69. Not just because of age, but also because of how vulnerable each could be to negative attacks, distorted or not, over statements and actions of the past.

For example, would key Midwestern states that Clinton lost in part because she was painted as swerving too far left really embrace Sanders, a proclaimed socialist? Wouldn't somebody new, younger, without so much baggage and emerging quickly and impressively as Barack Obama did, have a better chance to win? Maybe, but that's not a sure thing.

Would a new, younger candidate who has never faced the rigors and roughness of a presidential campaign hold up? Or crumble? Is there another Obama ready to emerge quickly and impressively? And if there is, what are the chances of winning the nomination in the long selection process of caucuses, primaries, debates, fundraising and organizing?

Predicting what presidential primary voters will do is like forecasting where lake-effect snow will hit off Lake Michigan. Lot of flakes. Who would have predicted two years before the last presidential election that Republican primary voters would pick Donald Trump? Or that the nation would then elect him?

While a dynamic young nominee with widespread national appeal would be the best choice of Democrats to challenge Trump, is there one who can convince millions of voters in the wild scramble of presidential primaries to give him or her the chance? Maybe, but that's not a sure thing.

So, perhaps it's too soon to rule out Biden. Of the "old-timers," Biden could be the best prospect to win and be an effective president.

Effective president? Yes, that should be a consideration, too. Bruni certainly wants an effective president. He argues, however, that the most important result is getting Trump out of the White House, saving democracy and the nation. So, if an avocado had the best chance to do it ... ?

Defeating Trump, though investigations are getting close, very close, is not a sure thing. As Trump famously said, he could shoot somebody on 5th Avenue in New York City and not lose his base.

Wouldn't Trump believers say he was justified in gunning down some dangerous Democrat, a threat to his presidency, who likely opposed building a wall and would welcome marauding caravans?

Democrats, who thought Trump never would be elected in 2016, should understand now that not just anybody could beat Trump In 2020. They also should seek more than just replacing a lemon with an avocado. ❖

Colwell has been covering politics over five decades for the is a South Bend Tribune columnist.

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

Unvarnished economic information revealed

By **MORTON MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Last week we promised the data to back up the disquieting claim that “Indiana is not, and has not been, outperforming the nation in job or wage growth.”

According to the Census of Employment and Wages, Indiana added 323,000 private sector jobs between 2010 and 2017, years of recovery from the Great Recession and a 14.0% increase compared to a 15.2% growth nationally. “That’s nothing,” you might say. “Only about 28,000 jobs spread over 92 counties and seven years.”



True, but consider this: The seven states with 40% of the jobs in 2010 enjoyed 52% of the job growth. California alone increased its job count by 2.5 million, more than the entire number of Hoosier jobs in 2010 (2.3 mil-

lion).

Within Indiana, 78 counties gained employment, led by Marion County with an increase of 50,400, ranking first in numeric growth, but only 36th in percent increase. Vigo County had the distinction of losing the most jobs (829) while Martin County lost 15.1% of its jobs.

Look then at average annual wages. Nationally, the nominal increase was 19.1%; Indiana ranked 28th at 18.4%. During this period the Consumer Price Index rose by 12.4% bringing our real wage increase, adjusted for inflation, down to approximately six percent over seven years.

Relative to the national average annual wage, Indiana had a slight decrease, but staying close to 16% below the national average. We were one of the 20 states below the national average in 2010 that fell further behind by 2017. Sixteen other states below the national average managed to rise toward that number. Five states, which in 2010 were above the national average wage, managed to rise even further.

Among Indiana’s 92 counties, 85 saw average annual wages advance faster than inflation. Gains twice as fast as inflation were seen in seven counties, ranging from 24.9% in Sullivan County to 44.3% in LaGrange County. Losing out to inflation were seven counties, including Grant and Vermillion.

In 2010, only four Indiana counties exceeded the national average of \$46,455 (Posey, Pike, Vermillion and Marion). By 2017, only three (Posey, Pike and Marion) exceeded the national average of \$55,338.

Of the 12 counties above the 2010 state average, only three (Hamilton, Bartholomew and Gibson) saw their average wages gain relative to the state. Seven declined relative to the state, but remained above the state average of \$46,424. However, Warrick and Ripley slipped from their elite status to positions below the state average.

Of the 80 counties below the 2010 Indiana average, 47 closed the gap with the state average, with Elkhart and DeKalb breaking through to surpass the state average. That left 33 counties sinking further below the state average, with Dearborn and Grant taking the hardest hits.

An opinion piece in The New York Times (12/16/2018) offers a grim prognosis for states like Indiana and its many rural counties. We’ll take that up in a forthcoming column. ❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist. Reach him at mortonjmarcus@yahoo.com. Follow his views and those of John Guy on “Who gets what?” wherever podcasts are available or atmortonjohn.libsyn.com

ISTA doesn’t have the clout it used to have

By **RICH JAMES**

MERRILLVILLE – There was a time when the Indiana governor and state legislators would fear the wrath of Hoosier educators, particularly the Indiana State Teachers Association.



Teachers, after all, were a powerful force. And if they targeted a legislator for defeat, they might well have sent him or her packing.

Well, the governor has angered teachers on the eve of the 2019 legislative session that begins Jan. 3. And the Republican-controlled Legislature is about to do the same.

At issue is Gov. Eric Holcomb’s stance that it could be four more years before the Legislature approves enough money for substantial teacher raises. But, Teresa Meredith, the ISTA president, says that is unacceptable and that things need to be done during the upcoming session to ensure teacher pay hikes.

Meredith suggested there could be teacher walk-outs, just as there were in GOP-controlled states across the country last fall. There is an urgency, Meredith said, because Indiana teachers are being paid less than those

in neighboring states and make well less than the national average. And, she said, some Indiana school districts are having trouble retaining quality teachers.

Holcomb says he isn't blowing off the teachers, but that he and the legislators need to find a way to come up with the money. And the governor was firm about not touching the state's \$1.8 billion reserve fund.

So, why aren't Holcomb and the Republicans worried? Well, the ISTA no longer is the force it once was. In fact it hasn't been for a long time. One only has to look back a couple of years to understand the decline of teachers' political power in Indiana.

Glenda Ritz, a Democrat, was elected superintendent of public instruction in 2012. She was the first Democrat elected to that position in 40 years. She had a tumultuous four years in office, with Republicans – especially then Gov. Mike Pence – beating her up at every turn. They even stripped her of some powers of her office. So inept are teachers today, that they couldn't even get Ritz,

one of their own, reelected.

If teachers couldn't get Ritz reelected, there wouldn't appear to be any reason Republicans should be concerned about drawing the ire of teachers when they seek reelection in the next few years. And why did teachers become a significantly weaker lobbying group?

One only has to look at the Republican Party over the last decade or so. The Legislature has decimated teacher unions, stripping them of the majority of their bargaining rights. As a result, the teacher unions no longer have the power – and in a lot of cases the desire – to take a stand and come away with substantial results.

Meredith and others will raise some hell during the upcoming legislative session. They will get their share of headlines. But in the end it won't matter. ❖

Rich James has been writing about politics and government for almost 40 years. He is retired from the Post-Tribune, a newspaper born in Gary.

What's surprised me the most about politics

By LEE HAMILTON

BLOOMINGTON – The other day, a friend asked what surprised me most about politics. This may seem strange, but I'd never really thought about the question.



My response was off the cuff but heartfelt. The biggest surprise is also among my biggest disappointments with American political life, the ongoing effort by politicians to suppress votes.

Yes, it's gone on for years. And in some respects, limiting the vote has been a feature of American politics since the beginning, when only white men with property could cast ballots. But when I began in politics, I assumed those days were past us, and everyone was on board with the idea that the more people who vote, the better. Boy, was I naive.

The truth is, people work hard to prevent other people from voting. To be sure, some voters do it to themselves; they're too busy, or they think their vote doesn't matter, or they encounter long lines and turn away.

But there is also an active, ongoing effort to keep people, often minority or poor voters, from casting their ballots. How do politicians accomplish this? Here's a short, and incomplete, list:

- They require voter IDs — and then limit which IDs are valid (a gun permit is fine, for instance, but not a student ID);
- They close polling places — usually (you guessed it) in poor and minority communities;
- They limit the hours polls are open;
- They conduct sweeping purges of voter rolls, often stripping voters of their ability to vote without their knowledge;
- They restrict eligibility for absentee ballots;
- They refuse to invest in the infrastructure that sustains voting, resulting in machines that break down and long lines that discourage potential voters.

The people who oppose making it easier to vote often cite as their reason that they're trying to prevent voter fraud. In other words, they're defending the integrity of our democracy and of the ballot.

But here's the thing: There is occasional voter fraud, and yes, it needs to be guarded against. But rampant voter fraud simply doesn't exist in this country. Efforts to prove that it exists have failed. Let's be blunt: there's no tidal wave of illegal voting in the U.S.

What does inarguably exist, though, is an epidemic of efforts to suppress the vote. Voting is a basic right of citizenship. It's the foundation of a democracy people's ability to participate and engage with the issues facing their communities and their country. That ideal lies at the core of American values, and I'm always mindful of the fact that a lot of Americans gave their lives for that ideal. Moreover, excluding groups of voters encourages resentment, risking protests and potentially violence.

I've always believed that you win power by convincing people that your ideas and proposals are right, or at least that you should be given the chance to prove that they're right. Winning power by keeping people away

from the polls is a perversion of what democracy is about. Our political institutions need to reflect the will of the people, and if you disenfranchise people, it means that our representative government doesn't reflect accurately the will of the people.

Because voting laws are in the hands of the states, there are plenty of counter-examples, states that have worked to make voting easier, to expand hours, to allow same-day registration, and the like. There's more to be done, especially making sure that the politicians who control elections aren't themselves running for office, as happened notably in November's elections in Georgia and Kansas. That is a conflict of interest of the most obvious sort.

This struggle, between expanding the vote and

trying to limit it, is ongoing. It's not going to be resolved any time soon. I'm always distressed when I encounter efforts to suppress the vote. But I take heart from the fact that over the course of American history, the dominant trend has been to expand citizens' access to the polls, and I hope that over the long term, we continue in that direction. ❖

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Economist thinking

By **MICHAEL HICKS**

MUNCIE – Hardly a day goes by when I don't speak with someone about their area's growing or shrinking economy. Much of the time my conversations are with business people or with folks who think about the economic vitality of a region much like that of a business. One difficult part of every such conversation involves explaining how economists think about growth, and how much it differs from the way a business thinks about its own growth.



Business people are typically good at business. They think about costs, market demand, advertising, reputation, competitiveness and attracting capital for expansions. These are all elements of a thriving business that often color both the conversation and thinking about a region's economy. It is typical for economic developers to use the language of business when talking about a state or city. However, the way economists think about economic growth in a city or state is vastly different. In truth, none of these business terms or the ideas that underlie them have any place in really understanding how regional economies grow or stagnate. Let me explain.

The dominant way economists think about economic growth is a simple one. The size of a region's economy is almost wholly determined by very few simple factors. In maybe the simplest framework, only the number of people and the dollar value of physical capital, like machinery, buildings and roads, determine the size of a region's economy. This formulation dates back to the late 1950s and won an early Nobel prize in economics, and remains a powerful way to think about the issue.

To illustrate this in Indiana, I used new data on county-level gross domestic product (the size of each county's economy) from 2001 to 2015. In this basic model, more than 90 percent of the difference in GDP between Indiana counties was explained solely by the number of people and the gross assessed value of all property in the county.

The implications of this are many. At the very least, it means that all the other 'businessy' stuff that communities try to do can explain less than 10 percent of the difference between the best- and worst-performing counties in our state. But, the economic model can do even more.

If we add a simple measure of human capital to the model, such as the share of adults with a college diploma, we are left with maybe 8 percent of the difference between counties unexplained by these three simple data points; number of people, the assessed value of capital and the share of adults with a college degree. This small modification of this statistical model causes the overall value of people on a local economy to increase and the value of capital to decrease. When we include education, we find that a 1.0 percent increase in people has about twice the benefit on the local economy, as does a 1.0 percent increase in physical capital (machinery, equipment and the like). Of course, our policies almost wholly ignore that result, but that is for another column.

This year's Nobel Prize in economics rewarded research on human capital and economic growth. My favorite insight from this work is that education not only makes people more productive, but it actually makes machinery more productive. Both of these effects have a single source, but two very different and highly beneficial effects.

There are other insights to these approaches, such as the fact that wages are heavily determined by the skills of those who live and work around you, making places with a higher share of more educated citizens better for

everyone. Research into economic growth is not isolated to these broad issues. There is important work on corruption, governance, climate, culture, health and other factors. However, all this research focuses on how these individual factors influence the productivity of capital or people. That is, this research focuses on explaining the factors that influence more than 90 percent of regional differences in growth, not the less than 10 percent.

In contrast, the 'businessy' ideas about a local economy just don't survive close scrutiny. Local reputation, advertising, local competitiveness turn out to be empty ideas. Even the most thoughtful issues around growth, such as local tax rates, are by themselves useless concepts. But, everyone already knows that, right? Taxes in fast growing Boston or San Francisco dwarf those of any Rustbelt town. Unless you contrast taxes (a business cost) with the quality of local public services (a business

benefit) you understand absolutely nothing useful about either.

Now, by all means, you can worry about your community's reputation, or solely about tax rates or the 'competitiveness of a region,' whatever that might be. You can worry about the weather as well. What unifies all these worries is that you can do nothing about them that helps your local economy. Ultimately, what matters for local economies are the fundamentals that cause educated workers to live in your communities. At least that is what economic research has been steadily concluding over the past half century. ❖

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Trump's post-midterm lame duck debacle

By **MIKE ALLEN**

WASHINGTON – President Trump [has botched the six weeks since the midterms](#), repeatedly making unforced errors that have produced weaker markets and political standing as he heads into next year's divided government and his re-election race:

Yesterday became "Dump on Trump" day for the president's usual allies, as Republican officials condemned his seemingly impulsive decision to withdraw 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) quoted a tweet from the Russian embassy in Washington that praised the decision, and added: "I found someone who is supportive of the decision to retreat from #Syria."

Inviting "Mission accomplished" comparisons, Trump declared: "We have defeated ISIS in Syria."

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) called the withdrawal "an Obama-like mistake" that "would be a big win for ISIS, Iran, Bashar al Assad of Syria, and Russia. I fear it will lead to devastating consequences for our nation, the region, and throughout the world."

Trump got rolled on funding for the border wall, with conservative commentators roasting his cave from

a shutdown threat with no assurance or even indication that full funding was in the offing. "WALL STALL ... TRUMP IN RETREAT," bannered Matt Drudge, who is usually supportive. And later: "PELOSI HOLIDAY CHEER ... DANCING AT BAR AFTER WALL WIN!"

Democratic leaders couldn't believe their good fortune when Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi came to the White House intent on branding the funding fight "the

Trump shutdown" and he did it for her, saying in front of cameras: "I am proud to shut down the government for border security.

... I will take the mantle. ... I'm not going to blame you for it."

Since Trump's rejection in the midterm election, the Dow Jones industrial average — with traders rallied over tariffs, tech and spreading pessimism — has lost 2,300 points, or 9%, with several slides following Trump comments. Stocks are on track for their worst December since 1931, during the Great Depression.

Trump's public auditioning of potential chiefs of staff made it look like he couldn't attract talent — then he hastily announced Mick Mulvaney as "acting" chief because, according to insiders, he was freaked out by news coverage suggesting the search was a debacle.

Be smart: All of this has happened before Democrats take over the House and get subpoena power. ❖

AXIOS



Sheriff Bradley Rogers, Elkhart Truth: The Elkhart County Correctional Facility has a current capacity of 1,000 inmates with an additional capacity of up to 3,000 if more housing units are constructed. Our average jail population during 2017 was 953 inmates. Today I have 900 inmates. When opened in 2007, the Elkhart County Correctional Facility was estimated to sustain the incarceration rate for the county for at least 25 years before new housing units would be needed. We had 626 inmates in 2007. Although Elkhart County continues to stay under our maximum capacity, other counties throughout the state of Indiana have not been as fortunate. Counties of all sizes continue to struggle with housing a high number of inmates in their facilities, often to the point of being overcrowded. According to a 2017 survey conducted by the Indiana Sheriff's Association, about 40 sheriffs reported over-capacity jails throughout the state. This is not sustainable. What changed? In 2015 the Indiana state legislature passed legislation (House Bill 1006) mandating that individuals convicted of Level 6 felonies and below complete their sentence in county correctional facilities instead of where they traditionally were sent, the state prison system run by the Indiana Department of Corrections. This temporarily alleviated the burden on the increasingly overcrowded prisons, but did not solve the central issue. Instead, it has simply been shunted over to our county governments and local jails for the local taxpayers to take the full burden of additional construction. Simply put, the deck has been shuffled but the same cards are there. ❖



Ken Davidson, Indiana Policy Review: Over the course of the past three years, obtaining information on Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts has been made difficult and in some ways impossible. In 2016, shortly after articles appeared in the quarterly Indiana Policy Review, the Holcomb Administration stopped publishing data related to local economic development agencies. Previously, residents could go to the website of the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance and view the required annual reports. Statistics regarding revenue and expenditures were compiled there and presented statewide down to parcel-level detail. In my home county, TIF revenue grew by 34% between 2015 and 2017 from just over \$66 million to \$89 million a year, according to data I compiled from the annual reports to the executive of 16 municipalities. Expenditures exceeded revenues in nearly every local unit. I was able to learn that in my city, Hammond, TIF revenues skyrocketed from \$6.5 million in 2013 to over \$25 million in 2017. The Indiana Legislature passed several provisions designed to promote transparency but failed to specify penalties for refusal to comply. For example, Indiana law requires political subdivisions to upload digital copies of all contracts over \$50,000. This provision is largely ignored by redevelopment commissions. There is no good reason that the Department of Local Govern-

ment Finance cannot publish the redevelopment reports as they receive them, as has been done in the past. As other states move toward more transparency, Indiana moves to hide this important set of data from its citizens. ❖

Thomas Friedman, New York Times: Ever since World War II, the liberal global order that has spread more freedom and prosperity around the world than at any other time in history has been held up by two pillars: The United States of America and the United Nations of Europe, now known as the European Union. Both of these centers of free markets, free people and free ideas are being shaken today by rural and beyond-the-suburbs insurgencies of largely white working-poor and anxious middle classes, which have not generally benefited from the surges in globalization, immigration and technology that have lifted superstar cities like London, Paris and San Francisco and their multicultural populations. Having just seen the shocking sight of Parisian stores boarded up right before Christmas to protect against rioting along the Champs-Élysées by some of France's yellow-vested protesters; after being told in Rome a few days earlier that Italy, a founding member of the E.U., could conceivably shuck off both the E.U. and the euro one day under its new bizarre far-left/far-right governing coalition; after watching Britain become paralyzed over how to commit economic suicide by leaving the E.U.; and after watching President Trump actually cheer for the breakup of the E.U. rather than for its good health, it is obvious to me that we're at a critical hinge of history. The core challenge for both the U.S. and the E.U. is the same: These rapid accelerations in technology and globalization have brought many more immigrants into many more remote corners of their societies — public housing in Paris today is dominated by immigrants — at the same time as many long-frozen social mores have changed — like acceptance of gay marriage and transgender rights — and as average work no longer returns an average wage that can sustain an average middle-class lifestyle. The middle classes that powered the growth of the U.S. and the E.U. in the 20th century were built on something called a "high-wage, middle-skilled job." But robotics and artificial intelligence and outsourcing and Chinese imports have wiped out a lot of middle-skilled routine white-collar and blue-collar work. Now there are high-wage, high-skilled jobs and low-wage, low-skilled jobs. But high-wage, middle-skilled jobs are vanishing, leaving a considerable cohort of people with stagnant incomes and burning resentments at the globalized city slickers who they think look down at them. When you simultaneously challenge all these things that anchor people — their sense of home, their job security, their prospects for growth and the social norms that, for better or worse, defined their lives — and then amp it all up with social networks, you can get a really ferocious blowback, as France's president, Emmanuel Macron, saw across his country. ❖

Congress passes stop-gap funding bill

WASHINGTON – The GOP-controlled Congress on Wednesday severely undermined President Trump’s drive for a border wall, embracing a short-term spending bill that would keep the government open but deny any new money for his long-promised wall along the U.S.-Mexico border ([Washington Post](#)). The agreement announced by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) would fund the federal government through Feb. 8, averting a partial shutdown scheduled to take effect at the end of Friday absent action by Congress and Trump. But the spending bill would not include any of the \$5 billion Trump is demanding for his wall, and it would punt the next round of border wall decisions into the new year, when a new Democratic majority in the House will have the power to stop wall funding from going through Congress. Without Congress, Trump’s only remaining options for fulfilling his wall promise would rely on a series of legally dubious strategies that face opposition from newly empowered Democrats at every turn.



Trump orders U.S. troops out of Syria

WASHINGTON—President Trump ordered a rapid withdrawal of all U.S. military forces from Syria, officials said Wednesday, marking an abrupt shift of the U.S.’s posture in the Middle East ([Wall Street Journal](#)). The U.S. immediately began moving a handful of personnel from Syria and will quickly extract about 2,000 forces over the next few weeks, officials said, ending a four-year military campaign against Islamic State on the brink of its defeat. “The Pentagon has an order to move troops out of Syria as quickly as possible,” a U.S. official said. The decision recasts U.S. policy in the Middle East, where the Trump administration has been working to defeat Islamic State, contain Iran’s expansionist ambitions and counter Russia’s influence

in Syria, where Moscow has a vital Navy base. The planned exit also worried the U.S.’s Kurdish partners, who risk losing vital backing just when Turkey is threatening to attack them. The U.S. has long said it would remain in Syria until Islamic State was defeated and local forces could prevent a new rise of extremist forces, and to press Iran to withdraw its forces from the country. While those objectives haven’t been met, Mr. Trump declared an end to the fight against Islamic State, or ISIS, in a tweet on Wednesday. “We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency,” he wrote.

Livid GOP senators castigate Pence

WASHINGTON – GOP senators leveled blistering criticism at Vice President Mike Pence on Wednesday for President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw from Syria, with multiple Republican senators expressing outrage and frustration ([Politico](#)). Pence was dispatched to the Hill as the administration began absorbing a torrent of condemnation from hawkish Republicans, who blasted the White House announcement that the U.S. and its allies have defeated the Islamic State in Syria and that some of the 2,000 U.S. troops battling the terrorist group will begin coming home. But though the criticism was directed at the president in Wednesday’s party lunch, Pence still endured an earful as he tried to make a presentation to the startled GOP about U.S. policy in the Middle East. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) told Pence he was “personally offended” to read about the decision in the news rather than hearing from the president or his aides. “We’re going to hold the administration accountable for this decision,” Graham recounted telling Pence. Graham declined to say how Pence responded. Pence declined to speak to reporters after the lunch.

ISIS used Elkhart child in video

VALPARAISO – In August 2017, an Indiana woman’s 9-year-old son appeared in an ISIS propaganda video, “promising President Donald Trump that the battle will not end in Raqqa or Mosul, but ‘in your lands’” (Ortiz, [NWI Times](#)). The video portrayed the child as an ISIS sniper with a rifle scope, federal court records state. Additional FBI-obtained footage shows the boy assembling a rifle and being coached on how to use a suicide belt. The child was in Syria under the care of his mother, Samantha Elhassani, and her husband, Moussa Elhassani, an ISIS terrorist fighter who was later killed in Syria. Samantha Elhassani, originally of Elkhart, was charged in federal court with aiding and abetting her husband and his brother by providing them tactical gear and funds between March 2015 and April 2015 “for their use in fighting for ISIS,” court records state. In July, Elhassani was initially charged. On Friday, a motion was filed by Samantha Elhassani’s attorney on an “emergency basis” citing the woman’s deteriorating mental health as the reason for her requested release from Porter County Jail.

Fed raises rates for 4th time

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve nudged up short-term interest rates for the fourth time this year, defying pressure from President Trump, but suggested it could slow the pace of increases next year in the face of new headwinds ([Wall Street Journal](#)). Fed officials voted unanimously Wednesday on the increase, which will bring the benchmark federal-funds rate to a range between 2.25% and 2.5%.