



Halfway point of General Assembly

Gov. Holcomb's health reforms, voucher expansion, social issues hang in balance

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – At the mid-point of Gov. Eric Holcomb's final biennial budget session of the Indiana General Assembly, House Speaker Todd Huston stated the obvious to reporters last week: "There are a lot of bills

filed about a lot of topics. And I always say, 'Don't judge us where we start, don't judge us in the middle – judge us where we end.'"



Where that end point will be at sine die on Gov. Holcomb's sprawling health care reorganization, an expansion of the state's educational voucher system, or the array of election procedural changes and the GOP's "anti-wokeness" agenda will become evident at the end of April.



New Ways & Means Chairman Jeff Thompson (left) and Senate Appropriations Chairman Ryan Mishler will help forge a \$43 billion budget.

All this comes in a record ninth consecutive Republican super majority session, although more Democrat

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CPAC time warp

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Let's crank up the CPAC time machine.

On March 20, 1981, there stood President Ronald Reagan, who told the Conservative Political Action Conference, "We've come to a turning point. We have a decision to make. Will we continue with yesterday's agenda and yesterday's failures, or will we reassert our ideals and our standards, will we reaffirm our faith, and renew our purpose?"

"This is a time for choosing," Reagan said.

In February 2011, the man behind the podium was Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, who Howey Politics Indiana described his Friday night Reagan Dinner speech at



"We are very, very close to being able to ignore Trump most nights. I truly can't wait. I hate him passionately. What he's good at is destroying things. "

- Fox New host Tucker Carlson in emails and texts revealed by the Dominion lawsuit against the network. .

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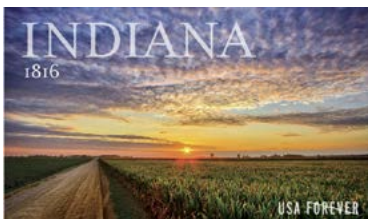
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Jack E. Howey
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CPAC as "at his Churchillian best."

Daniels said, "We face an enemy, lethal to liberty, and even more implacable than those America has defeated before. We cannot deter it; there is no countervailing danger we can pose. We cannot negotiate with it, any more than with an iceberg or a Great White. I refer, of course, to the debts our nation has amassed for itself over decades of indulgence. It is the new Red Menace, this time consisting of ink. No enterprise, small or large, public or private, can remain self-governing, let alone successful, so deeply in hock to others as we are about to be."

Daniels continued: "Purity in martyrdom is for suicide bombers. King Pyrrhus is remembered, but his nation disappeared. Winston Churchill set aside his lifetime loathing of Communism in order to fight World War II. Challenged as a hypocrite, he said that when the safety of Britain was at stake, his 'conscience became a good girl.'

"We are at such a moment," Gov. Daniels said. "I for one have no interest in standing in the wreckage of our Republic saying, 'I told you so' or 'You should've done it my way.'"

And then came last weekend.

On Friday night, the Reagan Dinner speaker was Kari Lake, defeated Arizona gubernatorial nominee, who said, "There's no hiding it. There's no sugarcoating it. They stole that election. The entire world saw that crime was committed in broad daylight on Nov. 8. They sabotaged Election Day."

Lake was referencing her own election, which she lost by less than 1% a week after she told supporters of the late U.S. Sen. John McCain (the 2008 presidential nominee) at a November rally, "We don't have any McCain Republicans in here, do we? Get the hell out! It was the party of McCain."

"I'm not just the most dan-



gerous politician in America – I'm the most dangerous politician in the world because we are not going to let these people win," Lake said.

Former president Donald Trump, who lost his reelection bid by 7 million votes in 2020 (and who spoke to CPAC the night before Daniels did in 2011), gave a rambling two-hour address on Saturday before a room not at capacity. "In 2016, I declared, 'I am your voice,'" Trump said. "Today, I add, I am your warrior. I am your justice. And for those who have been wronged and betrayed, I am your retribution."

Trump added, "They're not coming after me; they're coming after you, and I'm just standing in their way."

When Trump took office in January 2017, the national debt was \$19.9 trillion, according to the Treasury Department's Bureau of Fiscal Services. By September 2020, it stood at \$26.9 trillion, which was an increase of \$7 trillion, or 39%. It amounts to about \$23,500 in new federal debt for every person in the U.S.

In January 2017, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office



Mitch in Wonderland

Even close allies aren't sure whether Gov. Daniels will seek the White House

By BRIAN A. HOWEY
 WASHINGTON - The Indiana governor is famous for writing his own speeches and TV ads, and building intricate strategies and timelines to achieve significant goals.

But this past week, even the most ardent Mitch Daniels supporters weren't sure what they were seeing.

It was Mitch in Wonderland. As he viewed the elite Reagan Dinner crowd at CPAC and the rave reviews spilled in, many close to the governor weren't sure whether they were witnessing a campaign for president, or perhaps vice president. Catch some of these people at a different time and they don't think he's running. Another day and another hour, they do. Some see an audience of one - First Lady Cheryl Daniels - as the governor orchestrates this strategy clear to



Gov. Mitch Daniels addresses the Reagan Dinner for the American Conservative Union Foundation last Friday night in Washington, D.C. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)

only him and a few trusted aides and friends. In the national media gallery and within the various CPAC delegations last weekend, there was intrigue galore on the policy sense as there were whispers about the governor's marriage. It opened up questions about whether Mitch and Cheryl Daniels would be ready for prying media

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In the valley of the blind

By RUSS STELLWELL
 BOONVILLE - Everywhere you look, you hear that government is not working, that government needs to get out of the way and that government should not dictate to us how we lead our lives. My oh my, do we ever live in a strange world! Let's look at some of the more noticeable examples right here in our Hoosier State. It's a political gold mine for the political junkie unless you are a visionary. While calling for less government and for government to get out of the way, the Indiana General Assembly is



"I'm running against a teacher, a stripper and a karate instructor. Don't let the Village People in!"
 - Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott, at his campaign kickoff

was projecting that federal budget deficits would be 2% to 3% of our gross domestic product during Trump's term. Instead, the deficit reached nearly 4% of gross domestic product in 2018 and 4.6% in 2019 (Pro Publica). "Not since World War II has the country seen deficits during times of low unemployment that are as large as those that we project," Phillip Swagel, director of the CBO, said in January 2020. "Nor, in the past century, has it experienced large deficits for as long as we project."

Conservative commentator Charlie Sykes of The Bulwark observed, "Ronald Reagan proclaimed 'It's Morning in America'; Trump declared, 'I am Nemesis.' This is not, to put it mildly, normal political rhetoric, at least in the English language. But it gives a taste of the bleak storm to come."

Trump won the CPAC straw poll with 62%. Lake won the straw poll for veep.

Tom Nichols of The Atlantic noted, "Trump gave a long and deranged speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference this weekend. We need to stop treating support for Trump as if it's just another political choice and instead work to isolate his renewed threat to our democracy and our national security. Donald Trump went to CPAC and gave a speech that was, even by his delusional standards, dark and violent. Much of it was hallucinatory."

"It is long past time to admit that support for Trump, after all that we now know, is a moral failing," Nichols continued. "Anyone who cares about the health of American democracy, of any party or political belief, should say clearly that to applaud Trump's fantasies and threats at CPAC is to show an utter lack of civic character."

During his 1981 address – coming a little more than a week before he survived an assassination attempt – President Reagan told this story: "You know, one day the great baseball manager Frankie Frisch sent a rookie out to play center field. The rookie promptly dropped the first fly ball that was hit to him. On the next play he let a grounder go between his feet and then threw the ball to the wrong base. Frankie stormed out of the dugout, took his glove away from him and said, 'I'll show you how to play this position.' And the next batter slammed a line drive right over second base. Frankie came in on it, missed it completely, fell down when he tried to chase it, threw down his glove, and yelled at the rookie, 'You've got center field so screwed up nobody can play it.'"



"The point is we must lead a nation," Reagan continued, "and that means more than criticizing the past. Indeed, as T. S. Eliot once said, 'Only by acceptance of the past will you alter its meaning.'"

Reagan referred to a speech he gave on behalf of Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater in 1964. "I said, 'We've been told increasingly that we must choose between left or right.' And I'll repeat what I said then in '64. 'There is no left or right. There's only an up or down': Up to the ultimate in individual freedom, man's age old dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with an orderly society – or down to the totalitarianism of the ant heap. And those today who, however good their intentions, tell us that we should trade freedom for security are on that downward path." ❖

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bills have headed to the opposite chambers than expected.

This session has seen leadership advocate for legislation they have long championed. Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and Speaker Huston both testified on bills important to them. For Crouch, it was SB1, a mental health bill. And for Huston it was against an amendment to the bud-

get bill that would have removed a massive school vouchers expansion in the bill.

There has been a lot of talk about mental health this session, but it will be interesting to see if legislators put their money where their mouths are. Passing bills is one thing; funding them is another. So far, lawmakers also haven't been on board with fully funding the public health request from Gov. Holcomb.

For the next seven weeks, there will be jousting between the House and Senate over the proposed \$43.3 billion budget bill that will be the vehicle for the voucher expansion. While Huston is an ardent proponent of HB1001 and the potential elimination of “pathway” categories that could lead to universal access, Senate Appropriations Chairman Ryan Mishler signaled skepticism in a mid-February letter to his private school community.

“I feel obligated to share my experience with a voucher school so parents are aware of the weight that has been on the families in a particular community,” Mishler wrote. “This buyer’s remorse is the consequence of repeated deficiencies and the effects they are having on some of the school’s students and families. I hope families heed my candor, but if nothing else, let this serve as a transparent record of my time with the school.

“I would advise families looking at voucher schools to be aware they are on their own at this point in time,” Mishler continued.

By nearly all reports new House Ways and Means chair Jeff Thompson is doing an excellent job in his first year in this powerful post. He is described as accessible and thoughtful. The House has passed HB 001 and now awaits consideration by the Senate where changes are expected. Budget observers are closely watching the issue of funding of charter schools and vouchers.

In an interview with State Affairs’ Kaitlin Lange, Thompson was asked about the main sticking points between the House-passed version and potential Senate changes. “I suppose, it could be maybe the tax cuts,” Thompson said. “It could be the amount of the contribution to the pre-’96 fund. We obviously put \$250 million in the second year. The governor’s budget had \$100 billion up front. We’ll see. We’ll find a spot to land. I encourage [people to] find ways to make this budget better. I like to claim it’s picture perfect, and the Senate should just take it and they just agree to it, no amendments, but that’s probably not going to happen. We can improve things. Why should I stand in the way of that?”

Thompson also described Holcomb’s proposed health system reforms a “work in progress.”

“It’s going to be a process and we also think that we’re going to somehow engage the providers and the



Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch testifies on behalf of mental health reforms in SB1. (Twitter Photo).

providers are going to be the key,” Thompson told State Affairs.

SB1 (Sen. Michael Crider) will attempt to address the state’s growing mental health issues. It is a framework that would augment local mental health centers and the state’s 988 suicide hotline, which received a substantial part of the \$100 million in mental health funding in the current biennial budget. SB1 passed the Senate unanimously.

The Republican super majorities are following the “anti-wokeness” agenda favored by U.S. Rep. Jim Banks, and Attorney General Todd Rokita’s wing of the Indiana GOP as well as Fox TV’s Tucker Carlson and other national social conservatives. In the first half of the session, the legislature has passed the following bills:

- HB1008 (Rep. Ethan Manning) which establishes restrictions on socially responsible invest-

ing (ESG-Environmental, Social and Governance) by state pension funds.

- SB12 (Sen. Jim Tomes), which would ban “inappropriate” books from school libraries, establishing a process for parents to petition for book removal. The bill singles out school librarians and removes certain existing protections from felony charges while leaving those protections in place for public and college librarians. In an IndyStar op-ed, Oseye Boyd wrote, “Let me get this straight: To keep children safe in school – the place where they go to learn – we want to ban books, but we’ve done very little to protect them from school shootings.”

- SB480 (Sen. Tyler Johnson), proposes to prohibit gender-affirming care for transgender persons under age 18, even with parental approval.

- SB386 (Sen. Jeff Raatz), a bill to prohibit teachers or other employees from promoting certain concepts regarding age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, creed, color, marital status, familial status, mental or physical disability, religion, or national origin failed to advance.

- SB380 (Sen. Raatz) addresses an issue of students dressing as animals (furrries) although most edu-

cators say there is no problem. It passed the Senate in February.

■ HB1564 (Rep. Mike Speedy) is a bill that has remained relatively under the radar, giving the attorney general the power to enforce deceptive sales by businesses. Critics tell HPI that this bill is so vague as to give Attorney General Todd Rokita carte blanche enforcement regimen.

■ HB1608 (Rep. Michelle Davis) the "don't say gay" bill passed the House in February. It would prohibit the use of chosen names and pronouns by transgender students without written permission from their parents.

■ HB1186 (Rep. Wendy McNamara, pictured above) provides that a person who knowingly or intentionally approaches within 25 feet of a law enforcement officer after the law enforcement officer has ordered the person to stop commits a Class C misdemeanor. This is in reaction to a spate of civilian recordings of law enforcement during the arrests of minority citizens.

There have been a large number of bills targeting transgender students. Majority Floor Leader Matt Lehman, R-Berne, told the Capital Chronicle the higher number of transgender bills was more about "issues at the local level, most of those around education."

"It's clearly House Republicans playing to their base," House Minority Leader Phil GiaQuinta told reporters last week (Capital Chronicle). He attributed the focus on LGBTQ issues to gerrymandered district maps under which elections are decided during primaries.

On elections, while HB1428 establishing partisan school board races passed out of committee, that bill did not move out of the House. Partisan school board elections are not the norm. Some 41 states and the District of Columbia have nonpartisan elections similar to Indiana nonpartisan. Only four states have partisan school board elections. Five states give local school districts the option of choosing partisan elections. The Hamilton County GOP was very active in endorsing and advocating for local school board candidates in the most recent elections. Although these elections are nonpartisan, Indiana law doesn't prohibit parties from supporting local candidates nor does it prohibit candidates from using party labels in their campaign materials.

HB1344 (State Rep. Timothy Wesco), a measure adding further requirements to Indiana's already strict absentee voting law, passed the House and is eligible for consideration in the Senate. The bill would require additional identification from voters seeking an absentee ballot including a photocopy of a valid government ID or the submission of two ID numbers such as a driver's license number or the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security



number. Advocates, including a representative from Secretary of State Diego Morales' office, said it would establish confidence in Indiana's voting system, even though Indiana's system appears to be working well. Opponents say the bill adds additional hurdles to voters who choose to vote absentee, making it especially difficult for senior citizens and others who might not have access to a copier to meet the ID photocopy requirement in the bill.

On taxes, the two chambers continue to wrestle with ways to mitigate the impact of rising property taxes on Hoosier homeowners as well as potential acceleration of the state income tax reduction already underway.

There is evidence that Speaker Huston and Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray have found their sea legs. Lawmakers have appeared to work much more efficiently than usual this year. There were fewer late nights than usual in the first half of the session. ❖

Business pushes back at ESG

Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. — Conservative Republicans who want to thwart socially and environmentally conscious investing are now being pushed to water down their proposals after backlash from powerful business groups and fears that state pension systems could see huge losses. In both Kansas and Indiana, where the GOP has legislative supermajorities, bankers associations and state chambers of commerce criticized the strongest versions of anti-ESG legislation currently under consideration as anti-free market.

In Kansas, their opposition prompted a Senate committee's chair to drop the toughest version of its bill — applying anti-ESG rules to firms handling private investments — before hearings began this week. The Kansas committee was slated to vote Thursday but could postpone action on a milder version of an anti-ESG bill after the head of the state pension system for teachers and government workers warned that it could see \$3.6 billion in losses over 10 years if the bill were passed.

And last month, legislative researchers in Indiana reported that its pension system expected the first version of a House bill to cost the system \$6.7 billion over 10 years, prompting lawmakers to rewrite it before the chamber passed it. ❖

Rokita to seek reelect; Banks consolidates U.S. Senate support

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS — As expected, Attorney General Todd Rokita said in late February he will seek a second term.

"Confirming I am seeking reelection in '24," Rokita tweeted on Feb. 22. "I am proud of my work bringing



back nearly \$1 billion to taxpayers in just over two years, fighting wokeism, protecting citizens and our jobs from federal overreach, bureaucrats and special interests while always standing up for liberty."

Sources close to Rokita had been telling HPI that he liked being attorney general and was likely to seek a second term.

It ended speculation that he might seek the open U.S. Senate or Indiana governor's office in 2024. Rokita finished second in the 2018 Republican U.S. Senate primary to Mike Braun in 2018. Braun used more than \$5 million of his own money to begin an early TV ad campaign against then-U.S. Reps. Rokita and Luke Messer.

Braun is now seeking the Indiana gubernatorial nomination as well as another potential self-funder, Eric Doden in Fort Wayne. Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch has declared for the gubernatorial race.

In the U.S. Senate race, U.S. Rep. Jim Banks is attempting to clear that field after former Indiana governor Mitch Daniels opted not to run, as did U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz, who used more than \$1 million of personal funds to win a crowded 5th CD primary in 2020.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell will be appearing at a fundraiser for Rep. Banks. The event is being held at the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) headquarters in Washington. A source familiar with the March 28 event told Fox News Digital that it's being organized through Banks' Senate campaign and not through the NRSC.

Banks also released a list of law enforcement officials endorsing his senatorial bid: Max Weber, Noble

County sheriff; Jim Heflin, Blackford County sheriff; Troy Hershburger, Allen County sheriff; Art Moystner, Randolph County sheriff; Rodney "RJ" Robinson, Steuben County sheriff; Jeff Campos, former LaGrange County sheriff; Leonard Corral, Decatur Police chief; and Diana Moers, Vanderburgh County prosecutor.

There are two more figures to watch in the 2024 cycle. Gov. Eric Holcomb hasn't ruled out a Senate run, but said in December that he was focused on his final biennial budget session, which is expected to wind up in late April. Holcomb was seeking Indiana's other U.S. Senate seat in 2016 when then-Gov. Mike Pence selected him to replace Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann, who resigned to accept the Ivy Tech president's job. When Pence joined Donald Trump on the GOP presidential ticket, Holcomb won a second-ballot nomination via the Indiana Republican Central Committee.

Then there is another self-funder – former U.S. Rep. Trey Hollingsworth – who declined to seek another 9th CD term. Braun suggested in November that Hollingsworth is supporting his gubernatorial bid, and there is speculation that he might join a Braun ticket should the senator win the gubernatorial.

On the Democratic side, former White House chief of staff Ron Klain said on Twitter earlier this week that he would not seek the Indiana U.S. Senate nomination. Klain declared on Tuesday that he would "never run for anything – not my role."

Klain, an Indianapolis native and graduate of North Central HS, added, "I've helped others win, and I'll do whatever I can to help a Dem win #insen24," using a common hashtag for Indiana's 2024 U.S. Senate race."

That brought a derisive response from Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr., who ran unsuccessfully against U.S. Sen. Todd Young in 2022. On his Left of Center podcast Tuesday, McDermott said, "F--- you, Ron Klain. Right? What a d---," McDermott said. "Ron Klain: Your bosses, the big shots,

wanted Tom McDermott to run for U.S. Senate in Indiana, and I said yes. I busted my ass, I raised \$1.6 million, drove 75,000 miles, worked my ass off for 18 months, and Ron Klain, you freaking ignored us. You ignored me, and you ignored all Hoosier Democrats."

McDermott continued: "So you come in now and you say let's find some great candidates for U.S. Senate. Am I supposed to trust you Ron? You asshole! You freaking screwed me. You guys screwed me and all Democrats in Indiana when we ran," McDermott said. "I'm a veteran. I'm



a 20-year mayor. I was a good candidate. You had a good candidate and you freaking screwed me. So why are we supposed to trust this guy?"

McDermott told HPI in January that he intends to seek a sixth term as mayor (he's unopposed), and then run for governor in 2024. Other potential Democrats seeking the governor's race include U.S. Vatican Ambassador Joe Donnelly, and former superintendent of public instruction Jennifer McCormick.

Congress

3rd CD: Zay declares

State Sen. Andy Zay of Huntington announced his campaign (AP). Zay said in his announcement that President Joe Biden's administration has "failed," blaming it for high inflation and economic troubles. Zay is the first elected official to enter the congressional race, although the field of candidates could grow. Banks first won the seat in 2016 after narrowly winning a six-candidate Republican primary. Zay, who owns a vehicle leasing business, replaced Banks in the state Senate in 2017 by winning a vote among Republican precinct committee members. He easily won reelection in 2018 and 2022. So far Zay is the only declared candidate for the 3rd CD.



5th CD: Wyman ponders bid

Informed and reliable sources tell HPI that former Howard County commissioner Paul Wyman is pondering a run for the open 5th CD seat. That seat, held by U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz, is expected to draw a big field. Currently no candidate has declared for that seat.

Mayors

Indianapolis: Meriweather backs Shackleford

Gregory Meriweather announced Wednesday he is ending his campaign for mayor and supporting State Representative Robin Shackleford in the Democratic Primary. "I got into the race for Indianapolis Mayor to give voters an option for real change," said Meriweather. "There are so many issues that have not been adequately addressed over the last eight years – potholes, crime, poverty, landlords that don't fix sewerage in houses. It became clear as I campaigned and as more candidates got into the race that there is a need for unity in the city – not more division. In order to create more unity, I made the decision to

leave the race and support Rep. Shackleford." Meriweather explains why he is backing the Shackleford campaign. "We need a leader with her passion, her forward thinking and ability to be solution-focused; all of which are needed if we want to correct the problems in our city," Meriweather said. "Rep. Shackleford has the name recognition and political experience needed to lead the City of Indianapolis into a new era of economic growth, safety and diversity," Meriweather continued. "She and I share the same vision for Indianapolis – one that gives everyone a seat at the table and a voice. We want to solve the same problems – and together we can."

The senior pastor of Eastern Star Church is also throwing his support behind Shackleford. Pastor Jeffrey A. Johnson Sr. has grown the church to three locations with about 15,000 members. Johnson believes Shackleford is the right choice to become the city's next mayor. "I am honored by the faith, support and trust that my Pastor for over 25 years has placed in me," said Shackleford. "There are other choices in the race, including the incumbent mayor, and this endorsement means the world to me. I will work hard to be the voice for those who have felt for too long that their opinions are not heard – that includes all Indianapolis residents regardless of religion, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status and background."

Anderson: Watters outlines agenda

Democrat Tony Watters has outlined proposals to address the three biggest issues facing Anderson in announcing his bid for mayor.

Watters, 56, retired from the Anderson Police Department after serving 31.5 years and was a detective, major and chief of police. He is running in the May primary for the party's nomination against two-term incumbent Thomas Broderick Jr. and Rodney Chamberlain (de la Bastide, Anderson Herald Bulletin). In deciding to run for the mayor's office, Watters said Anderson was once the world headquarters for two divisions of General Motors. "If we had that potential 50 years ago, you can imagine the untapped potential we have today," he said in an email response to The Herald Bulletin. "This is my home and one of the best places in the country to live, work and raise a family. That's why I have never lived outside of the city limits." Watters said what's needed is to have progressive leadership in place and someone with a vision for the future and a plan for managed, responsible growth. He said the three biggest issues facing the community are jobs, drugs and homelessness. "Anderson needs to work harder to bring more jobs to the community," Watters said. "I have explored a number of business leads that will expand the skill set of our workforce, and we have the resources, the available real estate and the skilled manpower to make it happen." Addressing the drug problem starts with the cause of the crime, he said.

Zionsville: Stehr calls for transparency

Republican mayoral candidate John Stehr called for campaign finance transparency and accuracy from his opponent following a report in Indiana Legislative Insight, which cites repeated misreporting of the Burgess campaign's largest contribution disclosed to date (Howey Politics Indiana). "Our next mayor has to do a better job managing our town's financial resources," Stehr said. "It has come to my attention that my opponent has now *twice* erroneously reported the largest contribution her campaign has disclosed to date." The contribution in question is an \$8,000 direct contribution made by zPack LLC on December 16, 2022 – just two days after this entity registered as a single-member Domestic Limited Liability Company with the Indiana Secretary of State. "The voters of Zionsville deserve to know who is funding the candidates hoping to earn their votes. The relevant questions include: Who is behind zPack LLC? What is this mysterious entity's interest in our community's municipal elections? In going to such lengths to obfuscate this donor's identity, has Indiana's 'giving in the name of another' law been violated? It's not enough to talk about 'transparency.'" Stehr also announced that Kate Swanson would be his choice to serve as deputy mayor. Swanson was the first executive director of zWORKS, Zionsville's coworking and entrepreneurial center.

Presidential 2024

Trump says he won't drop out if indicted

Former President Donald Trump said Saturday that he would not drop out of the 2024 presidential race if he were indicted in any of the federal and state investigations he faces (CNN). "I wouldn't even think about leaving," Trump told reporters at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Maryland.

Trump wins CPAC poll with 62%

Former President Donald Trump topped the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) straw poll for the 2024 GOP nomination by a wide margin at the conservative conference Saturday (Fox News). Trump won 62% support in the poll, which was announced shortly before he was scheduled to speak to the crowd gathered at the Gaylord in Fort Washington, Maryland. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis came in as the second choice with 20% support. The third-place pick at 5% support was long-shot GOP candidate Perry Johnson, a businessman who attempted to run for governor in Michigan but was blocked from participating in the Republican primary. Mike Pence registered no support. Kari Lake, the Republican Arizona gubernatorial nominee in 2022, received the most support for the vice presidential candidate with 20%. DeSantis received 14% support for the 2024 vice presidential nominee in the CPAC poll.

DeSantis, Pence make case to Club for Growth

The two presumed front-runners of the 2024 GOP

primary field are headlining competing conservative political events this week as the race to the White House picks up (Fox News). Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, speaking in front of 120 of the top donors in the GOP, showcased that his conservative victories in the past four years in Florida have turned the one-time general election battleground "into the nation's leading red state." Also speaking at the confab is former Vice President Mike Pence; former ambassador and former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley; Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina; New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu; and entrepreneur, author and conservative commentator Vivek Ramaswamy. CFG President David McIntosh said the Club may end up backing a candidate as next year's nominating calendar nears, "but at this point, everybody wants to see how the race develops, who does well, and make that decision later."

Pence talks of potential '24 'advantage'

Former Vice President Mike Pence said Republican voters' familiarity with his story affords him some breathing room as he makes a decision on whether to launch a campaign for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination (WFIN). Pence isn't concerned that the clock is ticking, emphasizing in an exclusive interview Friday with Fox News Digital that "I think the advantage that we have is I think the American people know the Pences." "By and large they know our story and our career, and some are getting to know it better every day. So, we think we have time to be discerning, to be reflective, to listen," Pence said.

White House blasts Carlson

The White House lashed out at Fox News host Tucker Carlson Wednesday in an extraordinary rebuke of the late-night commentator who has been airing false depictions of the January 6, 2021, attack this week (CNN). Carlson, given access to about 40,000 hours of US Capitol security camera footage by Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, has aired carefully selected clips to portray the pro-Trump mob as peaceful patriots. Carlson falsely claimed that the footage provided "conclusive" evidence that Democrats and the House select committee that investigated January 6 lied to Americans about the day's events. According to the Justice Department, 140 officers were assaulted at the Capitol that day, including 60 Metropolitan Police officers and 80 US Capitol Police officers. "We agree with the chief of the Capitol Police and the wide range of bipartisan lawmakers who have condemned this false depiction of the unprecedented, violent attack on our Constitution and the rule of law – which cost police officers their lives," White House spokesman Andrew Bates said. "We also agree with what Fox News's own attorneys and executives have now repeatedly stressed in multiple courts of law: That Tucker Carlson is not credible." ❖

GOP target gains in South Bend, Mishawaka

By JACK COLWELL
South Bend Tribune

SOUTH BEND – Some things in South Bend and Mishawaka government seem never to change, election after election, decade after decade. But Republicans, coming off big wins in the county elections last fall, seek change this time: More wins in local races in both cities.



No Republican has been elected mayor of South Bend since 1967. No Democrat has been elected mayor of Mishawaka since 1979.

Democrats have won almost all the other city contests as well as for mayor in South Bend.

But Mishawaka has been unique politically. While Republican mayors win big in Mishawaka, sometimes unopposed, the city's voters select a Democratic-controlled council. And Democratic City Clerk Debbie Ladyga-Block has won big, sometimes unopposed, for eight consecutive elections, going back to 1991.

Will things change?

Certainly not in the Mishawaka mayoral election.

Mayor Dave Wood, highly popular and seeking a fourth full term, will win. He doesn't even have a challenger seeking the Democratic nomination.

Probably not in the South Bend mayoral race, where Mayor James Mueller seeks a second term. He does face a Democratic primary challenger and a Republican opponent in the fall.

But Republicans will seek this time to win the city clerk races in both cities and win additional city council seats.

They have momentum from wins in 2022 and a funding advantage. St. Joseph County Republicans already have funds for an all-out effort, including TV ads. And they will add proceeds from a May 13 Lincoln Day Dinner featuring Kellyanne Conway. It's \$90 a plate, \$125 if also attending a reception. A "platinum" sponsor of a front-row table for 10 pays \$8,000.

Republicans, with only a bit more than their usual turnout, won key races last fall when Democratic voters stayed home in droves. This time?

The tone of the campaign is likely to take on more

of the Washington style, as seen in negative attacks last fall.

If that happens in Mishawaka, it will be a big change.

Mishawaka voters have seemed to like their divided government, and it has worked smoothly, with bipartisan cooperation on everything from building the gleaming new government center to attracting private development.

The clerk race will test the tone, as Republican Louann Hazen, former executive assistant to Mayor Wood, challenges Ladyga-Block. Hazen left the mayor's office at the time of her filing.

In South Bend, Republicans have a real shot at winning the clerk race. Dawn Jones, the Democratic incumbent, has been involved in controversies. Both Mueller and a council majority have said basically that she is not competent for the job. If Jones survives the primary, she will be a big target. If she loses the nomination, there could be a party split.

Mueller has sought continuation of the growth, economic development and improved city image during the terms of Mayor Pete Buttigieg. There has been progress, but problems of crime and schools bring dissent.

In the primary, Mueller is challenged by Council Member Henry Davis Jr., who has baggage from the past, with such things as arrest for driving the wrong way for miles on the U.S. 20 bypass in 2014. He has overcome difficulties from back then and hopes voters will look at him now. Davis ran against Buttigieg in the 2015 Democratic primary. Buttigieg won with 78% of the vote.

Mueller is expected to win in the primary, though not by as big a margin as Buttigieg.

Then he would face Republican Desmond Upchurch in November. Upchurch is a serious candidate, not the



token challenger Republicans sometimes offered in mayoral races in past decades. But he is an untested candidate, even though actually coming close for county auditor last fall. He did not campaign extensively and came close because it was a time when all on the Republican ticket won or

came close.

While the mayoral races could fit the pattern, there could be some other big changes.



21st Century appeasers

By CRAIG DUNN

CARMEL — As an avid student of history, I am deeply motivated by the rallying cry of historians everywhere spoken by George Santayana in 1905, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

In this time of international conflict in the Ukraine, it might be good for some of our political leaders, particularly in the Republican Party, to consider their words and deeds carefully. While it may score a political point or two with the rabid populists who dominate the extreme right wing of the Republican Party, those vying for political office or for more time on Fox News need to measure themselves carefully. That is, unless they are hell bent on repeating some of the worst mistakes in history.



For this reason, I would like to ask Donald Trump, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, Rep. Matt Gaetz, Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Ambassador Nikki Haley and former CIA Director Mike Pompeo exactly when they would have acted to stop Adolf Hitler prior to World War II.

Would they have acted when, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, the German Army reoccupied the Rhineland? Would they have acted when Germany annexed Austria into Germany? Would they have told Hitler, at Munich, that any advance into Czechoslovakia would result in war? Would they have honored their treaty with Poland when it was invaded in 1939? Would they have defended France when it was overrun by the German Wehrmacht? Would they have provided military assistance to England during the Battle of Britain?

To hear the recent speeches of many far right political leaders frankly makes me nauseous and ashamed. Their strategy is crystal clear: Play the populist card and pander to the lowest common denominator on the GOP right.

Sure, it sounds wonderful to say, "Feed our hungry before providing weapons to the Ukrainians," or "Why support the Ukrainian army when we have homeless veterans right here in the United States," and "If we keep sending aid to the Ukraine, eventually our sons and daughters will be sent there to die."

Reps. Greene and Gaetz are merely firebombers who are the worst kind of political prostitutes. Work the crowd up, as on January 6, and then stand back and act like you are not responsible.

Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis both know that the radical right of the Republican Party votes in the primaries and will be a critical group to attract if they want to

be successful in 2024. Nikki Haley and Mike Pompeo know in their hearts that backing the Ukraine is a must, but fail to speak out on the issue for fear of rightist retribution. Frankly, former Vice President Mike Pence has been one of the few Republicans to advocate the continued support of the United States for the Ukraine. Pence recently said, "There can be no room in the leadership of the Republican Party for apologists for Putin."

Well said, Mr. Vice President!

The words coming from the Republican right have been downright scary and show a complete lack of understanding of the roots of World War II or the main causes of human conflict down through the ages. At the recent CPAC conference, Rep. Greene told the audience that, "The U.S. should be pushing for peace in Ukraine instead of funding and continuing a war that seems to be escalating and putting the entire world at risk of World War III." Greene even went further and told the group that Ukrainian President Zelensky said that he wants American sons and daughters to go die in Ukraine. This is an absolute lie and Greene should be taken to task for her naked dishonesty.

CPAC founder Steve Bannon stated, "Every Republican who supports this murderous war in Ukraine should be turfed out." I'm not sure exactly what that means, but it sounds ominous and now when I leave my house I will have to worry about Chinese spy balloons and being turfed.

One female CPAC attendee stated, "I like Putin. I think he's got balls and he's taking care of his country." Wouldn't I just love to ask this clueless dimwit whether she thought Hitler had "balls" and was just taking care of his country when he slaughtered the Poles?

A little more modest CPAC participant, Paul Bintley, a North Carolina Faith and Freedom Coalition member described Putin as "not much of a dictator." One wonders if he would ever describe a woman as just a little pregnant.

The worst quote of all coming from the CPAC conference was from "the Donald" himself. Trump told the assembled masses that, "If I was president, I would end the war within 24 hours." How would you do it in such a way that would not completely eviscerate the Ukrainian nation and its brave people? Would you waive that piece of paper and declare "Peace for our time" like the world's greatest appeaser, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

The words that echo in my mind and that have echoed through the ages are the immortal words of the great British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, "An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile hoping it will eat him last." How soon the history-challenged forget.

The pure fact is that during my lifetime, the number one enemy of peace and freedom and the sower of the seeds of sorrow and misery throughout the world has been the Soviet Union and, now, Russia. From the Korean War, Vietnam War, conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, South America, Cuba and Afghanistan, just to name a few, Russia has provided arms, advisors and financial support

for anyone who has opposed peace and the conventions of civil relations between nations. Russia is not our friend, nor will they ever be until they truly have a free and independent people. Until then, the despots and oligarchs will rule and prosper.

Russia seriously misread the willpower of the free nations of the world and wantonly invaded the Ukraine with the full intent of expanding its national boundaries and eradicating the freedom loving Ukrainian people. Putting miscalculated the will of the Ukrainian people to fight for their freedoms.

The Ukrainians are not the Afghans, they have fought an heroic and epic fight to stop the world's second largest military in its tracks. If there ever was a cause that should call the American people to provide as much aid and support as possible to an oppressed people, the Ukrainian war is it.

There is no room for equivocation, waffling or playing politics with the lives of the Ukrainian people. It ends here and now with Russia. Stop them in the Ukraine

or fight them in Poland or in the Baltic. By continuing our generous military and economic aid we can bleed Russia of the resources that allow it to promote adventurism around the world. Let the Ukrainians destroy the Russian military with their courage and the free nations of the world destroy the Russian economy with our sanctions. In this effort, we will teach two lessons, one to the Russian tyrants and one to China, who is watching our every word and step, perhaps from a balloon near you.

The party of Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan should be the leaders in advocating peace through strength and support for those who love freedom and not just pimps in the peanut gallery who say just what they think those in the clown car want to hear.

Those who don't know history are bound to screw things up again. ❖

Dunn is the former Republican chairman of Howard County.

Hoosier Hispanics

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS — When you talk about Hispanics in Indiana, who are you talking about? These Hoosiers didn't just arrive in the U.S. Most (72%) were born in America; another 9% have been in the U.S. long enough to be naturalized citizens.



A person is Hispanic if s/he identifies her/himself as Hispanic. The most recent Census Bureau data (2021) reveal about 494,000 Hispanic persons living in Indiana. That's just 0.8% of the nation's Hispanic population, ranking this state 21st among the 50 states. Three states (California, Texas and Florida) alone account for 54% of all Hispanics in the nation.

tion.

That 494,000 Hispanics constitute 7.3% of Indiana's 6.7 million Hoosiers. We rank 30th in percentage Hispanic behind number one, New Mexico, where 49.6% of the population identifies as Hispanic.

Marion County has the biggest Hispanic population in Indiana (105,100), followed by Lake County with 97,900. Together they account for 40% of the state's Hispanic residents. The next largest number of Hispanics (34,500) reside in Elkhart County, where they constitute 16.6% of the county's total population.

Lake County is first in percentage with 19.7% of its population identifying as Hispanic. Elkhart County is second, third place goes to Clinton County (Frankfort) with

16.5% Hispanic, followed closely by Cass at 16.3%. In fifth place is Marion (10.8), with Noble, Porter, and Marshall completing the list of counties with Hispanics as a tenth of their populations.

Anytime a substantial minority exists in a community there is opportunity for greater diversity in consumer goods and services. This diversity can be a cultural bonus, an enhancement of choice.

There may also be a cultural burden if the minority has a different age composition than the majority. When the statewide age distributions of the Hispanic and Non-Hispanic populations are compared, the Index of Disparity is 21%.

Let's explain that. People 10 to 14 years old account for 11.5% of Indiana's Hispanic population and 6.5% for the Non-Hispanics, a difference of 5%. That 5% seems like a small number until we find it's 23,100 of the 462,400 persons of that age.

Given the concentration of Hispanic populations in the state (40% in just two counties), we have significant language and orientation problems in our schools. Similar issues may arise in health care and other services because the Non-Hispanic majority differs in its age distribution from that of the Hispanic minority.

When that 5% figure is added to all other age disparities for a given county, we have a county-wide Disparity Index. Allen County's age Disparity Index is 19% while Cass County is up at 28%, Jackson 34%, and Scott at 50%.

Age disparities are only one of several factors giving rise to community issues. When economic, demographic, or educational disparities exist among easily identified groups, efficiency and even social cohesion are threatened.

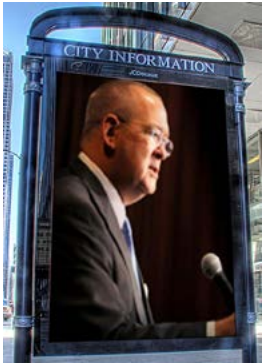
❖

Mr. Marcus is an economist.

Indiana is home to 1 in 6 U.S. Amish

By **MICHAEL J. HICKS**

MUNCIE – Indiana is home to about one in six of all Amish Americans, with estimates from 2022 at about 62,000 adherents. The Amish, as most readers will know, are a Christian religious denomination who arrived from Germany and Switzerland in the early 1800s. Their members are recognizable by their style of dress and transportation.



Again, most folks know this, but newcomers to Indiana may not. Amish men and women can be seen wearing work clothes of simple designs – black trousers and jacket for men, simple dresses for women. They are recognizable traveling by bicycle or horse-drawn carriage.

Amish farms and families have a quaint, 19th-Century look about them. This is purposeful, with an intention to preserve a way of life that is focused on spiritual observance. In many ways, this is not remarkable; we have many religious groups who wish to sustain their identity in an America awash with options. We often forget how new our modern conveniences truly are, and that a sizable share of Americans lived like the Amish less than a century ago. While many people find much about their lifestyle to be endlessly fascinating, to an economist, the Amish are simply part of an ever-changing tapestry of the United States.

The Amish live so separately that their presence is worth noting in the ways they affect the economy. This influence on primarily the local economy is driven by the focus on the community and household being “self-sufficient.” This self-sufficiency often means that households will establish themselves on subsistence-size farms, which is less than 50 acres. Because the Amish largely forbid modern agricultural machinery, most of their farms rely on animal power. This limits the scale of farming to about the size of a family farm in the late 19th Century.

One result of the proliferation of these small farms is that after a couple of generations of nature taking its course, the population outgrows the available farms and neighborhood, which is an inevitable economic consequence of clinging to technologies and practices of the 19th Century. This has two notable effects that are reminiscent of much of the Midwest just before the turn of the 20th Century.

The first of these effects is the diaspora. As they were crowded out of small farms, Amish families moved westward and southward across the country. Here in Indiana, Amish communities have migrated from Pennsylvania to Wayne and Parke counties over the last three decades.

Meanwhile, productivity growth in agriculture increasingly makes part of America’s farmland redundant. This dynamic allows the Amish to reestablish family farms in places where they have not been economically viable for generations.

The second big trend is the movement of the Amish into non-agricultural occupations. Today, a substantial share of Amish men and women work in manufacturing, construction, food services and retail. This shift is a direct corollary to what occurred in the late 19th Century as Midwestern family farms started to feel the effects of growing populations and better technology. Some of today’s Amish families might be able to survive on a small farm, but they increasingly rely on supplemental work elsewhere. You can farm like it is 1900 if you wish, but the produce you sell will face 2022 prices. That limits what can be profitably grown on a family farm.

The Amish pay most taxes, including income, sales and property taxes, and in return they receive most government benefits, including a judicial system, national defense, police and fire protection and other public services. They also receive public goods as they choose, such as roads. The Amish are pacifists and do not serve in the armed forces. Likewise, they do not participate in Social Security, so they do not pay FICA payroll taxes.

The Amish typically do not attend public schools; they attend schools operated by their local community, ending their formal education after eighth grade. Additionally, the Amish typically don’t participate in poverty relief programs or Medicaid. There are exceptions to many of these cases, determined by local bishops, ministers and deacons. There are regional variations in the rules of each community. For example, someone with a close eye might notice some buggies are equipped with safety reflectors, while buggies in another county are not.

With very few Amish attending high school or college, the educational attainment data in counties with large Amish populations are poor measures of human capital. LaGrange County is a good example. A whopping 40% of adults are listed as having not completed high school. The Amish population in the county is 44%, so one can assume that nearly every non-Amish resident has completed high school. Given the Amish focus on the ability to read the Bible, LaGrange County might possess the highest literacy rate in the United States.

It is hard not to draw similarities between the Amish and newer immigrant groups. The literacy example is perfect for this comparison. Many immigrants to the USA, particularly illegal immigrants or refugees, have poorly measured human capital. A typical Guatemalan immigrant to the USA will not have attended high school. For good reason, that credential is a critical measure of cognitive ability and motivation among native-born Americans. Among immigrant groups, that is not the case.

Lack of universal secondary education means many intelligent adults do not possess that credential. So, measure of formal schooling loses its ability to measure

cognitive ability. As for motivation, that walk from Guatemala to Texas speaks for itself. It is unsurprising that the Amish work alongside immigrants in many businesses around Indiana. Individuals from both groups often lack formal credentials that attest to human capital.

The other striking comparison of the Amish to immigrants is the difference in assimilation. Today's immigrants typically assimilate quickly. Children are given "Americanized" names and English language typically supplants Spanish, Arabic or Hindi in a single generation. While religion is more persistent, children or grandchildren are far more likely to marry outside of their ethnicity and religion.

The Amish have clung to a 19th Century lifestyle for more than 150 years. There are other religious minorities who cling to a very separate lifestyle. The Mennonites, Hutterites and Hasidim come to mind. But, no immigrant group in our history remained as non-assimilated as the Amish. Yet, the effect of this unassimilated population is modest. There's an interesting lesson in that. ❖

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

DeSantis seeks to change death penalty

By **KELLY HAWES**
CNHI Indiana Bureau

ANDERSON – Donald Dillbeck was 15 when he stabbed a man in Indiana while trying to steal a CB radio. He fled to Florida, where Lee County Sheriff's Deputy Dwight Lynn Hall found him in a parking lot at Fort Myers Beach. Dillbeck took the deputy's gun during a struggle and shot him to death.



Dillbeck was 11 years into a life sentence when he walked away from a work release assignment. He bought a paring knife and walked to Tallahassee, where he encountered 44-year-old Faye Vann waiting for her family.

He demanded that Vann give him a ride, and she refused.

She honked the horn and tried to drive away. Dillbeck stabbed her more than 20 times and slit her throat. Members of Vann's family were there to watch last month when the state of Florida finally carried out Dillbeck's death sentence. Minutes after he had been injected with poison, Dillbeck's body began to twitch. After it stopped, prison workers grabbed his shoulders. "Hey, Dillbeck," they said. Dillbeck didn't react. A physician put a stethoscope to his chest before pronouncing him dead. Afterward, the Florida Department of Corrections released a statement from two of Vann's children, Tony and Laura Vann.

"**11,932 days ago**, Donald Dillbeck brutally killed our mother," they wrote. "We were robbed of years of memories with her, and it has been very painful ever since. However, the execution has given us some closure."

They expressed gratitude to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis for carrying out the sentence.

Dillbeck was 59 when he died. "I know I hurt

people when I was young," he said moments before his death. "I really messed up. But I know Ron DeSantis has done a lot worse. He's taken a lot from a lot of people. I speak for all men, women and children. He's put his foot on our necks."

That night, Maria DeLiberato, executive director of Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, issued a statement. "While we executed the person who tragically took the lives of Ms. Vann and Deputy Hall, we also executed the infant born addicted to alcohol," she wrote. "We executed the four-year-old who was starved and beaten with extension cords and physically and sexually abused by the one person who was supposed to protect him. We executed the elementary schooler who was bounced around the foster care system alone, ripped away from his sister, the only person who had ever shown him love. We executed the scared teenager, sent to a violent adult prison where he was subjected to rape and assault."

DeLiberato argued that Dillbeck had been trying to atone for his crimes for decades. "We grieve for the victims of his violence and their families," the statement read. "We grieve for his friends. We grieve for the members of his legal team, who worked tirelessly over the years to try to stop this very moment from happening. We grieve for the corrections officers – who tonight had to strap a healthy man to a gurney – and put him to death."

Dillbeck was sentenced under a law found to be unconstitutional in 2016. Then, a divided jury could impose the death penalty. Now, the law requires a unanimous vote. Still, DeSantis signed the death warrant, and he's pushing legislation that would go back to the eight-juror threshold. Republican lawmakers have filed bills that would accomplish that while allowing judges to impose the death penalty regardless of a jury's recommendation.

DeLiberato insists the death penalty isn't the answer. "Protecting vulnerable children, and making sure the abused and the traumatized and the mentally ill have access to mental health care," she said. "That's how we keep our community safer. That's how we end the cycle of violence. We are better than this."

Maybe we're not. ❖

Being a good citizen is a lot harder than it used to be

By LEE HAMILTON

BLOOMINGTON – A couple of decades ago, I wrote a book in which I talked about what it takes to be a good citizen in a representative democracy like ours. I thought the principles I laid out were timeless, but I recently reread them and boy, they seem a lot less clear-cut now.



In principle, everything I wrote back then is still key to the functioning of our democracy: You need to vote; you need to take the time to be informed about policy and politics; you need to be in touch with your representatives to let them know what's important to you; and you

need to be involved in making your community, state, and country a better place to live. Each of these still matters. A lot.

But over the past 20 years, each has also become more difficult, more politically fraught, and more challenging to navigate responsibly. Some states are trying to make voting more difficult. Misinformation is rampant, and not only online. Being in touch with legislators and becoming involved in public issues have lost their innocence since Jan. 6 and threats to politicians and other public officials became commonplace.

I see the fallout regularly when I talk with young people who want to become involved in politics or in community affairs but worry about what they might be exposing themselves to if they do. The challenge we face is that our system won't work unless citizens participate in a constructive fashion. In a sense, there's now a fifth responsibility for us to shoulder as good citizens: Overcoming the predicaments we face on the road to the other four.

Twenty years ago, I'd have said that the foundation of good citizenship was voting. I've changed my mind. I believe everything else flows from taking responsibility for being informed. This means looking for trustworthy sources of information, being on guard against misinformation and biased interpretations, and recognizing that in the online world in particular, false or slanted information is rampant. Let me be blatant: Mainstream news organizations have plenty of faults and

sometimes go astray, but day in and day out they're the most reliable source of news and information out there. But it's not safe to rely on just one: Seeking a variety of sources beyond your own ideological wheelhouse will make you far more knowledgeable.

This, obviously, is key to being a voter. So, I would argue, is advocating for making it as easy to vote as possible while making sure that the mechanics of elections remain secure. We are stronger as a country when more people have a stake in choosing our leadership.

In a sense, being knowledgeable and well-informed is also key to being in touch with legislators and to promoting a cause or taking on an issue. Lawmakers are bombarded with input from others. To be effective, it helps to look at sources on both sides of the issue and understand the arguments that seem most persuasive. Similarly, if you're contacting a member based on the request of some interest group (or someone you've seen on television or online), you want to spend a little time gauging the reliability of the information they're using; just firing off a message that parrots their argument is unlikely to be productive.

The same sentiment holds for becoming involved in community or public life. Involvement is great – but not blind involvement. How reliable is the information you're basing your actions on? Is your involvement helping, rather than hurting because it's based on incorrect information? Similarly, if someone asks you to get involved to save your town or state or country from some alleged peril, how accurately have they depicted the problem and have you carefully sorted out the claims on both sides of the issue?

I know. All of this seems like a lot of work. And it is. But American democracy was built on the assumption of an engaged and well-informed electorate. It's gotten a lot more complicated over the centuries, but if one core truth has remained constant, it's this: If responsible citizens do not participate in the system, then the system will not work. It's as simple as that. ❖



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Assessing the GOP presidential race

By **KYLE KONDIK**
and **J. MILES COLEMAN**

CHARLOTTSVILLE, Va. – It feels late – and also early – in the race for the Republican presidential nomination.

It may be late because despite the fact that we are still nearly a year away from the actual voting, the top 2 contenders seem to be so clear. The winnowing process that so often defines the year in advance of the primary voting may have effectively already happened – it’s just that the winnowed candidates, some of whom aren’t even candidates yet, don’t know that their fate is already sealed.

And yet it may be very early because the person who seems like Donald Trump’s chief rival, Gov. Ron DeSantis (R-FL), is both in an enviable, impressive position but also is unproven as a national candidate, which means he is not guaranteed to have staying power.

Donald Trump already served a single term as president, lost reelection, and is seeking to be renominated, putting him in the position of being a quasi-incumbent. In national polls of the GOP presidential primary that ask about multiple candidates, Trump typically registers in the 40s, sometimes getting into the 50s. That is a strong starting point, but he is not the undisputed leader of the party, like he was in 2020 when he was an incumbent running for reelection. He also may be coasting to some degree on name ID. Still, Republicans have long struggled to actually land punches on him – to the extent they have even tried.

Meanwhile, DeSantis remains an undeclared candidate, but he is acting very much like an actual candidate. He just released a book, and he embarked on a national tour recently, including speaking at one of the great Republican forums in the country, the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. While he generally polls considerably lower than Trump in national polls, DeSantis still registers a level of support ranging from the mid-20s to the low-to-mid 30s. That is impressive for someone who has never before run for president or been part of a presidential ticket, as Nate Cohn recently documented in the New York Times.

In the RealClearPolitics average of national polls, Trump and DeSantis together get about 75% of the total support. That’s a little bit more than what national polls showed in the early days of the 2008 Democratic presiden-

tial primary, which turned into a two-way contest between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama: At this time in 2007, Obama and Clinton generally shared about 60%-65% of the support in national polls. Maybe this race will just end up looking a lot like that 2008 Democratic contest -- one in which many candidates competed, but only 2, Clinton and Obama, ever really showed much ability to actually win the nomination.

But this race is not guaranteed to follow the Clinton-Obama model. The composition of the debate stage – or stages, depending on the number of candidates – at the first Republican presidential primary debate in

August remains a mystery. Political scientist Seth Masket has identified 14 potential Republican candidates, but only five of them have announced bids – and only two are

people we would consider prominent national politicians. There is Trump, of course, as well as former ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley. Beyond them, there is businessman Perry Johnson, who was last seen failing to secure a place on the Michigan gubernatorial ballot; Vivek Ramaswamy, an entrepreneur and author; and Corey

Stapleton, the former Montana secretary of state who has previously lost several primaries for higher office. Meanwhile, a couple of potential contenders have said they will not run: Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and former Gov. Larry Hogan (R-MD).

That still leaves several other possible candidates who are technically undecided but have been behaving as though they might become candidates. DeSantis obviously leads that list, but we would also add former Vice President Mike Pence, Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC), and

former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, among others.

Whether those candidates can get any traction depends very much on the first of 5 questions and observations we have about the GOP field.

1. We have to see DeSantis prove it

As mentioned above, DeSantis is in an unusually strong position for a newcomer to presidential politics. In addition to garnering a quarter or more of GOP support in national polls, DeSantis has arguably been even more competitive with Trump in state-level polls. He even sometimes leads Trump in polls of key states that ask about multiple candidates, as opposed to just a hypothetical head-to-head with Trump (where DeSantis often fares better). DeSantis has led Trump in recent multi-candidate polls of likely or registered voters released since Feb. 1 in California, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, while Trump has led DeSantis in Arizona, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, and South Carolina (we used the latest polls list from FiveThirtyEight to track these surveys). So the individual polls vary, but both Trump and DeSantis backers



can point to good results for their candidate in individual states.

Say what you want about Trump, and we have said plenty, but he is basically a proven commodity at this point. He has won, he has lost, he has been at the center of politics for almost 8 years now and has been a well-known figure in American life for much longer than that. He is well-defined. He continues to face several ongoing legal questions – Insider laid all of them out here. These cases are obviously worth monitoring but we’re not going to assume in advance that any of them will ensnare him or cause his campaign serious damage. That is not to say that we should assume Trump’s level of support will be static in the primary – he may rise or fall depending on his own performance or the performance of his rivals – but at this point we think it’s less likely that he experiences huge gyrations in his level of support.

DeSantis is different – or at least might be different. We have no idea how he will perform as an actual presidential candidate, and the public’s perception of him is less solid. Maybe he enters the race, is well-received, and emerges more clearly as Trump’s chief rival, perhaps even surpassing the former president. Or maybe he flames out, as other seemingly formidable but ultimately unsuccessful candidates before him, like then-Texas Gov. Rick Perry after he was a relatively late entrant to the 2012 GOP presidential race. Perry skyrocketed to the top of the GOP field but then fell off quickly as he performed poorly as a candidate.

Current polling numbers are not going to help us project how DeSantis will actually perform. We don’t know what to expect – all we know is that we don’t know.

How well DeSantis campaigns is really the key to the question posed at the start of the article, whether it is late or early in the primary process. If DeSantis is as strong as he now appears, there just is not much oxygen for anyone else besides Trump.

2. Wine track versus beer track

The astute political journalist Ron Brownstein long ago coined the term “wine track” versus “beer track” to analyze presidential primary coalitions. He recently discussed the history of the dynamic and how it has often applied to Democratic primaries, but now is very salient on the GOP side (we recommend his CNN piece for a fuller exploration of this dynamic).

Basically, on the GOP side, the “wine track” means having a four-year college degree, while “beer track” means not having a four-year degree. Trump won in 2016 by not only doing better among beer track voters than wine track voters, Brownstein writes, but also because wine track voters were more divided in 2016 among different candidates than beer track voters were.

This blue collar/white collar divide is evident in polling. For instance, a recent national survey from the GOP firm Echelon Insights showed Trump leading DeSantis 46%-31%, with Pence at 9% and Haley at 6%. Trump

dominated among those who do not have a bachelor’s degree, 54%-27%, but DeSantis led Trump, narrowly, 36%-33% among those who had a bachelor’s degree or more. The Pence/Haley combo also got more support among college graduates – 22% combined compared to 11% among the non-college group. This poll -- and others show similar findings – illustrates the basic dynamic: Trump is stronger with the non-college group than the college group, and the college group is more divided than the non-college group.

We can see this at the state level, too. The GOP firm Differentiators polled likely Virginia GOP primary voters in late February, finding DeSantis up 37%-34% in a multi-candidate field. But the regional splits were telling: DeSantis led Trump by 14 points in the highly-educated Washington, DC suburbs/Northern Virginia region, while Trump led DeSantis by 17 points in rural, western Virginia, where 4-year college attainment is not nearly as high. This reflects the pattern we saw in Virginia in the 2016 primary: Trump beat the second-place finisher, Rubio, by about 3 points statewide.

So one can see the outlines of a dynamic similar to 2016, and how in order to defeat Trump, a single candidate likely needs to consolidate the “wine track” (college-educated) vote at least as well as Trump consolidates the “beer track” (non-college) vote. That candidate very well may be DeSantis but, again, we’ll just have to wait and see.

Trying to determine the education level of the likely GOP electorate is going to be a challenging but important task for pollsters.

3. Trump is without modern precedent

Trump is effectively in an unprecedented position in the modern history of presidential nominations, a time period that covers basically the last half-century, when presidential nominations became much more about winning primaries and caucuses as opposed to using backdoor wheeling and dealing to win the nomination at the convention. In that timeframe, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, and Trump lost reelection bids. None of the prior trio later sought a return to the presidency, although Ronald Reagan and Ford did discuss the latter joining his ticket as the vice presidential nominee in 1980. So what Trump is attempting is unfamiliar, as is so much else about his political persona.

The best example of that phenomenon was from over a century ago. After leaving office, Teddy Roosevelt remained a popular figure, and actually finished first in most states that held Republican primaries in 1912 -- but he could not convince Republican convention delegates to dump his successor, William Howard Taft. Roosevelt famously ran as an independent “Bull Moose” candidate in the general election, which handed the presidency to Democrats. Pundits have discussed the prospect of a third-third party run by a snubbed Trump since at least 2016, but looking to 2024, Trump may face some logistical hurdles if he opts to go that route. ❖

Jerry Davich, NWI Times: “USA! USA! USA!” An enthusiastic group of children yelled this patriotic cheer while waiting for first lady Jill Biden to arrive at Ivy Tech Community College in Valparaiso. The young tykes stood in front of their preschool building next to a star-spangled poster stating, “WE (HEART) USA.” On this dreary Monday afternoon, they sang a set list of bright tunes such as the alphabet song, “L, M, N, O, P!” Across the street, a lively group of protesters waved American flags and “Trump 2024” banners to passing motorists. Police officers watched on, later relocating the protesters to a different spot. It didn’t stifle their energy level. “Trump won! Trump won!” one of the protesters yelled, displaying a banner stating the same lie. As soon as he noticed me, he called out my name and yelled the word, “Propaganda!” (Watch a video of our exchange at nwi.com.) I showed up at the college just two minutes earlier, simply out of curiosity, parking my car near the demonstration site. “Wake up, Jerry,” the protester yelled to me. Since he knew my first name, I asked for his. Instead, he told me he should put on a face mask. “I’m Joe Schmoe,” he replied sarcastically. I shrugged. ❖



David French, New York Times: Two weeks ago, U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia kicked off a conversation about a “national divorce,” and it hasn’t really stopped. Greene says she doesn’t mean a true national division, but rather an extreme form of federalism, in which red and blue states essentially lived under completely different economic and constitutional structures while maintaining a nominal national union. The very idea is absurd. It’s incompatible with the Constitution. It’s dangerous. It’s unworkable. It would destroy the economy, dislocate millions of Americans and destabilize the globe. Even in the absence of a civil war – it’s beyond unlikely that vast American armies would clash the way they did from 1861 to 1865 – national separation would almost certainly be a violent mess. There is only one way to describe an actual American divorce: an unmitigated disaster, for America and the world. It could also happen. It’s not likely, but it’s possible, and we should take that possibility seriously. To be clear, it’s not because secession makes sense. As my colleague Jamelle Bouie noted in an eloquent column last month, the very idea that red states or blue states represent ideologically coherent communities is completely wrong. Every red state has bright blue counties or cities, and every blue state has red precincts as well. How do you split up a nation when red and blue are so thoroughly intertwined? The South separated from the North and started a ruinous and futile war not because of calm deliberation, but rather because of hysteria and fear – including hysteria and fear whipped up by the partisan

press. So my question is not “Is divorce reasonable?” but rather, “Are we susceptible to the unreason that triggered war once before?” America’s recent history makes me worry, and if we doubt that concern one need only point back to Jan. 6, 2021, and indulge in a single, simple thought experiment: What if Mike Pence had said yes? What if Vice President Pence had done exactly what Trump demanded, and the Trump lawyer John Eastman said he had the power to do: Block the certification of the 2020 election or even overturn the result entirely and purport to award the presidency to Trump? In that moment, American peace and unity depended on the force of will of one single person, a man who stood up to a president, to the lawmakers in his own party who challenged the election, and to the howling mob that was crying out for his head. Even worse, in the immediate aftermath of the attack on the Capitol, Pence’s approval rating with Republicans collapsed, not Trump’s. The GOP’s “unreasoning fury” turned on a man who was loyal to Trump every moment of his presidency, right until the moment when Trump demanded a coup. And where are we now? Has the fever passed? Not by a long shot. America is in the grips of a simply staggering amount of partisan animosity. ❖

John Krull, Statehouse File: As they reached the halfway point of the 2023 legislative session, the members of the Indiana General Assembly made their priorities clear. They focused inordinate amounts of time and energy on making the already difficult lives of transgender students even harder, keeping students, teachers and librarians from reading or just making available any books dealing with human sexuality and preventing children and their parents from deciding what name a student could be called at school. Critics – and there have been many of them – have focused on the meanness, even the cruelty, of many of these measures. But the cruelty is only one feature of this concentration of conservative legislators’ energies. The other notable thing about this campaign of persecution is how small it is in scale. The focus of this current crop of Republican Indiana lawmakers is as meager in its reach as it is in its humanity. Consider the disproportionate attention devoted to the lives of transgender Hoosiers. The highest estimate of the percentage of people in Indiana pegs the number at .56%. That’s one-half of one percent—or roughly one in every 200 Hoosiers. Other studies list the number even lower, at .2% – or one in every 500 residents of the state. The Indiana Youth Institute’s research puts the total number of transgender students in Indiana at 3,400 – out of 1.12 million students statewide. Yet, making their lives miserable is the top priority for many Hoosier lawmakers. ❖

Holcomb says no toxic waste in state

INDIANAPOLIS — Gov. Eric Holcomb says third party testing of toxic waste brought to a Putnam County landfill from Ohio does not contain any harmful levels of dioxins when compared to acceptable levels established by the EPA ([WRTV](#)). Holcomb ordered the testing after tons of waste arrived at the landfill near Roachdale. He also says the landfill site operator is lawfully permitted to dispose of the waste at the site. "Pace Labs has completed and shared the full results of their third-party dioxin testing I had ordered and expedited last week," Holcomb said. "Initial samples were taken on Saturday morning, March 4, and testing began that same day at their Minneapolis laboratory. These results indicate that the material tested does not contain any harmful levels of dioxins when compared to acceptable levels established by the EPA. Furthermore, these results demonstrate that the site operator is lawfully permitted to dispose of that material at its site. We have informed the EPA and the site operator of these testing results. We will have Pace Labs continue to test samples of any future loads that may arrive in Indiana from East Palestine to confirm that none of the material contains harmful levels of dioxins."



McConnell falls, is hospitalized

WASHINGTON — Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has been hospitalized following a fall at a hotel in Washington, his spokesperson said late Wednesday ([Washington Post](#)). The 81-year-old senator was attending a private dinner at a local hotel when he tripped, spokesman David Popp said in a statement. "He has been admitted to the hospital where he is receiving treatment," he

added, without providing any further details on his condition.

Westville warden sanctioned

WESTVILLE — The warden of the Westville Correctional Facility in LaPorte County has admitted to violating a state law prohibiting the personal use of state property, according to a report by David Cook, Indiana's inspector general (Carden, [NWI Times](#)). Warden John Galipeau recently signed a settlement agreement with the inspector general acknowledging his misuse of the warden's residence, 134 Circle Dr., and agreeing to pay a fine of \$2,790, Cook said. According to the report, Galipeau permitted his wife, and later his adult son and granddaughter, to live in the warden's residence at the prison at various times during the summer and fall of 2021 while Galipeau lived at his home in Valparaiso. Under Indiana law, state-owned residences on Department of Correction (DOC) property only can be occupied by staff, and only if necessary to promote the security and maintenance of a facility, the report said.

Mayor's son driven home after DUI stop

MISHAWAKA — A few minutes after midnight on Oct. 28, a handful of Mishawaka police officers milled around a curb near the intersection of Mishawaka and Indiana avenues as they watched over a man suspected of drunk driving (South Bend Tribune). In body camera footage The Tribune obtained, the officer who initiated the stop said he saw the driver speeding and turn without using a turn signal. The driver smelled of alcohol and stumbled as he exited the car, according to the office. The man police pulled over that night was 22-year-old Joseph Wood, the son of Mishawaka Mayor Dave Wood. Despite the primary officer's characterization of Joseph Wood's behavior, Wood was

not arrested.

Biden seeks to cut deficit by \$3T

WASHINGTON—President Biden will outline a plan to reduce federal budget deficits by nearly \$3 trillion over the next decade and raise taxes on wealthy people and large corporations, kicking off monthslong spending negotiations with Republicans in Congress ([Wall Street Journal](#)). Mr. Biden's fiscal year 2024 budget plan, which will be released Thursday, will lay out his recommended funding levels for federal agencies and departments. He is expected to ask for more in defense spending than he requested last year and propose drug-policy changes and efforts to cut fraud and waste that the White House said would save hundreds of billions of dollars. The budget is unlikely to gain momentum on Capitol Hill as Republicans, who control the House, are expected to oppose most of Mr. Biden's proposals.

DOJ issues scathing report in Louisville

LOUISVILLE — The Louisville Metro Police Department routinely uses excessive force and practices "an aggressive style of policing" against Black people, the Justice Department said Wednesday after an investigation launched following the botched raid that killed Breonna Taylor (CNN). The scathing assessment paints a shocking portrait of racist and abusive conduct in the Louisville police that harkens to practices more commonly seen in some southern cities during the civil rights era. Investigators identified a pattern of police leaders in recent years commissioning reports that documented disproportionate violence directed toward African Americans and ignoring the findings or burying the internal reports. The abuses extended to the treatment of the disabled and even sex assault victims.