



## Chambers on his GOP listening tour

Former Commerce secretary presents himself as the needed CEO

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

WARSAW, Ind. — The rumor mill surrounding Commerce Secretary Brad Chambers' Republican run for governor had been churning for months, until early August when he resigned his \$1-a-year post after 24 months. He loaned his

campaign \$5 million, hired the state party's political pros and made a \$1 million TV ad buy.

The biographical TV ad traces his family's roots to Thorntown, his forging a lawn care business at age 15, how he met his wife at Indiana University and then began a multistate rental business before Gov.



**GOP gubernatorial candidate Brad Chambers is introduced by Jim Kittle Jr. to Kosciusko County Republican Chairman Mike Ragan. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)**

Eric Holcomb named him commerce secretary a little more than two years ago. "We had our faith in Hoosier values," Chambers says in the ad. "I met my wife at IU. We raised

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## Constitutional duress

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS — Mitt Romney — son of a governor, a governor himself, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee and now a U.S. senator — announced last week that he won't be seeking a second term. But the real news came with this jarring observation:

"A very large portion of my party really doesn't believe in the Constitution."

This was an assertion made to journalist McKay Coppins in his forthcoming biography of Sen. Romney, excerpted in *The Atlantic*. "Tyranny," Romney explained to Coppins, was essentially "a man gets some people around him and begins to oppress and dominate other." It was the status quo for thousands of years, Romney



**"If Victoria is concerned about fighting stronger, I wish she would run again and not quit."**

- U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, responding in *Politico Playbook* to criticism by U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz, who said the speaker lacked 'courage' in the government funding debate.



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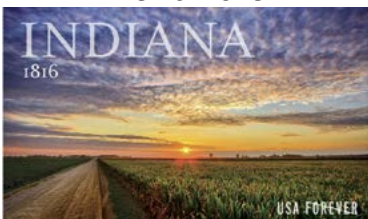
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**Jack E. Howey**  
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concluded, telling his biographer that America's democratic experiment "is fighting human nature. This is a very fragile thing."

Why does Romney believe that so many in today's Republican Party are ready to jettison the federal blueprint for stability, the rule of law, the pursuit of happiness and the concept of democracy? Was it an intervening cult of a demagogic personality? Or political and legal losses over issues such as same-sex marriage that have convinced them that the U.S. Constitution no longer serves their perceived "Christian nation"?

**Sen. Romney's** observation came with the author's speculation: "We were a few months removed from an attempted coup instigated by Republican leaders, and he was wrestling with some difficult questions. Was the authoritarian element of the GOP a product of President Trump, or had it always been there, just waiting to be activated by a sufficiently shameless demagogue? And what role had the members of the mainstream establishment — people like him, the reasonable Republicans — played in allowing the rot on the right to fester?"

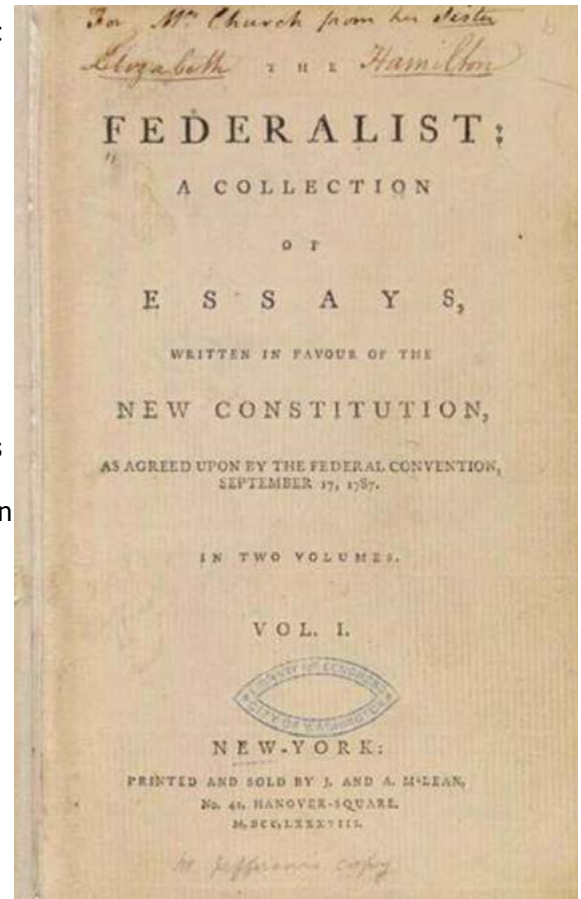
In December 2022, former President Trump made this social media post on his unproven assertion that he had been wrongfully denied a second term due to a "rigged" 2020 election: "A Massive Fraud of this type and magnitude allows for the termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution."

That posting earned immediate rebukes from Capitol Hill Republicans. "Well, I think you take an oath to the Constitution, you don't take it provisionally," U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri told NBC News. "And I can't imagine that a former president would make that statement."

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn of Texas added, "I don't know why any-

body would say something like that, certainly not an ex-president. I think that's irresponsible."

Now, Trump is the prohibitive favorite to win the 2024 GOP presidential nomination. It prompted me last April to ask the Republican front-runner for the Indiana U.S. Senate nomination — U.S. Rep. Jim Banks —



why he is backing Trump despite his call for terminating the U.S. Constitution. "How do you square that?" I asked.

**"Look, Donald Trump** is running through the constitutional election process of our country to become president again," Banks told me. "The Republican primary will determine who's our candidate. There's a reason Donald Trump is substantially leading just about any poll you can find because the Republican Party is looking for a fighter in the White House who is going to fight back against the woke left."

Compare that to U.S. Sen. Todd Young, who said at a Boy Scout



event this week of Trump: "He lacks appropriate personal character. He lacks integrity. He fails to bring our country together; fails to follow the Constitution of the United States. It's time to turn the page."

As a bookend to Coppins' speculation, author Tim Egan, writing in his book, "A Fever In the Heartland," about the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan and Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson that had taken over the Indiana Republican Party a century ago, noted: "What if the leaders of the 1920s Klan didn't drive public sentiment, but rode it? A vein of hatred was always there for the tapping. It's still there, and explains much of the madness threatening American life a hundred years after Stephenson made a mockery of moral principles in the Heartland."

**It used to be that** conservative Republicans would often produce the U.S. Constitution in pamphlet form to make political points. In 2014, when Hoosier conservatives sought to amend the Indiana Constitution to prevent lawful same-sex marriages, then State Sen. Mike Delph once handed me a pamphlet titled "The Constitution of the United States." On several of the first pages, it quoted George Washington, Daniel Webster, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson as well as John and Samuel Adams as "Observing the Hand of Providence."

The U.S. Constitution, Webster was quoted, was the work of the "purest patriots" who were aided "by the smiles of a benignant Providence. It almost appears a Divine interposition in our behalf." John Adams said in this pamphlet, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people."

These quotes prompted me to write: "The predominantly Christian nation of the 18th through 21st centuries may, in the coming centuries, give way to a majority Buddhist or Hindu nation. The Founders purposely separated church and state. Thumbing through the U.S. Constitution, there is no reference to marriage. But there is the 14th Amendment, Section 1, which reads: 'No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.'"

**I explained in a 2014 column:** We project our own views through the American experience. We all know that Jefferson was a slave owner, as were about a third of the signers. America evolved on the issue, fought a Civil War to change and amended the U.S. Constitution to ensure it would never happen under this republic.



**Then State Sen. Mike Delph shows his Constitution of the United States pamphlet in 2014. (HPI Photo by Brian A. Howey)**

State legislatures create laws, just as Hoosier legislators have, that have been overturned. In his 1963 inaugural address, Alabama Gov. George Wallace defiantly defended his state's Jim Crow laws, declaring, "In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

In 1982, Wallace told a group of Alabama African-American citizens, "We thought [segregation] was in the best interests of all concerned. We were mistaken. The Old South is gone," but "the New South is still opposed to government regulation of our lives."

Hans Zeiger, president of the Jack Miller Center (a national network of teachers and scholars) writes in a Newsweek column: "Abraham Lincoln famously declared that the Civil War was a similar test. The outcome of that conflict would determine whether American constitutional principles 'can long endure.' Time and time again, our greatest statesmen framed constitutional questions in these high, world-historical terms. The survival of the republic did not just matter for the here and now, but for people across the planet and generations yet unborn."

**In the Federalist Papers No. 1**, drafted by Founding Fathers Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison in more than 80 editions in 1787, there was this observation: "After an unequivocal experience of the inefficacy of the subsisting Federal Government, you are called upon to deliberate on a new Constitution for the United States of America. The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences, nothing less than the existence of the union, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed, the fate of an empire."

These Federalist Founding Fathers warned that without a Constitution, "A torrent of angry and malignant passions will be let loose. An enlightened zeal for the energy and efficiency of government will be stigmatised, as the offspring of a temper fond of despotic power and hostile to the principles of liberty."

What is clear now is that this is no longer Gov. George W. Romney's Republican Party or that of his son Sen. Romney himself, but of his niece, Republican National Committee Chair Ronna Romney McDaniel; its present course of devolution ... unknown. ❖

**Brian Howey is senior writer and columnist for Howey Politics Indiana/State Affairs. Find Howey on Facebook and Twitter @hwypol.**

## Chambers, from page 1

our son in Indiana. We're Hoosiers. Indiana's great, but it can be even better. Hoosiers need a governor ready to build an economy of the future.

"I feel the challenges that too many Hoosiers face. I've lived them," Chambers says. "And that's why I'm running for governor."

Chambers joins a GOP field that includes U.S. Sen. Mike Braun, Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Fort Wayne businessman Eric Doden, former attorney general Curtis Hill and businesswoman Jamie Reitenour. Former Republican superintendent of public instruction Jennifer McCormick is the most credible Democrat running. Like Chambers, Braun and Doden have the ability to self-fund their campaigns, while Crouch has been a prolific fundraiser.

Joining the Chambers campaign are former GOP Chairman Kyle Hupfer, Executive Director Matt Huckleby, Communications Director Luke Thomas as well as general consultants Marty Obst and Jennifer Hallowell.

"Chambers' funding and his recruiting of a powerhouse campaign team has to have sent ripples throughout his opponents' campaigns," Anderson Herald Bulletin political reporter Ken de la Bastide observed. "The actions of the past few weeks definitely make Chambers a player for the nomination — a fact highlighted by a television ad that was broadcast this week."

On Wednesday, Chambers reacted to the U.S. Department of Defense announcement that Indiana-based Applied Research Institute (ARI) would receive funding from the federal CHIPS and Science Act to establish one of eight Microelectronics (ME) Commons regional innovation hubs across the country.

"Congratulations to Heartland BioWorks, Gov. Eric Holcomb and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, and ARI on their successful application to become one of eight ME Commons regional innovation hubs across the country," stated Chambers. "As Indiana's Secretary of Commerce, my team and I implemented a bold, strategic vision to position Indiana as a top competitor for these very investments, investments that will provide high-wage career opportunities to Hoosiers for decades to come. Indiana deserves a governor that has the vision, the urgency, and the aspiration to build an economy of the future and continue the economic momentum in support of Hoosier prosperity. With \$33 billion of statewide capital investment, 30% higher average wages, and new high-wage industries calling Indiana home, I've proven that with the right leadership, Indiana's future is, and will continue to be, bright."

Howey Politics Indiana caught up with Chambers at Creighton's Crazy Egg & Coffee Bar last week for a meet and greet with about 50 local GOP and business leaders from across Kosciusko County. There were no endorsements. They came to hear a candidate for governor few of

them knew. His message was a simple one: "I know how to grow the economy."

It was part of a statewide blitz that brought him to Warsaw, Fort Wayne, Anderson and Evansville last week.

Former Indiana Republican Chairman Jim Kittle Jr., who was instrumental in Mitch Daniels' 2004 run for governor, is backing Chambers. "Of all the candidates, he has the ability to be the most transformational and move Indiana ahead like Mitch Daniels," Kittle explained. "Mitch moved Indiana from an also-ran, bankrupt state both financially and politically, to a real leader in the Midwest. We



need another jolt. The states around us have caught up to us, copied us and have moved ahead."

Kittle cited Chambers' performance at IEDC and Commerce where he "worked with local political leaders" from both parties. "That showed me his ability to work within an existing structure. I believe he has the ability to work across the aisle, whether it's with the Democratic mayor of Fort Wayne or Indianapolis, to Republicans in the legislature," Kittle said. "Because he's not as political, that makes a difference. That's something that's needed now; we've become awfully polarized."

During a Q&A after a short biographical talk by the candidate, one questioner made a pitch for a U.S. 30 freeway from Ohio to Valparaiso. "When I walked into IDEC, they were playing defense. I want to play offense," Chambers said. He went on to describe the LEAP project in Boone County as a "big, bold move" and added that of the \$22 billion in investment he has secured for the state as commerce secretary, 53% came in rural counties.

HPI conducted this interview with Chambers following the Q&A. It has been edited for length and clarity.

**HPI:** What have you learned about Indiana in the past two years since you took the helm of IEDC, and what have you learned in a political sense over the past two weeks of your campaign for governor?

**Chambers:** I've learned a lot. I've looked under the hood of this state we call Indiana. I've looked at its economic engine. I've looked at its universities and its workforce, quality of place and just the value proposition of Indiana. I'm incredibly impressed and optimistic about

Indiana's potential. This engine I call Indiana; this race car I call Indiana can run faster and it can win a lot of races.

**HPI:** When Steve Goldsmith ran for governor in 1996 he said the state needed a "CEO" at the helm. What's your pitch to voters going to be on that front?

**Chambers:** My pitch is that I've never done this before, but I've run a business for 40 years that was founded in Indiana from nothing. I'm an Indiana entrepreneur. I've been running a business, hiring people, inspiring people, leading, planning, measuring performance for a very long time. That's what a governor is. The No. 1 job of a governor is to grow the economy.

**HPI:** It wasn't always that way. Being the state's economic driver began to take shape under Gov. Robert Orr in the 1980s. But now it is the No. 1 job.

**Chambers:** It's required to do it successfully. It funds all the other needs of the government of Indiana, the taxpayers of Indiana, whether it's education, health care or public safety. Being the CEO, running this corporation, running this state of Indiana's business is fundamental. It is critically important to do it well. It funds all the other services.

**HPI:** Since you're a novice in running for governor, what have you learned from Govs. Holcomb, Mike Pence and Mitch Daniels?

**Chambers:** I'm going to be a Brad Chambers style of governor. I'm going to be authentic. I'm going to pull from my 40 years of experience. But, of course, I'm a lifelong learner. So you look at Mitch Daniels and his playbook, and you look at Mike and Eric Holcomb, all good governors, and you pull their successes and meld that into your life's history and your experience and you try to create a plan and a vision for Indiana. I'm excited about what that vision can look like. I am going to pull from Mitch the policy-focused approach to this campaign. That's the way I would do it anyway, I'm not going to do it just because Mitch did it. I want a plan for the state's future. We're articulating that plan through my policy team right now. I'm going to roll that policy out over the next two quarters.

**HPI:** How do you win this race?

**Chambers:** You work hard and you be yourself. It took me a bit to get to yes on this. I'm not a career politician, I've never run for office. You hear me say that a lot. But I believe in the product through my career as a business person, I've been a consumer of the state's economy and then my two years as secretary of commerce. I saw up close and personal the potential of this state. It gets me excited. The civic philanthropic service side of

me feels we can do more. We can be good, but we can be great, so I'm excited about the potential to have an impact on that.

**HPI:** With Mike Braun starting at about 1% in the polls in his U.S. Senate primary race about this time in 2018, will you have a similar game plan? He started advertising early on his way to winning the primary over two congressmen.

**Chambers:** I wouldn't do it if it was impossible. No. 2 is putting a great team around you. I have a great campaign team of very experienced people. I know grassroots Indiana and this is going to be a grassroots campaign. I'm

going to get around the state and do exactly what we're doing today. Not just talking, but telling my story and then listening to the customers of Indiana, the taxpayers and the voters of Indiana. That's No. 1. And then No. 2, be true to myself. My story is my story. Be authentic, and we'll see what happens and whether the voters respond to that. If they don't, that's just the name of the game.

**HPI:** In addition to the local desire to create a U.S. 30 freeway from Ohio to Valpo, what else did you learn today?

**Chambers:** They are proud in this community, and they ought to be. There's a lot going on here. One of the comments was, "We don't need you guys to fix all our problems, we just need a partner." That's what a governor should be, which is to be a partner, a problem solver and a solution provider. Government shouldn't solve all our problems, government should be a facilitator and it should lower the friction for a healthy life, a successful life and quality of life.

**HPI:** I always end my interviews by asking if there's anything you want to add that I didn't ask.

**Chambers:** I'm going to try to run my campaign in an aspirational, conservative format. I'm humble about the challenges, but I am optimistic about the opportunity.

**HPI:** I do have to ask what was it like to get on the back of that camel with Holcomb at the pyramids at Giza?

**Chambers:** I was a little shaky about that at Giza because I knew it would end up as a photo somewhere. But I am always awed by history and you cannot find a more awe-inspiring place than the pyramids. I cannot read enough about it; how did they do it? It's unbelievable. ❖





# Signs point to another congressman retiring

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – There are telltale signs that U.S. Rep. Jim Baird, R-Ind.-04, won't seek reelection in 2024. If so, that would create a third open congressional seat



in Indiana. U.S. Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind.-03, is running for the U.S. Senate and U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz, R-Ind.-05, announced in January she would not seek a third term. HPI asked for confirmation that the 4th CD Republi-

can would seek a fourth term from his office Wednesday and received no response.

But an anonymous source sent HPI this comment: "He's definitely not going to end up running. ... I've heard the congressional office is off-loading all this old tech, upgrading old phones and laptops, using this year's funds ahead of the shutdown. Also, there is a practical hiring freeze. He hasn't had a chief of staff since February. [State Rep.] Beau [Baird] and Danise do all the office management. Watch for a last-minute retirement with Beau filing the day of the deadline. Or sending it to the INGOP district committee after the primary is over. Then Beau can try to waltz in."

The last remark was in reference to the congressman's son, State Rep. Beau Baird, R-Greencastle, who was elected in HD44 in 2018, the same year that the elder Baird was elected to the 4th CD.

Another telltale sign comes from the senior Baird's June Federal Election Commission filing. It showed that he raised \$48,602 for the quarter, had \$46,565 in disbursements and \$342,779 cash on hand, which are low numbers for an incumbent congressman with a primary opponent. He is being challenged by Charles Bookwalter. Bookwalter posted \$44,214 for the quarter in his June FEC filing, had \$19,389 in disbursements and \$26,331 cash on hand.

## An 'October surprise' in Indy mayoral race

It's called the "October surprise" in politics, though any negative anomaly after Labor Day that threatens a candidate's fate on Election Day suffices. Last Friday, it was announced that the wife of Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett had filed for divorce in Johnson County.

The timing of the filing, less than eight weeks before the election, ginned up rumor and speculation. Howey Politics Indiana has always resisted delving into the private lives of public officials unless it is demonstrated



that personal circumstances impact their public performance.

The Hogsett campaign released this statement from the mayor: "Like so many families in

Indianapolis, the last few years have been trying in ways that neither of us could have imagined, and the demands of life in public service have been felt not only by Steph and me, but by every member of our family. Our focus will remain on supporting our three children, and for their sake, we would simply request privacy and respect during these extraordinarily difficult times."

The campaign of Republican Jefferson Shreve has not acted on the Hogsett divorce, though it aired a previously produced TV ad over the weekend that showed a photo of Joe and Stephanie Hogsett together. That ad also noted that during the George Floyd civil unrest in July 2020 that struck downtown Indianapolis, Hogsett did not make public appearances.

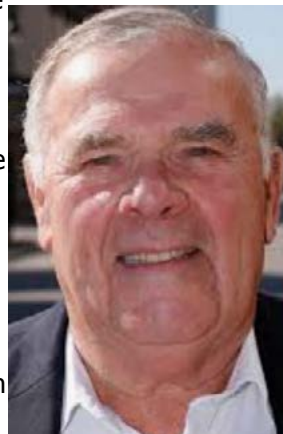
Whether the Hogsett divorce will have any political impact here in the age of Donald Trump is debatable. In the Sept. 14 edition of HPI's Horse Race, we speculated that Shreve might need an "external event" to pull off an upset over Hogsett. But it is far from clear at this writing whether a divorce filing will change the race dynamic unless other aggravating details emerge.

Personal foibles no longer seem to have the same political impacts that they once did. For instance, Trump has been accused by more than 20 women of some sort of sexual misconduct, and yet he has won two Republican presidential nominations, one election, and appears to be well on the way to a third nomination next year, despite facing 91 criminal charges.

Past "October surprises" in Indiana have been mostly political in nature, though there have been a handful of personal problems. In 1982, freshman 8th CD Republican U.S. Rep. Joel Deckard was in a car wreck three weeks before Election Day and was charged with a DUI after refusing to take a blood test. He lost to Democrat Bloomington Mayor Frank McCloskey.

In the 1987 Fort Wayne mayoral race, Democrat Mayor Win Moses was in a tough reelection bid for a third term against Republican Paul Helmke. Moses had been convicted of a minor campaign finance violation during his second term but was returned to office by a Democratic caucus 10 days later. In the final weeks of that 1987 campaign, local law enforcement officials named the mayor's brother as a suspect in an unresolved murder case. Moses told HPI that after that news report, his campaign went into free fall as his poll numbers took a dive and Helmke pulled off the upset with 51% of the vote. Moses' brother was never charged.

In 2012, Republican U.S. Senate nominee Richard



Mourdock made a controversial statewide televised debate comment on the subject of rape and abortion several weeks before the election. He was subsequently defeated by Democrat Joe Donnelly following a media firestorm that sparked some distancing from fellow Republicans. Had Mourdock made the same remark in this era, the political impacts likely wouldn't have been the same as the political atmosphere surrounding the abortion issue has evolved.

Six years later, a U.S. Supreme Court nomination involving Brett Kavanaugh on a congressional inquiry into sexual assault allegations from the nominee's youth impacted Donnelly's reelection bid. Donnelly had announced he would not vote to confirm Kavanaugh less than two months before the election, bringing intense criticism. But Donnelly also had to fend off a half-dozen campaign rallies by Trump on behalf of Republican nominee Mike Braun. Trump also stoked speculation of "Mexican caravans" of illegal immigrants headed to the southern border. Braun would go on to upset Donnelly.

## Mayors

### Indianapolis: Debate scheduled

The African American Coalition of Indianapolis, in partnership with the Indianapolis Recorder and Radio One, announced the first broadcast and livestream of a mayoral debate focusing on Black issues featuring Democratic incumbent Mayor Hogsett and Shreve. It's scheduled for 4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 8, and will livestream on the Indianapolis Recorder's Facebook page, its YouTube page and broadcast on Radio One stations 106.7 WTLC-FM, AM 1310/95.1 FM/92.7 FM. This debate sets the stage for the candidates to lay out their plans for supporting and uplifting the Black community across Indianapolis. **Horse Race Status:** Leans Hogsett.

### Fort Wayne: Henry riverfront groundbreaking

Progress along Fort Wayne's riverfront continues as Mayor Tom Henry joined the City of Fort Wayne's Community Development Division, Parks and Recreation Department, and community leaders for a groundbreaking ceremony to celebrate the start of construction on Riverfront Phase IIb Public Open Space on Wednesday. "Riverfront development is a key economic driver and unique quality of life amenity that is positioning Fort Wayne as a regional and national leader in providing an excellent and successful live, work and play model," said Henry. "As a point of destination community, we're moving together in the right direction as our best days are ahead of us. This next phase of work along our riverfront will have a lasting and meaningful impact."

The opening of Promenade Park in 2019 was Phase I of riverfront development. Promenade Park quickly became one of the most popular destinations for residents and tourists. In addition to being a nationally renowned park, Promenade Park furthered the City's proven track

record of leveraging public funds to catalyze private investment. Earlier this year, work on Phase IIa was completed and serves as a connection between Promenade Park and Headwaters Park, filling in a missing piece of park space and providing a vital connection between what now is nearly one acre of public park space on the south side of the St Marys River. **Horse Race Status:** Leans Henry.



### Terre Haute: Bennett receives endorsements

Republican Mayor Duke Bennett was endorsed by the International Union of Police Associations, Terre Haute Police Officer's Local 133 and the Terre Haute Fire Fighters Local 758. Each group held an election where current members voted. "I am beyond honored to have earned the support of the brave men and women in our local public safety departments," Bennett said. "I was born and raised in Terre Haute, and this is the city Pam and I chose to raise our family. We love this city, and I am fully committed to ensuring it remains a great place and a safe place for my family and yours. Together, we will continue supporting those who serve on the frontlines and we will make Terre Haute an even better community over the next four years." In a letter announcing the endorsement, the International Union of Police Associations Local 133 said of Bennett: "Your commitment to public service and dedication to community safety has earned our support in the coming election. We believe that your leadership and vision align with the values and goals of our union. We are confident that your candidacy represents the interests of our community and the men and women who serve tirelessly in law enforcement." The president of the Terre Haute Fire Fighters Local 758 said of Bennett: "Over the past 16 years, you have been steadfast on making sure that public safety has been a top priority. You have stood with us to have the best equipment and the best training to be able to provide the service that our community needs."

### Sakbun lays out agenda

Terre Haute Democrat nominee Brandon Sakbun posted his agenda on his campaign Facebook page. "As the 43rd Mayor of Terre Haute, I will address our long-neglected streets and sidewalks by utilizing redevelopment funds, incoming casino revenue, and working with our state legislature for funding. "As a Mayor focused on improving the local economy, I will promote and partner with workforce development programs to ensure that every Hautian has a job opportunity in our city. As Mayor, I will fight to retain our young professionals and aging population through affordable housing initiatives. I will work to instill in our youth the passion and LOVE that I

have for Terre Haute in the hopes that they too will make Terre Haute their life long home. As Mayor, I recognize the importance of the Wabash River and its economic potential to our city. The current community plan has a small three-page section on the Riverfront plans. We will do much more than trails and walking paths.” **Horse Race Status:** Leans Bennett.

### Carmel: Finkam releases safety plan

Republican nominee Sue Finkam released a nine-page, 57-point comprehensive vision plan titled “Elevate Carmel.” The plan includes a focus on making Carmel the best-run city in America by delivering on world-class public safety; increased community engagement; robust economic development; data-driven, transparent operations; fiscal discipline; strong neighborhoods and schools; and senior living. “Our community’s future requires a leader with a strong commitment to excellence and the experience to develop, inspire and support a team capable of executing a comprehensive plan built through resident collaboration and aimed at bringing us together,” Finkam said. “My Elevate Carmel Vision Plan focuses on delivering for our residents, keeping Carmel special and ensuring we are the best-run city in America. I look forward to the opportunity to work alongside our communities’ residents, businesses and stakeholders to Elevate Carmel and take our city to new heights.” **Horse Race Status:** Leans Finkam.

### Evansville: Rascher TV ad

Republican nominee Natalie Rascher began airing her [“Leadership and Vision”](#) 30-second TV ad this week.

“Evansville thrives on leadership,” it begins. It describes her as a “political outsider” and says that the candidate “knows safer neighborhoods make a better Evansville. Natalie Rascher will make public safety job one.” It promises the Republican will seek “new approaches to stubborn problems.” It shows the nominee talking with current Mayor Lloyd Winnecke, who has endorsed her.



### Libertarian seeks Winnecke emails

Thomas Langhorne of the Evansville Courier & Press reported that Libertarian mayoral candidate Michael Daugherty has sought all of current Mayor Lloyd Winnecke’s work emails — including deleted emails — for a nearly six-year period. It reported that Winnecke’s city controller, Russ Lloyd Jr., denied Daugherty’s Aug. 4 request under the Indiana Access to Public Records Act in a Sept. 6 letter. Lloyd wrote that the request was “extraordinarily broad” — too broad to be reasonable under Indiana law. “You will note that one of the (counselor’s) repeated observations is that the request

needs to identify individuals as the sender and recipient of an email, as opposed to categories of senders or recipients such as ‘everyone in the mayor’s office’ or ‘anyone in the world’ or even ‘anyone in City departments,’” Lloyd wrote.

### Terry talks neighborhoods

Democrat nominee Stephanie Terry was talking neighborhoods this week. In a Facebook post, she said: “When I started my Together with Terry Listening Tour, it came as no surprise that improving our neighborhoods was at the top of people’s minds. Evansville is filled with neighborhoods with a unique personality, history, and set of qualities that make them special. Our city won’t truly prosper until all of our neighborhoods are a vibrant, safe place to live, work, and raise a family. Forward Together outlines how I plan to repair and reimagine our neighborhood development — from building upon our cultural districts, repairing and improving our park system, and completing street repavement projects throughout the city. I’ll work alongside leaders and organizations to make affordable, quality housing more available for working families.” **Horse Race Status:** Tossup.

### Muncie: Robinson critical of Ridenour

Democrat Council President Jeff Robinson criticized the Ridenour administration for using the city’s Facebook page for political messaging. Robinson, the Democratic nominee, said on his campaign Facebook page: “As you can see in the accompanying photos, there’s more misinformation and misleading posts coming from the current administration, via the City’s official Facebook page (there’s more on how inappropriate that is at the end, so stay tuned). What this post fails to mention, regarding total cost, is the scope of work being done that inflates the project cost per lane mile on this particular project. In opposition to my infrastructure plan, the current administration is doing its best to present inflated costs to punch holes in my very attainable plan to pave 82 lane miles of road for \$20 million.” Robinson added, “Using the City’s official Facebook page as a tool for my opponent’s reelection campaign is highly inappropriate (for many reasons) and goes against the standards they have set for citizens (pictured below) to engage on social media. I’ve remained quiet since my opponent put magnets with his name and face on the side of his city-issued vehicle while using it to drive to campaign events and to canvass neighborhoods.”

### Mayor Ridenour responds

Mayor Ridenour posted on his campaign Facebook page: “My opponent has put out a road plan. He used some colorful graphics but the plan does not work. Let’s set the record straight. No. 1. He has grossly underestimated the cost to pave. Claims \$20 million for 41 miles (\$487,000 per mile). Actual price to pave correctly is \$1 to \$1.4 million per mile. No. 2, 10 of the 28 streets



on his map plan are already being paved. Why saddle the tax payers with high rates on debt for streets already being engineered and paved? No. 3, we cannot use State or Federal Matching Funds for debt. Our plan secures jobs, keeps us eligible for State and Federal funding which is essential and protects the taxpayers from massive debt." **Horse Race Status:** Tossup.

### **Valparaiso: Costas lauds downtown project**

Republican nominee Jon Costas hailed a new downtown project. "Groundbreaking for the LINC project in the downtown on Thursday," Costas said. "Investment in the downtown is at an all time high. More higher-density housing in and around our downtown adds vibrancy, sustainability and safety. It was part of our downtown renaissance plan from the beginning, and it's working. Valpo is growing stronger." **Horse Race Status:** Likely Costas.

### **Governor**

#### **Doden opposes Chamber school plan**

Republican gubernatorial candidate Eric Doden is calling on the Indiana Chamber of Commerce to end its support for school district consolidation in rural Indiana (Martin, State Affairs). In a letter sent today, the Fort Wayne businessman labeled the business group's position as "damaging." "While the stated aims of this position are laudable, the message sent to our small towns and rural communities is damaging," Doden wrote. "Proposing to do away with small public school districts through consolidation will be seen as a death knell for the millions of Hoosiers who live in small towns and rural communities."

#### **Crouch's 'Axe the Tax' ad**

Lieutenant Gov. Suzanne Crouch aired her first TV ad on her ["Axe the tax"](#) plan. "Under Bideconomics, Hoosiers are hurting," the ad begins. "Suzanne Crouch has the solution: Combine Indiana's massive budget surplus with less government and more efficient operations to eliminate Indiana's income tax." Crouch says: "I even have a name for it: Axe the Tax. I can guarantee you the radical left will scream bloody murder, but that money is not theirs. It's yours and as governor, I'll make sure you get it."



#### **Daniels on Crouch's 'Axe the tax'**

When a Purdue Northwest Sinai attendee asked former Gov. Mitch Daniels about the upcoming gubernatorial race and eliminating the state income tax, Daniels opened his response describing how he enjoyed being apolitical when he was Purdue's president, according to a report by NWI Times reporter Caitlyn Rosen. "It's been a great time

to be a political eunuch," he said to a crowd of chuckles. Rosen reported that the Daniels administration looked at Indiana's income tax when it was constructing its tax reform plan. He said he supports lowering income taxes in the Hoosier state, but "getting them down to zero is not realistic." He did not indicate whom he would support in the upcoming Indiana gubernatorial election.

### **Chambers on 'Axe the tax'**

Republican gubernatorial candidate Brad Chambers told the Anderson Herald Bulletin's Ken de la Bastide that with Crouch's "Axe the Tax" plan, "The devil is in the details." Chambers also said: "I'm all for reducing our tax levy. We're very competitive nationally when it comes to overall taxes. That's one tax. You have to look at the whole portfolio of taxation. If we drop the income tax and property taxes go up, that's counterproductive."

### **Braun endorses Trump**

U.S. Sen. Mike Braun who is seeking the GOP governor nomination, endorsed Donald J. Trump for president on Monday. "As a Main Street Entrepreneur and political outsider, I've seen firsthand how the Washington swamp works against Hoosiers and works overtime to hamper our prosperity," Braun said. "Donald Trump is a businessman and outsider. Together we took on the Washington swamp with a historic victory in the 2018 Indiana Senate race. We installed constitutional conservatives on the Supreme Court who have protected the unborn and our 2nd Amendment rights, and we disrupted the cozy, self-serving Washington elites who are bankrupting our country. Donald Trump is the candidate capable of returning us to the America First policies that delivered unmatched prosperity and security for the American people. I give Donald Trump my endorsement for President of the United States."

### **U.S. Senate**

#### **Braun endorses Banks**

Braun endorsed Republican U.S. Rep. Jim Banks to take over his Senate seat. "Jim Banks is a proven conservative leader who has a strong track record of fighting for Hoosier values as a former member of the Indiana Statehouse, a veteran of Afghanistan, and a member of the US House," Braun said in an X post. "I am confident Jim will continue to put America First and fight for conservative values in the US Senate. I give Jim Banks my full and complete endorsement for the United States Senate because he knows America is worth fighting for."

#### **Rust files suit for ballot access**

Republican John Rust filed a lawsuit challenging House Enrolled Act 1365 (2021), by the Republican-controlled General Assembly and Republican Gov. Eric

Holcomb, a candidate need only have voted in a party's most recent primary election to be identified as a party member on the ballot (Carden, NWI Times). Rust, who is seeking the U.S. Senate seat, told the Times that Jackson County GOP Chairwoman Amanda Lowery has refused to certify him as a Republican.

## Congress

### Speaker McCarthy, Spartz feud

U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz is on the outs with Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Spartz said in a statement: "Unfortunately, real leadership takes courage and willingness to fight for the country, not for power and a picture on a wall. The Republican House is failing the American people again and pursuing a path of gamesmanship and circus. It is a shame that our weak Speaker cannot even commit to having a commission to discuss our looming fiscal catastrophe. Our founding fathers would be rolling over in their graves to see how this institution is betraying our Republic for personal political ambitions and our children will be ashamed of another worthless Congress." McCarthy responded, telling Politico Playbook on Tuesday, "If Victoria is concerned about fighting stronger, I wish she would run again and not quit." That exchange prompted a rival publication to speculate that Spartz might end up seeking a third term. She announced in January she would not seek reelection. Spartz told Politico Playbook in today's edition, "If he is not willing to fight — fight and win — then he is going to fail Republicans. He is going to be tested one more time. From my perspective, he's already failed us twice. The third time, I'm done. I judge people not on what they say, but the results. We need to win something."

## General Assembly

### SD38: Goode to seek vacant seat

A top aide to U.S. Sen. Todd Young is seeking to replace Republican Jon Ford in the state Senate with endorsements from Ford and other Terre Haute-area GOP legislators, according to State Affairs reporter Tom Davies. Greg Goode announced Monday his candidacy and endorsements for the Senate District 38 seat, a move coming quickly after Ford made his resignation decision public Friday. "Today I am announcing that I will respectfully seek the opportunity to succeed @votejonford in SD38," Goode said on X. "Jon has done an amazing job and I will work to continue his legacy of achievement. Thanks you Sen. Ford, Rep. Heaton, Rep. Morrison and Vigo GOP Chair Gentry for your endorsements." Vigo County Commissioner Chris Switzer on Wednesday said he will not seek the Indiana Senate seat being vacated by Jon Ford, R-Terre Haute (Terre Haute Tribune-Star). Instead, Switzer said he will support Greg Goode,



who announced Monday he plans to seek the post. GOP Chairwoman Anne Hathaway has officially called a caucus for 10 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 7, 2023, at the Northview High School Auditorium, 3150 W. State Road 340, Brazil.

## Political parties

### Elsener joins INGOP

Marion County Republican Chairman Joe Elsener is now working as executive director of the state GOP (Martin, State Affairs). He's been in the role for a couple weeks. Elsener follows Matt Huckleby, who recently resigned from the position to work as campaign manager for Brad Chambers' gubernatorial run.

## Presidential 2024

### Sen. Young says Trump can't win

Sen. Todd Young told reporters at a Boy Scout event this week that former President Donald Trump can't win in the 2024 General Election, according to an audio posting at IndyPolitics. "I don't think Donald Trump will win," Young said. "He's the only Republican who cannot win a general election against Joe Biden."

### Welker presses Trump on abortion

Donald Trump pushed back on the most staunchly anti-abortion faction of the Republican Party championed by Indiana's Mike Pence, warning them they won't win elections by calling for flat-out bans without exceptions. Trump had this exchange with new NBC "Meet The Press" host Kristen Welker on Sunday:

**Welker:** If a federal ban landed on your desk if you were reelected, would you sign it at 15 weeks?

**Trump:** Are you talking about a complete ban?

**Welker:** Would you sign that?

**Trump:** I would sit down with both sides and I'd negotiate something, and we'll end up with peace on that issue for the first time in 52 years.

**Welker:** At the federal level?

**Trump:** It could be state or it could be federal. I don't frankly care.

**Welker:** So you're not committed to a ban at the federal level.

**Trump:** I will say this. Everybody, including the great legal scholars, love the idea of Roe v. Wade terminated so it can be brought back to the states.

### Pence aims at Trump

Mike Pence took aim at Trump on CNN's "State of the Nation" on Sunday. "When Donald Trump ran for president in 2016, he promised to govern as a conservative. For four years, we did govern as conservatives, but, today, Donald Trump makes no such promise. He's embracing the politics of appeasement on the world stage, walking away from our role as leader of the free world. He's willing to ignore the debt crisis facing Americans." ❖

# Braun becomes the Trumpiest candidate

By JACK COLWELL  
[South Bend Tribune](#)

SOUTH BEND – In case there was doubt, and there wasn't much, Sen. Mike Braun is running as the Trumpiest of the five candidates seeking the Republican nomination for governor of Indiana.



Braun has officially endorsed a return of Trump to the White House, linking himself solidly with the former president.

"We installed constitutional conservatives on the Supreme Court who have protected the unborn and our 2nd Amendment rights, and we have disrupted the cozy, self-serving Washington elites

who are bankrupting our country," Braun said.

Although Braun is running for governor rather than for reelection to the Senate, he said that he and Trump "together ... took on the Washington swamp with a historic victory in the 2018 Indiana Senate race."

He didn't seem to like the Senate. And the Senate didn't seem to like him. So, Braun, a successful businessman before turning to politics, decided he would be better suited for an administrative position, governor.

The unabashed endorsement of Trump makes political sense for Braun in a Republican primary in a state where Trump won big twice in presidential elections with solid GOP support.

There are four other candidates for the Republican nomination, three matching Braun with multimillion-dollar campaign funding.

If Braun wins a big margin of support from Trump's MAGA base in Indiana, and the others split up what's left in the Republican primary, it would seem to be a recipe for nomination victory.

**The other contenders** with big funding and appeal that could go beyond the MAGA base are Lieutenant Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Fort Wayne businessman Eric Doden and former Indiana Commerce Secretary Brad Chambers, who just recently entered the race with surprising initial momentum.

All three, expressing traditional Hoosier conservative values, have refrained from the Trump style of rhetoric, though they certainly want the votes of Trump supporters, past and present. But they also appeal to Republicans more

interested in government in Indiana than divisive issues in Washington.

The only chance for defeating Braun in the primary would seem to be for one of those three to become clearly the chief challenger to Braun, winning over rather than just splitting ranks of Republicans who are not all-out Trumpsters.

The other candidate, the one without big funding, is former Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill. Since he could appeal to evangelicals who have been part of the Trump base, Hill could split away some support from Braun in seeking his own winning formula.

Trump was instrumental in Braun's 2018 defeat of Sen. Joe Donnelly, the Democratic incumbent, with repeated Indiana appearances for Braun, who came from behind to win.

**Though Braun was a** solid supporter of Trump proposals in the Senate, he did not this time get an immediate Trump endorsement for governor. A reason could be that Braun changed his stance on rejecting some Electoral College totals and joined after the Jan. 6 insurrection in the vote to accept the presidential election results. Trump holds a grudge. So, another reason for Braun's unabashed endorsement of Trump could be to prevent Trump from looking at the possibility of supporting one of the other candidates for governor.

The role of Gov. Eric Holcomb could be important.



Initially, there was speculation that Holcomb would endorse Crouch, his lieutenant governor. He has made no endorsement. Now, there is speculation that Holcomb might favor Chambers. Kyle Hupfer, long-time successful Republican state chair and Holcomb confidant, resigned from state party leadership and quickly became Chambers' campaign chairman, bringing along other party organization figures.

The winner of the Republican nomination is likely to go on to be elected governor. Jennifer McCormick, a former Republican state school superintendent who broke with the GOP on education policy, is now unopposed for the

Democratic nomination for governor. She faces a difficult general election race. No Indiana Democrat has won a race for governor since 2000. No Democrat has won a statewide race since 2012. ❖

**Jack Colwell has covered Indiana politics for over five decades for the South Bend Tribune. Email him at [jcolwell@comcast.net](mailto:jcolwell@comcast.net).**



# Elon Musk's rectitude

By **SABRINA HAAKE**

GARY – Excerpts from a new Elon Musk biography published this month reveal that Musk thought providing Ukraine with Starlink communication satellites gave him the power to dictate military strategies. In September 2022, we have learned, Musk refused to activate the satellites over Sevastopol, Crimea, just prior to a crucial planned attack against the Russian navy.



Despite his lack of military training or experience, and ignoring pleas from Ukrainian generals, Musk declared that Ukraine's planned mission and strategy was "going too far and inviting strategic defeat." Confident in his own rectitude, Musk unilaterally thwarted Ukraine's mission, allowing Russia's fleet to then fire Kalibr missiles at Ukrainian cities.

Musk has also argued on social media, where he has 150 million fawning fanboys hanging on his every word, that Kyiv should give up territory Moscow seized in 2014 and drop any bid to join NATO, well-honed strategies of that military alliance be damned, leading a top adviser to Zelenskyy to lament Musk's "cocktail of ignorance and big ego." Training the same caliber of ignorance and arrogance onto X, formerly Twitter, his newest toy, Musk frequently touts his efforts to "free the bird," meaning, cut online content moderation. Musk's freeing of the bird has handed dangerous antisemites, white nationalists and fascists a megaphone, leading to a recent showdown with the Anti-Defamation League.

Over the past week, X was awash in vile antisemitic tropes as #BanTheADL trended among white nationalists and their abettors. Musk fed the controversy by blaming the ADL for a loss of advertising revenue, suggesting the organization — not the hate speech he has allowed to flourish — had scared advertisers away from the social network. Musk also tweeted that X had no choice but to sue the ADL, to "clear our platform's name on the matter of anti-Semitism," after he amplified an antisemitic call to ban the ADL from X entirely.

**Musk styles himself grandly** but naively as a "free speech absolutist" despite the fact that free speech protections have never applied to privately run platforms like X. The 1st Amendment prohibits the government from abridging free expression, not private purveyors of media content like X that must sell advertising to stay afloat. If private platforms fail to police hate speech, or worse, cause it to increase dramatically, as Musk has done, they will struggle to monetize their platforms through advertisements. No company selling coffee, shoes or dating services wants to be associated with online hatred; it's bad for brand image.

Musk, who famously terminated key employees

engaged in content safety, has allowed online hatred to flourish. That he is now blaming the ADL for X's loss in revenue, instead of his own poor management decisions, is a Trumpian strongman finger-point exercise in projection. It also trots out an old and tired antisemitic trope: That Jews control the hidden levers of commerce.

It doesn't take an economist to understand that whenever free speech and free markets collide, whoever is paying the rent will dictate the terms of coexistence. If advertisers won't pay to have their brands appear on the same platform parading antisemitism, white supremacy or Christian Nationalism, that's not censorship, it's the free market. Aside from free market realities, and despite Musk's juvenile delusions of "absolutism," it has never been the case that anyone can say, write or express anything they want, about any subject they choose, without legal repercussions.

**Words that incite violence** have always been actionable, as is child pornography, as are deliberate falsehoods communicated through forgery, perjury, fraud and false reports, as are credible threats, as are words of slander and libel. Navigating these complexities through 500 million posts on X a day requires staff with discretion and finesse, the opposite of absolutism.

The historic premise driving the "free marketplace of ideas protected by the 1st Amendment," as endorsed by Musk, is that falsehoods and shoddy reasoning are best countered with more speech, not less. Eventually, the rationale goes, as long as informed people stay engaged in the debate, true facts will emerge, and the better argument will prevail. That was certainly true when learned men who drafted in Latin and French debated the 1st Amendment. But, to put it mildly, online public discourse and the right wing echo-chamber are not populated by learned men with enduring attention spans.

Moreover, as 1st Amendment jurisprudence developed during the 20th Century, free speech in the public square was managed through "fairness" mandates that required a reasonable opportunity for the presentation of contrasting viewpoints, and prevailing civilities prevented naked hatred from being presented at all. In today's fact-challenged environment, bias, grievance and anger-tainment masquerade as news, and the loudest, most salacious and most ignorant shouts quickly drown out any attempts at reasoned discussion.

Even without algorithms that amplify divisive content for profit, basic human survival instincts cause us reflexively to tune in to danger. That is why negativity sells; we pay disproportionate attention to negative information over positive. Ditto, negative thoughts. When faced with real or perceived threats online, old flight-or-fight instincts are triggered. Pugilists stay in the thread and escalate rhetoric (fight), while others simply leave the discussion (flight), morphing public debate into a one-sided echo chamber fairly quickly.

Despite these known distortion effects, Musk has officially welcomed accounts previously suspended for hate

and harassment back to the X fold, including Trump's, and hate speech and extremism on the network have increased dramatically as a result. Foreign terrorist groups are now flourishing anew, alongside America's own reactivated tin-foil hat brigade led by Q-Anon, Marjorie Taylor Greene and right-wing militants.

**Promoting free speech** while protecting it requires a deft balancing act, not a hammer. Musk lacks the maturity required to manage a public square and lacks a

basic comprehension of the dangers of extremism. Even a self-proclaimed "absolutist" should understand that inviting fascists, including an incendiary ex-president, to stand in the public square screaming "fire" will eventually burn the square down. ❖

**Sabrina Haake is a trial lawyer who lives in Gary and represents municipal clients in Chicago. Reach her on Twitter @SabrinaHaake.**



## A No Labels message

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – As the political press continues to gear up for next year's presidential election, I've been struck by how little attention many national reporters have paid to a potential third-party bid by the group known as No Labels. The organization, which says it's committed to bipartisanship and political centrism, has secured ballot access in at least 10 states and appears positioned to do so in others, as well.



This move has Democrats worried.

Third parties in presidential contests have mostly served either as afterthoughts or as spoilers, and it's not hard to see a No Labels presidential ticket taking votes from Democrats' likely nominee, Joe Biden, and assuring the election of the Republican candidate — probably Donald Trump. That's an unpalatable option for most Democrats and even many independents, and it may be why some prominent Republicans are pushing for a No Labels candidacy.

It's probably impossible for party leaders to leave strategic considerations aside, but for the rest of us, there are lessons for both parties in No Labels' traction this year. Many Americans are tired of the intense partisanship they see at the national and state levels. And for some voters, the policies the group is promoting seem to strike an attractive ideological balance.

**These include policy** prescriptions that call for reining in spending to keep the national debt from growing faster than the economy; regaining control of our borders but ensuring a path to citizenship; criminal justice reforms "so career criminals can't keep committing crimes" while at the same time, "keeping dangerous weapons away from dangerous people"; committing to make U.S. students number one globally in math and reading within a decade; and a bald statement that "no child should be forced to go to a failing school."

Now, as anyone with experience in creating policy will tell you, there is a big difference between promoting noble-sounding ideals and crafting legislation that will help

the country live up to them. Or to put it another way, the devil's in the details. To this end, I'm struck above all by No Labels' overarching key point — one that many politicians of both parties who are inclined toward the center have been trying to make for years: "America can't solve its biggest problems and deliver the results hardworking taxpayers want, need, and deserve unless Democrats and Republicans start working together side by side on bipartisan solutions."

**There's no doubt that this** is what a lot of Americans would prefer — and, ironically, it's what a lot of politicians could make happen without a third party nipping at their heels. In fact, it already is happening. The huge 2021 infrastructure bill? Bipartisan. A new effort to regulate AI? That's a Democratic senator from Connecticut and a Republican from Missouri working together. Modernizing STEM education? That's from a New Hampshire Democrat and a Tennessee Republican, also in the Senate.

Of course, work like this often flies under the radar. As fall wears on, it's more likely that what we'll be reading about in the press is the opposite: the House GOP's talk of impeaching President Biden because of — well, it's a little unclear why — and its continued brinksmanship over a potential government shutdown. Moreover, many ambitious politicians, looking for an edge, believe it's in their interest to stoke division, since they can raise funds from riled-up partisans and then drive election turnout by inflaming their base.

The problem is, that's no way to govern. Over the course of our history, bipartisanship has often produced better, longer-lasting legislation. It means a proposed law will reflect a wide range of views, win greater acceptance within a legislative body and among the public and — just as important — last beyond the next change in power.

As voters, we don't need a third party to help us make this happen: We can choose political candidates of both parties who, in both their rhetoric and their values, show that they can and will work across the aisle. But if No Labels' appeal to ordinary voters can serve to remind politicians and their party leaders that there's a hunger for centrism and bipartisanship in the public at large, then that's all to the good. ❖

**Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government. He was a member of the U.S. House for 34 years.**

# Thoughts on Trump's tax plan

By **MICHAEL J. HICKS**

MUNCIE – This week, the Trump campaign sketched out a tax plan for what they hope to be a second administration. To be clear, Trump failed to achieve any of the policy goals of his first administration and conducted a second campaign without a policy platform. So, it is hard to take seriously any of Trump's policies. Still, it is always a good time to cogitate through the potential economic effects of tax proposals.



Every tax discussion today, and for the coming decades, should begin by acknowledging our enormous federal debt. This discussion must admit that our huge debt is wholly bipartisan. Trump, and the

GOP House and Senate, was a far bigger spender than former President Barack Obama. Before COVID-19, the Trump administration grew more federal debt than any other president who did not face a recession. During the pandemic, he blew the lid off the debt, in what was the single largest one-time increase in debt across U.S. history. President Joe Biden extended the spending spree; he didn't invent it.

Likewise, no member of Congress of either party is without blame. There are no honest actors. Even the handful of members who voted against big spending bills offer no serious pathway to reducing the debt. The perfidy of Congress is a good reason to critically evaluate these sorts of tax plans.

In considering any tax change, first, question how it might eventually reduce the debt. That may be why Dr. Art Laffer spoke about the tax plan. Laffer became famous during the Reagan administration for arguing that the reduction of high marginal tax rates would spur economic growth. His Laffer Curve provided a visual display of the ill effects of very high taxes on the U.S. economy and federal budget.

**Laffer's arguments won** the day, and President Reagan secured major tax cuts. I believe these lower tax rates helped boost economic growth in the United States through the 1980s. But to be clear, the evidence on that point is far from decisive. Many economists, studying the issue in good faith, remain unconvinced that it played an important role in boosting growth.

However, the critical prediction of the Laffer Curve isn't that cutting taxes would grow the economy. The real prediction is that tax cuts would increase economic growth so much that they would lead to an increase in tax revenues. On that point, there is precisely zero disagreement.

The evidence is overwhelmingly clear — the Reagan tax cuts failed to boost tax revenues.

It is important to note that when Laffer pushed his ideas into the political forefront, the top corporate tax rate was about 45%, and the top income tax bracket was 70%. Today they are 21% and 37%, respectively. If cutting those very high rates back in the 1980s didn't boost tax revenues, cutting these lower rates cannot. The math on this issue is ineluctable.

In a further twist, Trump also proposes to levy a further 10% tariff on Chinese imports. It is worth noting that the last time he instituted tariffs, the Midwest saw large manufacturing job losses. Indiana was hit especially hard, and in the few months before the onset of COVID-19, Indiana slipped into recession-like conditions. Trump's tax plan is nothing but another campaign gimmick that'll be forgotten in a matter of days. However, it raises important questions for other candidates.

**Corporate taxes are popular** with citizens who fail to notice that corporations are mostly owned by individuals through their retirement savings. So, taxing corporate profits actually taxes the retirement funds of teachers, firefighters, auto workers and anyone who owns a defined contribution retirement plan. While it is certainly fine to tax these earnings, they will again be taxed when they flow to retirees. So, corporate tax and income tax affect each dollar of retirement earnings twice.

About eight in 10 households eventually own some sort of retirement fund that owns corporations. At any given time about six in 10 families hold some sort of stock or retirement fund. So, calls to reduce corporate taxation can be motivated by equity concerns over the treatment of different types of income. We are all capitalists now.

Other factors influence the efficacy of a proposed tax change. The reduction of corporate taxes would reduce the tax burden on the richest 60% of the population, with a heavy weight of benefits flowing to older Americans. There is no such thing as an optimal level of progressivity, but we've long sided with Adam Smith in his "Wealth of Nations" that: "It is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion."

A large tax cut aimed at the middle class and more affluent households is cause for consideration. However, I think it is less a progressivity issue than it is of intergenerational equity. A tax cut on older Americans today will affect taxpayers who already will receive far more generous Social Security benefits than will today's younger workers.

The very large federal deficit can only be remedied through some combination of benefit cuts and tax increases. Anyone who tells you something differently is either innumerating or lying to you (or both). So, a tax cut that is targeted at today's older population will redistribute wealth from those receiving much higher government



benefits to those likely to receive less.

There are reasons for one generation to bear a disproportionate tax. For example, it was the parents of the Greatest Generation who bore the tax burdens during and after World War II, following their own war and the Great Depression. There's a good reason they were called the "Lost Generation." Yet, the tax and savings bond appeals of the 1940s very specifically focused on their duty to the younger generation. We would be a better country if we thought more about this sort of thing.

**Tariffs likewise have a** disproportionate effect on poorer households. A 10% tariff on China would make goods more expensive, both imported and domestically produced. Typically, young and poor households spend a higher share of their income on goods than do older, richer households. So, a tariff lands squarely on the shoulders of younger, poorer workers.

We probably shouldn't take campaign promises too seriously, especially when it comes to taxes. Still, asking key questions about taxes is an important way to judge candidates. How serious are these candidates, what do they say they care about, and how carefully do they consider the effect of taxes on different constituents? Taxes are not the most important issue facing our nation today, but they offer a very clear, quantifiable gauge on candidate priorities. ❖

**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.**

## Indiana's untold story needs telling

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Ashley, Indiana, is astride the border separating DeKalb and Steuben counties, north of Fort Wayne. In 2022, Ashley had 1,032 residents, just eight people short of its 1900 peak.



Today, Ashley has joined so many other Indiana towns where a major employer is closing down. Just before Labor Day, Tram Inc. announced 155 employees will be affected as the automotive electric-switch-making facility will see production move closer to its corporate headquarters in Plymouth, Michigan — not a favorable move for workers who might hope for a transfer to the relocated factory, two hours and 140 miles away.

Plant closings are not big news outside the affected community. Openings, however, are triumphs of Indiana tax policies, the diligent work of the Indiana Economic Development Corp., and the agile strategic mastery of the governor's office.

**What efforts are made** by the IEDC to retain smaller manufacturing plants in small towns? Where do we find a record of those efforts in the glossy annual report? Is a note of condolence sent to local governments and Chamber of Commerce officials?

Let's be clear. Indiana, over the past quarter century (1997 to 2022) has out-performed the nation in manufacturing output. As measured by private-sector gross domestic product, our share of manufacturing has

risen to 4.2% from 3.7%.

Yet that increase is not impressive when you realize manufacturing fell to 12.4% of the nation's private economy from 18.6%, a 6.2% drop. In that time frame, when a high school graduate moves from youth to mid-40s and a retiring worker looks back to those years, manufacturing in Indiana went to 28% from 33% of the private sector, a 5% decline.

Where did Indiana show its best gains? Chemical production, which includes pharmaceuticals, increased its share of manufacturing by 5% nationally and 6.4% in Indiana.

**However, what is America's** current economic deficiency? Where are we putting vast sums to expand output? It is in the areas of electrical equipment and components as well as computer and electronic product manufacturing. Maybe I'm off base, but didn't we identify the Ashley plant as making electrical switches?

In the past 25 years, electrical equipment and components lost 0.7% share of the nation's manufacturing output but dropped 2.6% in the Hoosier state. No other Indiana industry had a greater relative decline during that period of time. Similarly, computer and electronic manufacturing lost more ground in Indiana than in the nation.

What's been going on? What efforts were made to retain the factories that left Indiana for other states and other nations? We always accept the costs of sending emissaries abroad to prospect for new investments. Isn't it time to open up the IEDC files and let us know about our losses as well as our gains? ❖

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**Mark Bennett, Terre Haute Tribune-Star:** Most Hoosiers aren't elected officials. That separates the vast majority of Indiana residents from Gov. Eric Holcomb and Sullivan Mayor Clint Lamb. Still, a new public-service video featuring Holcomb, a Republican, and Lamb, a Democrat eating lunch at the Oasis diner in Plainfield could be quite relatable, if the viewers use their imagination. In the ad, Holcomb and Lamb talk together about the value of not letting disagreements divide us all, as has increasingly been the case throughout the 21st century. "Actually, [the disagreements] should make us stronger," Lamb says in the one-minute spot. "Listen, discuss and ask questions," Holcomb adds. "It's not about showing the other side how wrong they are; it's about what's best for America," Holcomb continues. "In the end, we're all Americans, and we're all Hoosiers," Lamb responds. Their message is part of the Disagree Better initiative by the National Governors Association. Their ad was released on Tuesday. "The job is just getting harder because you just get drowned out by this political bull----. And I really don't think it's politics. I think it's social issues," Lamb said. Lamb recalled late Indiana's late U.S. Sen. Birch Bayh, a liberal Democrat, telling him that one of his best friends in Congress was Gerald Ford, the House Republican minority leader and future president. Holcomb agreed with the value of that approach to problems and appreciated Lamb's role and work as a Hoosier mayor. "Mayor Clint Lamb is a perfect example of someone who has come together with folks from all walks of life to leave this place better than he found it," Holcomb said. ❖



**Steve Rattner, New York Times:** The United Auto Workers has taken to the picket lines in a particularly acrimonious strike, targeting, for the first time, all three of the big Detroit automakers simultaneously. Popular opinion appears to lie firmly on the union side. And I'm all for the auto workers getting paid more — they have legitimate concerns. But this increasingly militant U.A.W. is overplaying its hand with an overly lengthy and overly ambitious list of demands. I don't think there's any way the automakers will be able to meet these conditions, and I worry about the implications for our economy and for President Biden. The stakes are high. A prolonged strike, which could lead to far more widespread shutdowns of auto facilities, could jeopardize the economic recovery. The UAW has its own reasons for its fury. When I headed President Barack Obama's auto task force in 2009, we restructured General Motors and Chrysler (now Stellantis) and asked the UAW to make significant sacrifices, including to their generous benefits packages. The UAW agreed. Since then, the automakers have seen their fortunes rebound, yet average real wages for workers have been flat more than three decades. Under the union's 1999 contract, the top

wage for a production worker at a Big Three automaker was \$26 an hour — the equivalent of \$43 in today's dollars — compared with \$32 per hour under the union's 2019 contract. So I can understand why autoworkers want, and deserve, a big raise. The problem is that in their zeal, they are asking for too much: In addition to pay raises of 36% over four years, the list includes a 32-hour workweek with 40 hours of pay; a new version of the pre-recession "jobs bank," which continued to pay laid-off workers most of their usual wages and a return to defined benefit pensions, company-paid medical benefits for retirees and cost-of-living adjustments. I know the automakers won't give all of this. Because they can't. Or if they do, the workers are likely to pay the ultimate price. Unlike service industries, in which jobs are largely tied to where customers are located, manufacturing companies can — and do — always offset higher labor costs by shifting production from more expensive locales to less expensive ones. ❖

**George Will, Washington Post:** Henry Ford, according to corporate legend, said that if he had asked potential customers what they wanted when he founded his company in 1903, they would have said faster horses. The infant automobile industry began by giving people what they did not know they wanted. Twelve decades later, this industry is being discombobulated by government pressure to manufacture products — electric vehicles — that the public does not much want, least of all in the quantities that Washington's central planners deem proper. In 1979, United Auto Workers membership peaked at 1.5 million, in a national civilian workforce of 98.8 million. Today, the "big three" — General Motors, Ford, Stellantis (Chrysler's parent company) — employ about 150,000 UAW members, and the civilian workforce is about 160 million. Time was, America's auto manufacturing meant those three. Today, they are not nearly as important as they were in May 1950, when the UAW and GM signed the "Treaty of Detroit." No one wanted a repeat of that year's 104-day strike against Chrysler that idled 100,000 in Detroit. The "treaty" improved wages and established pensions and company-paid health care. In the 1950s, Detroit was the nation's fifth-largest city (it is now 27th) and Germany and Japan were still struggling to recover from damage done by U.S. bombers, many with Ford-built engines. U.S. car companies, with 95% of the national market share, had negligible competition and could pass along to consumers the costs of labor contracts. Labor strife in Detroit — the automobile industry had supplanted railroads as the emblem of the nation's industrial might — used to be riveting news: Capitalism's big battalions were battling for supremacy. Now, the union and the companies are subordinate to much the biggest battalion: the federal government. ❖

## Sen. Sandlin died Wednesday

INDIANAPOLIS — State Sen. Jack Sandlin, R-Indianapolis, has died. "It is our understanding [that] Sen. Sandlin has passed away, and out of respect for the family, we have nothing further to share right now," Abbey Webb, Sandlin's press secretary, said late Wednesday in a statement to State Affairs (Meeks, [State Affairs](#)). Indy Politics was first to report on Sandlin's death, citing sources that said he died from a heart attack while at his home. Sandlin — who represented Senate District 36, which includes portions of Johnson and Marion counties — served as a state senator since 2016. He was also the president of Jack Sandlin & Associates Fraud Examination, according to Indiana Senate Republicans' website.

"Jack Sandlin was a strong advocate for the people of Central Indiana and a champion of Indianapolis," Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray, R-Martinsville, said in a statement. "He was a valued member of our caucus, and we will feel his loss deeply. Our hearts and prayers go out to his family, friends and all those who will be affected by this sudden loss, especially his wife Lydia." Marion County Republican Party Chairman Joe Elsener said in a statement: "We are incredibly sorry to hear of the passing of Senator Jack Sandlin. Jack lived a life in service to his community from his time on the police force, through his tenure as a city-county councilor, and finally as a state senator representing the Southside." An Army veteran, the late senator sat on three committees: Corrections and Criminal Law, Environmental Affairs, and Insurance and Financial Institutions.

According to the Senate Republicans website, prior to his election, Sandlin served on the Indianapolis City-County Council from 2010-2016 and was a Perry Township trustee from 1997-2006. Sandlin is



survived by his wife Lydia, a daughter and three grandchildren.

## DoD awards state \$33M for Chips

ODEN, Ind. — The soon-to-come Silicon Crossroads Microelectronics Commons Hub, led by the Indiana-based Applied Research Institute, was one of eight regional innovation hubs funded by the Department of Defense on Wednesday to help increase the production of semiconductor technologies and microelectronics ([Capital Chronicle](#)). Gov. Eric Holcomb said the \$32.9 million award will support microelectronics production and development in Indiana and across the Midwest. He said, too, that the Naval Surface Warfare Center — located at Crane, Indiana — already plays a "significant role" in the Department of Defense's microelectronics strategy to boost the country's microelectronics production and development and will administer the program. "Located in America's heartland, Silicone Crossroads builds on the Midwest's strengths in research and development as well as workforce training at all levels, to build a domestic semiconductor industry, a national security imperative to keep our nation ahead of our adversaries," Holcomb said.

## Holcomb chairs IEDC meeting

GOSHEN ([WNDU](#)) — Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb was in Goshen Wednesday to chaired a public meeting of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation board as the approval of state incentives sewed up four more new projects. "We were selected, Indiana, our A.R.I., our Applied Research Institute, which is comprised of about 130 entities including Notre Dame, Purdue University, Indiana University in the area of developing our microelectronics ecosystem," Gov. Holcomb told reporters. "This is about \$32.9 million in this first round. It's a five-year program, so these could be

some of the biggest federal grants the State of Indiana has received at some of our universities to work on."

## UAW strike prompts Kokomo layoffs

KOKOMO — Detroit-based carmaker Stellantis announced it would temporarily lay off an estimated 300 employees at its Kokomo casting and transmission plants, effective immediately, "as a consequence" of the United Auto Workers strike at the Toledo Assembly Complex in Ohio, the company said in a news release ([IndyStar](#)).

## UAW strike likely to spread further

DETROIT — There's zero chance the automakers will reach a labor deal with the UAW by tomorrow at noon, sources close to the bargaining tell [Axios](#). That's the time at which the union says it plans to kick off strikes at additional factories. With both sides dug in, a prolonged strike is looking more likely. UAW President Shawn Fain said in a video message to members: "We're going to keep hitting the company where we need to, when we need to. And we're not going to keep waiting around forever while they drag this out."

## Rokita paid \$190K to law firm

INDIANAPOLIS — Attorney General Todd Rokita has paid more than \$190,000 in legal fees to a Washington D.C.-based law firm for legal work related to his investigation into an IU Health doctor who performed an abortion on a 10-year-old girl, records show ([WRTV](#)). Those fees do not yet include the work lawyers at Schaerr Jaffe are doing to defend Rokita personally in a legal ethics case filed Monday by the Indiana Supreme Court's Disciplinary Commission.