



# Courts roil abortion issue, politics

Rumors of a special session if SEA1 is unconstitutional; young voters ignited

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS — The Indiana Supreme Court is expected to issue a ruling any day now on the constitutionality of SEA1, the abortion restrictions bill passed in a special session of the Indiana Legislature last August by towering Republican super majorities.

SEA1 replaced the state's

22-week abortion ban with a near-total ban. There are exceptions if the woman's life is in danger and in cases of rape or incest up to 10 weeks gestation.

According to the Indiana Lawyer, the case of Members of the Medical Licensing Board of Indiana, et al. v. Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Hawai'i, Alaska, Indiana, Kentucky, Inc., et al., 22S-PL-338, focuses on one



**Hoosier young people protest outside the Indiana Statehouse during the 2022 General Assembly special session. (AP Photo)**

central question: Does Article 1, Section 1 of the Indiana Constitution protect the right to an abortion? In September 2022, a trial court judge essentially answered that question with a "no" when she enjoined SEA1. SEA1 allows abortions only in cases of rape and incest within certain

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## American carnage

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – Connor Sturgeon, a former star athlete at Floyd Central High School, had just shot about a half dozen of his Old National Bank colleagues with his legally purchased AR-15 when he sat in the lobby and waited behind reflective glass for the cops to come. One of the first to respond was 26-year-old Louisville PD Officer Nickolas Wilt, a rookie working just his fourth shift after being sworn in on April 4.

Wilt was ambushed, taking an AR-15 round to his brain.

"They have him sedated. We are keeping our fingers crossed. It's just a wait and see," LaGrange Fire Chief Jim Sitzler told CNN. Wilt is a volunteer firefighter with the department. "Hopefully, he will re-



**"It looked like we were rather hard with the House-passed version of property tax reform. But ... we have done several pieces of legislation with property taxpayers in mind."**

- Senate Budget Chairman Travis Holdman



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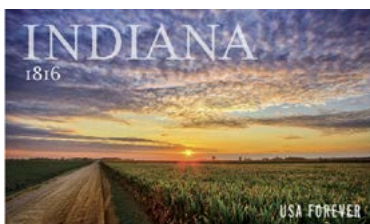
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**Jack E. Howey**  
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1926-2019



cover enough where he can go to rehab. (Nick) is going to have a long road ahead of him but he's young."

**When Dr. Jason Smith** of the University of Louisville Medical Center was asked on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" about the difference between a wound created by an AR-15 as opposed to a Glock 9mm handgun, he responded, "There is simply no comparison. The energies and velocities of the bullets moving from a rifle are just devastating to the human body. That is what they were designed to do. The amount of energy impacting all the tissues, it just pulverizes the tissues, it liquefies organs, it destroys and pulverizes bones and muscles, it just leaves these horrific wounds that are almost unable to be treated because of how devastating they can be. Handguns simply don't carry that kind of energy. It just makes treating those patients so much more difficult."

Dr. Smith and his colleagues in Louisville and across the nation now routinely see this type of American carnage. "The amount of gun violence and the escalation that's happened over the 22-23 years since I have been out of medical school has just been unbelievable," he said. "This was somewhat isolated and on a downturn in the 1990s and the uptick of what we're seeing now is on a scale that has not been seen in this country, ever. That is what people need to understand. This is a public health crisis. There is gun violence in every city and town in this country."

**"We have to begin** the discussion; we have to have the dialogues because there is no simple answer any longer," Smith said. "We have to be able to come up with complex solutions. I would simply ask you to do something because doing nothing, which is what we've been doing, is not working. We have to do



**Connor Sturgeon (top) during his massacre of colleagues, and Louisville PD Officer Wilt.**

something because this is just getting out of hand across our city and across this great nation."

At 2 p.m. Friday in Indianapolis, Gov. Eric Holcomb and U.S. Sen. Mike Braun will join Donald Trump and Mike Pence in addressing the National Rifle Association Convention. On Tuesday, the Indiana Senate passed a resolution praising the NRA.

These people and scenarios come as we are now experiencing an epidemic of gun violence that has brought a low-grade war into American society. The Gun Violence Archive reports there have been 147 mass shootings in the U.S. so far this year (involving four or more victims) fol-

lowing Monday's rampage at an Old National Bank branch in Louisville. There have been 73 kids under age 11 killed and 164 injured. There have been 409 teenagers killed and 986 wounded. There have been 16 police officers killed and 109 wounded.

**As of April 12,** the Gun Violence Archive reports there have been 11,757 gun deaths so far this year, including 5,025 homicides, and 6,732 suicides.

There have been 377 school shootings since the massacre at Columbine in 1999. Last year, there were 46 school shootings – more than any year since Columbine. A Pew Research Center analysis found that the number of children below the age of 18 who were killed by guns rose from 1,732 to 2,590 between 2019 and 2021 – a stunning increase of 50% in just two years.

In high-profile mass shootings in Colorado Springs, Uvalde, Buffalo, Midland, Dayton, Pittsburgh, Parkland, Sutherland Springs, Las Vegas, Orlando, San Bernardino, Newtown and on March 27 at a Christian school in Nashville, assault-style rifles and their mentally ill owners killed rampantly.

**These are siren symptoms** of a sick society.

According to a KFF Poll released Tuesday, experiences with gun-related incidents are common among U.S. adults. One in five (21%) say they have personally been threatened with a gun. A similar share (19%) say a family member was killed by a gun (including death by suicide), and nearly as many (17%) have personally witnessed someone being shot. In total, about half (54%) of all U.S. adults say they or a family member have ever had one of these experiences.

These kinds of statistics are bringing about personal changes. When people go to Walmart or Kroger or a movie theater or a shopping mall, they now fathom a rolling escape plan.

Erika Mahoney, whose father was killed in a Colorado supermarket massacre, writes in *The Atlantic*: "Too often, when we talk about the cost of these tragedies, we talk about the people, like my dad, who were killed. It's time we totaled that price more honestly. Let's also count the collateral damage. Let's count the family members, the friends, the people who ran for their lives or hid in a bank vault. Let's count the police officers, first responders, and doctors who tend to bodies ripped apart by bullets. Let's count the teachers, religious leaders, journalists, lawyers, jurors, and therapists who absorb these harrowing stories. Let's count the brave souls who confront gunmen."

"Let's add in the cost of subjecting schoolchildren to active-shooter drills and teaching office workers to run, hide, fight," Mahoney continues. "Let's think about the depression, anxiety, and PTSD that can make it hard to leave the house."

And then there are the societal costs that are largely unexplored.

Following the high school massacre in Parkland, Florida, I wrote in the Feb. 27, 2018, edition of HPI: "After the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks that killed more than 3,000 Americans, the U.S. responded with an array of security upgrades that we all endure today. We walk through metal detectors at airports and government buildings, have our bags (and even shoes) scanned before flights. There are hardened barriers at gates to stop car bombers. In 2011, the National Priorities Project estimated the

costs of these security upgrades for defense and homeland security at \$7.6 trillion. The homeland security portion cost an estimated \$636 billion, footed by taxpayers."

As Hoosier legislators complain about a spike in property tax bills, not yet appearing in the conversation is the array of expensive steps taken to "harden" our schools and add school resource officers, borne by taxpayers. We have no idea what the collective price tag is, but I bet that when that information is compiled, it's more than \$1 billion just in Indiana.

In that 2018 column, I observed of hardened schools: "This includes steel reinforced entries, vestibules and sally ports, the use of acrylic and polycarbonate bullet-proof glass systems for ground-level floors, entryway metal detectors that range from \$3,000 to \$40,000 each. Many of these changes will come to voters via Indiana's school referendum process. The Michigan-based firm Total Security Solutions notes on its website, 'This is driven by the fierce desire to protect children and give them a safe place to learn, but to do a job as scoped initially, schools would have to pay about \$1 million.'"

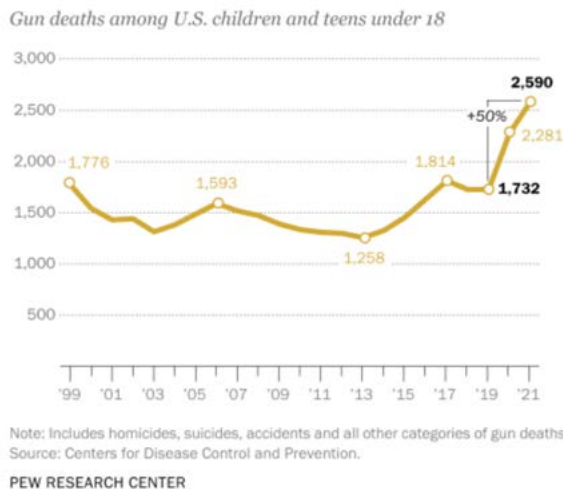
As schools are hardened and the atrocities and bodies keep piling up, we are now watching legislation advancing aimed at arming teachers. Here's what Gov. Eric Holcomb told HPI about arming teachers in 2018: "I firmly believe that we need to let our teachers teach and our law enforcement officials protect. There is a significant difference between teaching firearms safety/use/carry and taking a human life under tremendous stress."

**Here's another observation** I made in that 2018

column: "America has evolved significantly in other areas of safety to reduce mayhem and costs. Since I was a kid, the U.S. government has placed restrictions on the sale and use of tobacco, mandated the installation and use of seat belts, lowered blood alcohol levels on drivers, toughened DUI penalties, placed protective guards on lawn mowers, and required health warning labels on our beer cans. But when it comes to the 2nd Amendment, the prevailing governing notion is that it should not be restricted ... in any way. And, when we did restrict the 2nd Amendment with the assault weapons ban of 1993 (the Brady Bill) with former President Reagan playing a key role in its passage, the law was later rescinded, leading to the carnage we are suffering today."

American society is now awash in guns. According to TheTrace.Org, Americans bought an estimated 1.38 million guns in February 2023, according to an analysis of FBI data. This seasonally adjusted figure includes about 840,000 handguns and 550,000 long guns (rifles and

**Gun deaths among U.S. kids increased 50% between 2019 and 2021**



shotguns). Since 2020, there have been at least 57 million guns sold in America.

In past eras, if a 23-year-old bank employee was fired, he might go on a bender or end his own life. On Monday, Connor Sturgeon took his AR-15, killed five people and injured eight, all while live streaming his atrocity on Instagram.

Gallup found in February that 63% of respondents said they are dissatisfied with the nation's laws and policies on firearms, while 34% of those surveyed said the opposite. An AP/NORC poll in June 2022 found 75% of Americans view gun violence as a major problem. Fewer believe it is increasing in their state (66%) or local community (39%). Those living in urban areas (51%) are more likely to believe that gun violence is on the rise in their communities than those living in suburbs (39%) and rural communities (27%).

**What can we do to stem** this mayhem without violating the 2nd Amendment?

How about raising the gun purchasing age to 21 and preventing those who have a record of violent misdemeanors, alcohol abuse or domestic violence from purchasing? Or banning hollow-point bullets (the U.S. military doesn't use them). Or reinstating the assault weapon ban? Or high-capacity magazines, which were never meant for civilian use? Or taxing the most lethal weapon, the 9-millimeter handgun? Or requiring steeper insurance premiums for guns, the way the industry does for flashy sports cars

or homes with swimming pools?

After the Parkland massacre, Holcomb ordered Indiana flags lowered. Asked about further response, Holcomb said, "It's heart-wrenching, painful to even imagine. No parent should ever have to endure this or wake up and think every day will be like yesterday and then have their child taken away forever."

**Holcomb said Indiana requires** safety specialists at every school. "We have to do everything we can to make it safe so that you have peace of mind when your child either walks to school, gets on that bus or drives to school, that they are going to come home."

Holcomb speaks to the NRA convention on Friday. His audience will be beyond the 70,000 NRA members expected to attend, extending to the 6.8 million Hoosiers, many of whom are fearful of sending their kids to school or going shopping at a mall.

If these atrocities persist, if this low-grade war on Americans continues without a government response, there will be political ramifications, if not in the coming 2024 election cycle, then when the generation of kids who have endured "active shooter drills" in school begin voting and running for office. ❖

**Brian Howey is managing editor of Howey Politics Indiana/State Affairs at [StateAffairs.com/pro/Indiana](https://StateAffairs.com/pro/Indiana). Find Howey on Facebook and Twitter @hwypol.**

## Abortion, from page 1

time limits, fatal fetal anomaly or to protect the health of the mother. One week after the law took effect, Special Judge Kelsey Hanlon determined it violated Article 1, Section 1, which includes a right to "liberty."

There was a second challenge to SEA1 on religious freedom grounds. In that case, the Marion Superior Court struck down the law as a violation of the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act, so the state is once again seeking an emergency transfer to the Supreme Court (Indiana Lawyer).

Should the Supreme Court strike down that law, returning the state to a 22-week gestation, that will prompt calls from pro-life proponents to come back this summer to pass a new law. Other states have opted for 15 weeks and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has proposed and promised to sign a six-week law. And the more radical wing is eyeing the Texas case where a federal judge ruled that the FDA had overstepped its authority in approving the medical abortion medication

mifepristone.

Informed and reliable sources tell Howey Politics Indiana that the restive pro-life advocates in both House and Senate majority caucuses are pushing for an adjournment on April 29, instead of sine die, similar to what

occurred in 2022, paving the way for last summer's special session. These sources say that should the Supreme Court strike down any part of SEA1, this would allow them to come back this summer to make changes.

One source told HPI that there has been "no discussion at leadership level yet."

But should that scenario play out, Hoosier Republicans could find themselves venturing out onto the proverbial

limb, or a bridge too far. Since the U.S. Supreme Court repealed Roe with its Dobbs Mississippi decision in June 2022, pro-abortion rights ballot measures have passed in six states. These include the ruby red states of Kansas (with 59% of the vote), Montana (53%) and Kentucky (52%). Neighboring Michigan approved its measure with 57%.



The latest penultimate thunderclap occurred last week in Wisconsin, with liberal state Supreme Court justice candidate Janet Protasiewicz winning a stunning 11% blowout victory. Wisconsin has been one of the “blue wall” states that Donald Trump won by less than 1% in 2016 and President Biden won by a virtually equal margin in 2020. Politico reported that 2022 mid-term election exit polling revealed 63% of voters said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 34% thought it should be illegal in most cases.

**Hoosier GOP impervious**

Hoosier Republicans are feeling impervious on this issue due to the gerrymandered maps they drew and Gov. Eric Holcomb signed in 2021 that have maintained House and Senate super majorities for a historic fifth consecutive election cycle.

While Democrats picked up a new suburban seat in Hamilton County (State Rep. Victoria Garcia-Wilburn’s win in HD32) and Rep. Kyle Miller in Fort Wayne’s HD82, they saw Democrat Rep. Terri Austin upset by Kyle Pierce, and lost a Bloomington area “blue seat,” HD62. They almost lost state Rep. Rita Fleming, who became the national face of the Indiana Democratic Party during last summer’s special session. In the Senate, Republican Dan Dernulc upset Democrat state Sen. Michael Griffin in Lake County, while Democrats picked up SD46, which moved from Southern Indiana to Indianapolis.

Indiana Right to Life CEO Mike Fichter noted that not one legislator who voted for SEA1 lost in 2022. “In spite of predictions by some pundits and pollsters that Indiana went too far in its approach to protecting unborn children, yesterday’s election results serve as a reminder that Indiana is a pro-life state,” Fichter said the day after the election. “We look forward to even greater opportunities to show Indiana is a state that cares for pregnant mothers and their babies.”

These election results came before the Ball State University Bowen Center poll released last December that revealed 56.7% believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Most Hoosiers – more than 76% – found abortion to be an important or at least somewhat important issue. Hoosier voters were almost evenly split on whether they would vote for a candidate who has a different stance on this issue, with 48% saying they would not and 52% saying they would or might still vote for such a candidate.

Influential LaPorte Democrat Shaw Friedman told HPI after the 2022 election, “Keep in mind that in other parts of the country where election deniers and anti-choice extremists were beaten, it was because they were effective foils to run against. These Trump-recruited and -backed candidates made for effective targets useful to mobilize a D base. Here, early voting and Election Day

turnout from Ds was down because in the two most highly visible Rs – Eric Holcomb and Todd Young – you had relatively moderate Rs who don’t scare people. Neither one is a fringe election denier and certainly neither one has come out for a nationwide ban on abortions. The states where extreme Rs were active and visible afforded reason to boost D turnout.”

Since the Wisconsin blowout, The New York Times has characterized the GOP heading for an abortion issue “cul de sac,” Politico reported that “conservatives are finding out the hard way that abortion isn’t a 50-50 issue anymore” and the Cook Political Report’s Amy Walter reported, “Democrats are happily watching from the sidelines as the Republican Party continues to be defined by two issues that turn off swing voters: Donald Trump and abortion.”

Walter observed: “Both sides acknowledge that it remains a serious liability for the GOP in swing states. The victory of Wisconsin Supreme Court liberal candidate Janet Protasiewicz only served to validate those concerns. Given these results, it’s easy to understand why Democrats are eagerly watching potential GOP presidential candidate Gov. Ron DeSantis support a Florida bill that would limit abortion to the first six weeks of pregnancy. A KFF poll taken last fall found that a majority of Americans (59%) oppose this measure.”

Conservative commentator Charlie Sykes, writing in The Bulwark, said earlier this week, “Many Republicans are trapped by their base. They no longer have appeal to swing voters.”

**New realities setting in**

The new realities may be settling in. The New York Times reported that RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel has been showing polling to members of her party demonstrating that Americans largely accept abortion up to 15 weeks into a pregnancy and support exceptions (rape, incest, life of the mother) that had been the pre-Dobbs line of demarcation.

“If we can show that we care just a little bit, that we have some compassion, we can show the country our policies are reasonable, but because we keep going down these rabbit holes of extremism, we’re just going to keep losing,” said U.S. Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., who has repeatedly called for more flexibility on first-term abortions and exceptions for rape, incest and the life and health of the mother (New York Times). “I’m beside myself that I’m the only person who takes this stance.”

Dan O’Donnell, a conservative radio host in Wisconsin, observed for the MacIver Institute, “Abortion is now a primary driver of young voters, who fear that an unplanned pregnancy could derail their life’s plans. Fear is quite possibly the single greatest motivator, and the



fear that 'women's rights' could be trampled (by a man, no less) motivated a voter base already whipped into a frenzy following the repeal of Roe. For nearly 50 years, Americans were accustomed to the idea of legal abortions even if the thought of ever personally having a child aborted was something they could never abide. As difficult as this may be to come to grips with, Republicans are on the wrong side politically of an issue that they are clearly on the right side of morally."

Pollster Kellyanne Conway told Fox News, "I think we've got some work to do on the young people who think differently on abortion, and perhaps, guns or climate change." Conway noted that while most Americans (53%) say medication abortion should be legal, 66% of Americans ages 18-29 say it should be legal compared to the 12% that say it should be illegal, according to Pew Research Center. Conway also said she's concerned the left is becoming a "turnout machine" with young voters because of the Biden administration's use of influencers. "Influencers have this domino effect, lemming-like effect of people just all... wanting to be part of the same crowd," Conway said.

**The mifepristone development**

Then came the federal court rulings over mifepristone from Amarillo by U.S. District Court Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk and Washington state last Friday.

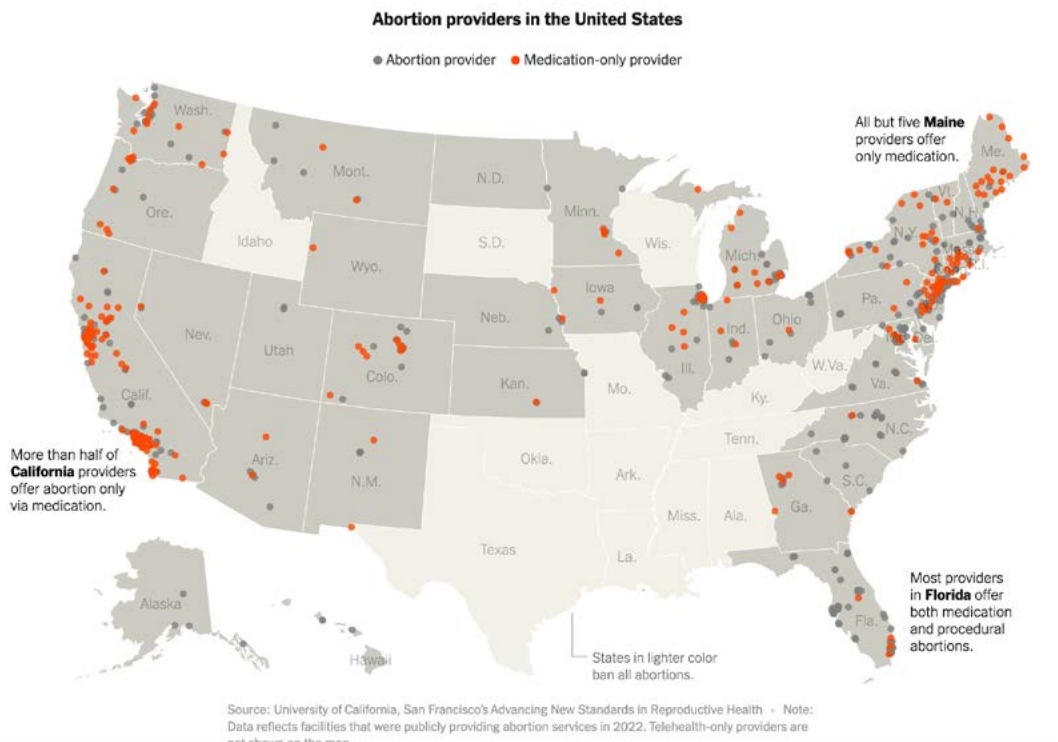
Axios reported on Tuesday: "Top Republicans are in a state of paralysis over abortion, watching – with one eye on the 2024 ballot box – as a cascade of new restrictions threatens to dig the party into a political hole. The Supreme Court's reversal of Roe v. Wade last summer was a huge victory for the GOP. But the backlash to new abortion restrictions has been furious – and could box Republicans into defending rigid, unpopular policies in next year's elections. That backlash already helped drive Democrats' over-performance in November's midterms – and their landslide victory in last week's Wisconsin Supreme Court race, a campaign that focused squarely on abortion rights."

"The GOP's political headaches over abortion aren't going away – especially with prolonged media coverage of the mifepristone legal fight, and a wave of unpopular new abortion restrictions coming at the state level," said Mike Allen of Axios.

The Wall Street Journal editorial board observed on Monday: "Abortion has been a political gift to Democrats

that they want to keep giving, which explains why they sounded almost gleefully furious on Friday after a Texas federal judge overruled the Food and Drug Administration's approval of the abortion pill mifepristone. A conflicting order by another lower court issued the same day means the issue could be headed to the Supreme Court. The Court's Dobbs decision last summer handed abortion regulation to the states, but many on the anti-abortion right and abortion-rights left are trying to nationalize it again via the courts. The justices in Dobbs sought to extricate themselves from regulating abortion, but partisans on both sides don't want to let them."

Worth noting is that former vice president and Indiana governor Mike Pence was the sole potential 2024 presidential candidate to issue a statement praising the Amarillo ruling, calling the FDA's approval of the drug a



"20-year wrong."

**Fed court preserves access, tightens rules**

A federal appeals court preserved access to the abortion pill mifepristone for now but reduced the period of pregnancy when the drug can be used and said it could not be dispensed by mail (AP). The ruling late Wednesday temporarily narrowed a decision by a lower court judge in Texas that had completely blocked the Food and Drug Administration's approval of the nation's most commonly used method of abortion. The Texas order unsettled abortion providers less than a year after the reversal of Roe v. Wade already dramatically curtailed abortion access. The case may now be headed to the U.S. Supreme Court. ❖

# Shreve emerges as an Indy mayoral target

By **BRIAN A. HOWEY**

INDIANAPOLIS – After spending \$600,000 on TV ads to become the most prolific mayoral advertiser of the cycle in the state, Indianapolis Republican Jefferson Shreve has become a target.

Indiana Democrats pressed Shreve on releasing his NRA questionnaire from his 2016 Indiana Senate race. And a journalist accused the Shreve campaign of improperly using her photos on his first TV ad.

Because Shreve fits the “self funder” category, the campaign of Democratic Mayor Joe Hogsett has begun to scrutinize his public record, with sources telling Howey Politics Indiana that it expects him to emerge in the GOP primary. Shreve faces Abdul-Hakim Shabazz and John Crouch in the primary.

Hogsett is facing a primary challenge from State Rep. Robin Shackelford. Neither campaign has started TV ads (and Hogsett has a huge money advantage), signaling the incumbent is focusing on a potential general election fight with Shreve.

“Conservative Republican Jefferson Shreve clearly doesn’t want voters to know about his record on guns and his support of the NRA,” said Indiana Democratic Chairman Mike Schmuhl. “Whether as a city-county councilman or as a failed state Senate candidate, Shreve consistently supported the efforts of the gun lobby to roll back local control on firearms and put more guns on the streets of Indianapolis. He needs to immediately release his “A” rated 2016 candidate questionnaire from the NRA so voters can see the full picture of his radical ideas on firearms.”

As an unelected City-County Councilman in 2015, Shreve voted against a commonsense ordinance to fine gun owners who did not report stolen guns. Just months later, he launched his conservative campaign for state Senate and was given the NRA’s highest rating, INDEMS said.

In an interview with Importantville, Shreve said he has nothing to hide. “First of all, what do they think I did? I filled out a survey seven or eight years ago? I did not put it in my memory box,” Shreve said. “I don’t have it. I can’t imagine what I said that I wouldn’t have believed, but I don’t have that survey.”

Asked about seeking gun reforms, Shreve said, “If my police leadership in Marion County asked for that, if I was persuaded by their conviction that it was going to be a differential in providing for the public safety of our citizens? I would.”

On the media front, Jayden Kennett took two photographs showing the aftermath of the May 2020 racial justice protests downtown for a story published on May 31, 2020, in *The Reflector*, the student newspaper at the University of Indianapolis, where she was a student at the time. The *IndyStar* reported that Kennett objected to the use of her photos Monday on Twitter, stating, “While I appreciate people seeing my work, this is not how my work is intended to be used and no one asked if they could use it.”

One of Shreve’s primary opponents, Shabazz, released his public safety plan. “Public safety is job number one, two, and three,” Shabazz said. “We’ve averaged more than 200 murders annually for the past few years -- a murder rate that rivals Chicago which has nearly three times as many people.”

Shabazz’s public safety plan includes: Reinstating the public safety director position; hiring 200-350 more police officers; seeking tougher penalties for “crimes committed in certain areas”; backing “creative post-conviction sentencing”; backing organizations like the Ten Point Coalition; and expanding after-school anti-crime programs.

Shabazz said, “One of my first official acts as mayor would be to reinstate the position of public safety director. Much like the secretary of defense, Indianapolis needs an individual who can focus solely on public safety (police, fire, E-911). We can only effectively fight crime if we have the right people in place to do the job.”

He also vowed to improve officer morale. “Our officers need to know they have a mayor who will support them while holding bad officers accountable,” he said. “A Shabazz Administration will stand with our law enforcement officers and work to ensure they have the resources they need. Citizens have a right to be safe in their neighborhoods, regardless of where they live. If I am fortunate enough to be elected mayor, we will work with all Indianapolis residents to reduce crime and provide opportunities for all.”

On the Democratic side, Rep. Shackelford released her agenda to improve the city’s roads, sidewalks and trails. “The simple fact is that nearly 2,000 miles of our roads in Indianapolis don’t have sidewalks which means kids walking to the park or men and women trying to catch



the bus to work end up having to walk in the road where they are at risk of being hit by vehicles,” said Shackelford. “Our roads are so bad that it would take \$732 million just to bring them up to ‘fair’ condition. Things must change.” From saving lives with new, safe sidewalks – to investing in green infrastructure that mitigates flooding while reducing our carbon footprint – Shackelford said she has a bold plan to reimagine transportation and infrastructure in Indianapolis.

**Horse Race Status:** Likely Hogsett; Likely Shreve.

**Carmel: Mayor Brainard endorses Rider**

On Friday evening, Carmel Mayor Jim Brainard released the following statement explaining his reasoning for endorsing City Council member and mayoral candidate Kevin “Woody” Rider (Current in Carmel). “When I announced not to seek reelection as your mayor, it was my intention to not become involved in the Republican primary election,” Brainard said. “Carmel voters are aware of the guiding principles and ideas that have helped our city achieve success and will elect the right person to lead our city into the future. Based on statements, however, by the candidates and many requests from voters as well as the importance of choosing the right mayor, I have decided at this time I will make a public endorsement. I am endorsing Kevin ‘Woody’ Rider in his campaign for mayor in the upcoming Republican primary election. The reasons are based on statements made by the candidates in the current campaign and the importance of protecting our city’s future that so many in my administration and the community have worked so hard for.” **Horse Race Status:** Tossup.

**Gary: Cedric endorses Prince**

After three members of the Jackson Five had endorsed Sen. Eddie Melton last month, Mayor Jerome Prince released a video from Cedric The Entertainer. In the video, Cedric says, “Big congrats to the mayor; doin’ an excellent job during the pandemic. There was leadership that we need and counted on. So y’all check out the mayor and let him know, let him know.”

Prince also emphasized his “reimagine Gary” initiative on his campaign Facebook page. “I anticipated challenges but some

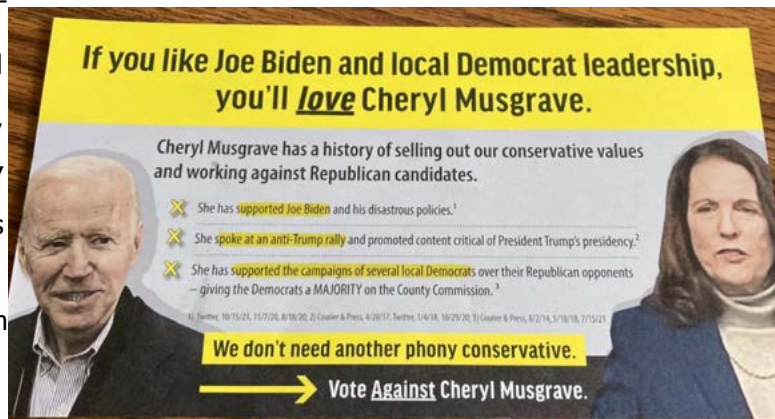


have been greater than others,” Prince said. “Who would have imagined that we would find ourselves shut down from a global pandemic? COVID-19 slowed us down but it didn’t stop our determination. Working our way through COVID-19, we’ve made tremendous progress. Our administration created a conscious and realistic plan to lower our city debt. I am happy to say that we have paid down about \$7 million in long-term debt which frees up some of your tax dollars and re-allocating them to other areas to improve services offered to Gary residents. In order to move our city forward, we must stabilize the finances.”

At 6 p.m. (CT) tonight, Mayor Price and Sen. Melton debate at St. Timothy’s Community Church. **Horse Race Status:** Tossup.

**Evansville: Musgrave criticized mailer**

A mailer calling Vanderburgh County Commissioner Cheryl Musgrave a “phony Republican” has been



denounced by the candidate. The ad was paid for by the Evansville Future PAC, which was created in 2018 by current Deputy Mayor and Interim Parks Director Steve Schaefer. He was chair until 2020, when it was passed to

Hobart Scales. In February, Dylan Krohn became the chair. In a statement sent to the Courier & Press, Musgrave called the message “nothing short of a lie. I am saddened that there will be conservative and Republican voters who would be duped by this deceit. I am and have been a proud Republican and conservative. I stand by my record and my faith.” Musgrave spent time with U.S. Rep. Jim Banks, who is touring the state this week.

The campaign of Republican Natalie Rascher announced she has been endorsed by Randy Alsman, who serves as the president of the Evansville Redevelopment Commission. “His endorsement is a reminder of the pledge I take to serve our people and the future of our city,” Rascher said on her campaign Facebook page. “Our vision is a tomorrow that requires more than my effort and commitment to you and our children.”

Two supported it and the rest said nothing at all. That was the reaction when the Courier & Press asked Mayor Lloyd Winnecke and the candidates looking to replace him what they thought about the new Indiana law banning gender-affirming care for transgender minors. Gov. Eric Holcomb signed Senate Bill 480 last week, despite not initially under-



standing it. It makes gender reassignment surgery illegal for anyone younger than 18 and forces any minor undergoing hormone therapy to stop by Dec. 31. In Evansville, mayoral hopefuls Stephanie Terry, a Democrat, and Natalie Rascher, a Republican, didn't return messages from the Courier & Press seeking comment. Winnecke did the same. The only candidates to respond were Republican Cheryl Musgrave and Libertarian Michael Daugherty. "It's important to put a pause on these types of procedures for minors specifically until there is more transparency on the risks and more input from parents," Musgrave said through a spokeswoman. **Horse Race Status:** Leans Musgrave.

**Fort Wayne: Henry on downtown projects**

Democrat Mayor Tom Henry heralded more economic development downtown. "Today's groundbreaking for The Lofts at Headwaters Park marks an important milestone for the continued revitalization of our downtown," Henry said. "This \$98 million project will include a parking garage, apartments, townhomes, and retail space. When completed, this space will make a tremendous statement in the downtown area." Henry, who faces a primary challenge from Jorge Fernandez, said, "During my tenure, Fort Wayne has been a progressive and aggressive city with regard to our infrastructure, and that's one thing that sets us apart from other cities. To continue this trend, we are allocating \$135 million in water, sewer, and stormwater improvements for 2023- the largest yearly investment in the history of City Utilities. These improvements will protect and strengthen our neighborhoods, increasing quality of life and making Fort Wayne an even more attractive place for families and businesses." **Horse Race Status:** Safe Henry.

**Columbus: Smith defends \$5 property tax bill**

A candidate for the Republican nomination for Columbus mayor has confirmed he received nearly a full tax assessment reduction two years ago on property he owns overlooking Harrison Lake west of Columbus, according to county tax records (Columbus Republic). Milo Smith, who is seeking the GOP nomination in a race against Mary Ferdon, executive director of administration and Community Development for the city of Columbus, received a 99.7% tax assessment reduction two years ago on a 2.77-acre property he owns on Columbus' west side, according to county tax records. After the reassessment, Smith's annual county property tax bill for the vacant wooded property at 9815 W. Raintree North Drive, overlooking a community of \$1 million homes, was \$5 for taxes payable in 2022. Before the reassessment, the tax bill had been \$1,648. The reduction came after Smith appealed the assessed value of his property, which for several years had been \$97,300. After Smith appealed, the Bartholomew County Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals (PTABOA) reduced the assessed value of the property to just \$300. Smith defended the reassessment in a telephone interview, saying his property was reassessed to reflect the value that would be

applied to any similar agricultural property. "Assessments in the state of Indiana are based on market value in use and current use, and my current use is growing timber. It has no other purpose," Smith said of the property. "It has no purpose to me whatsoever right now except to someday harvest trees off of it."

**Congress**

**3rd CD: Kenworthy announces**

Veteran and former legislative aide Jon Kenworthy kicked off his campaign for Indiana's 3rd Congressional



District today and said he wants to bring stability back to politics and the Republican Party. Kenworthy, who filed to run March 31, is already the fifth candidate in the Republican primary field, joining former Allen Circuit Court Judge Wendy Davis, state Sen. Andy Zay, R-Huntington, Warsaw maintenance technician and veteran Mike Felker and Auburn lawyer Chandler Likes.

They're running to replace the incumbent, U.S. Rep. Jim Banks, R-3rd, who is seeking his party's nomination for the U.S. Senate next year. Speaking at Allen County Republican Party headquarters in downtown Fort Wayne, Kenworthy talked about inflation, the national debt and his military experience. "I'm not going to promise that you're always going to like the votes that I take or the decisions that I make. That's not going to happen with any politician; it never will," he said. "But what I will promise is that my door will be open and I will be listening to you." Kenworthy said he served on active duty in the U.S. Army from 2003 until 2008, including two tours in Iraq, and continued to serve in the reserves until 2011. He graduated from Concordia Lutheran High School in 2003 and from Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne in 2011. Kenworthy worked on Capitol Hill for then-Sen. Dan Coats and has been a legislative assistant and field representative for U.S. Sen. Mike Braun from 2019 until the beginning of his campaign.

**5th CD: Banks visits Rep. Goodrich**



Rep. Banks spent time with State Rep. Chuck Goodrich, who multiple sources tell HPI is preparing to launch a bid after the the General Assembly sine die later this month. "Thank you, @Jim\_Banks, for recognizing the importance of Career

and Technical Education (CTE)! CTE programs help ensure EVERY Hoosier has access to a quality education and a good job," Goodrich said. Banks added, "Great stop today at the Gaylor Electric Innovation and Production Center in Noblesville. Thank you State Rep. Chuck Goodrich for the tour and for all the work you do to train up the next generation of Hoosier electricians!"

## Governor

### Lt. Gov. Crouch meets with Realtors

Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, and the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority are hosting round table discussions around the Hoosier state (WNDU-TV). On Wednesday, Crouch and a panel consisting of leadership from the South Bend Area REALTORS® Association, IHEDA Executive Director Jake Sipe, and Indiana Association of Realtor's CEO Mark Fisher talked to South Bend's local realtors to hear their concerns about inventory shortage and try to come up with solutions. The introduction of House Bill 1005 is one way they've done so. The bill would help lower costs for developers and help Hoosiers avoid being "forever renters." "Because we learned through our ready grants, the 500 million we made available to counties all across Indiana, that the number one request that these communities have was for housing. So, we know it's a big need," Crouch said.

## State parties

### Brooks named INDEM executive director

The Indiana Democratic Party announced that ZeNai Brooks will serve as the next executive director of the party. ZeNai (pronounced zuh-NAY) will begin the role on April 24. Brooks was the Democratic nominee for state auditor in 2022, and visited much of the state during her campaign. ZeNai serves as the finance and operations director of the corporate responsibility function of Cummins, as well as treasurer of the company's foundation. "The Indiana Democratic Party is thrilled to announce that ZeNai Brooks will serve as the party's next executive director. ZeNai is uniquely qualified for this role with her background as a statewide candidate and her experience with Cummins, one of Indiana's best companies," said Indiana Democratic Party Chairman Mike Schmuhl. "ZeNai has shown a serious commitment to advancing the needs of Hoosiers, and ensuring every community has the power to be successful in our state." Brooks said, "As a faith, business, and community leader in Indiana, I am excited to take on the challenge of strengthening our party from the ground up, really leaning into and operationalizing the business of politics. I will also leverage my experience to connect politics to the community in order to effectively engage under-represented communities. By connecting with and mobilizing Hoosiers from every part of the state, we will build an inclusive, big tent party that best represents Indiana and helps regain political power."

### INDEMS blast HB1334

The Indiana Democratic Party is today disappointed at the Republican effort to further restrict the voting rights of Hoosiers with the passage of HB1334. The bill now goes to Gov. Eric Holcomb. "Election after election, Indiana finds itself at the bottom of the list for voter turnout. This bill will only make a bad problem worse," said Indiana Democratic Party Chairman Mike Schmuhl. "When looking over this cruel proposal, Gov. Holcomb should protect the voting rights of disabled, elderly, and military Hoosier families overseas by vetoing this bill, and sending it back to the legislature."

### Legislative dysfunction due to gerrymandering

There are 99 legislators in the Tennessee House of Representatives, the body that voted on Thursday to expel two of its Democratic members for leading an anti-gun protest in the chamber. Sixty of them had no opponent in last November's election ([New York Times](#)). Of the remaining House races, almost none were competitive. Not a single seat flipped from one party to the other. "We're just not in a normal political system," said Kent Syler, a political science professor and expert on state politics at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro. "In a normal two-party system, if one party goes too far, usually the other party stops them. They put the brakes on." In Tennessee, he said, "there's nobody to put on the brakes." And not just in Tennessee. Nationwide, candidates for roughly four of every 10 state legislative seats run unopposed in general elections. And across the country, one-party control of state legislatures, compounded by hyperpartisan politics, widespread gerrymandering, an urban-rural divide and uncompetitive races, has made the dysfunction in Tennessee more the rule than the exception.

## Presidential 2024

### Polls show Trump approval falls to 25%

As the highly anticipated 2024 presidential race kicks off, several recent polls indicate President Joe Biden has a higher approval rating than former President Donald Trump as he faces criminal charges (Fox News). The polls show that even as Trump has risen in GOP primary polls, he still remains unpopular among the broader voting public. Quinnipiac University also released a national survey that found Biden edging Trump 49% to 45% in a hypothetical 2024 matchup. The poll, conducted from March 9-13 with a margin of error of plus or minus 2.4 percentage points, also suggested Trump led DeSantis by 14 points in a potential GOP primary. A recent ABC News/Ipsos poll revealed Biden's approval up nearly 10 points over Trump, locking in a 34% favorability rate among Americans compared to 25% who have a favorable opinion of the former president. After the former president was arraigned in New York City, the ABC/Ipsos poll revealed that 48% of Americans think Trump should suspend his campaign. ❖

# Apologies to Rep. Greene; I was wrong

By JACK COLWEL  
South Bend Tribune

SOUTH BEND – Today I want to apologize to Marjorie Taylor Greene. In past columns, I have cited her and her conspiracy theories as a joke. I was wrong.

The combative representative from Georgia, in only her second term in the House, has become one of the most influential members. And I used her as a laugh line. She is no laughing matter.



She was instrumental in the selection of Kevin McCarthy for House speaker, sticking with him as the slim Republican majority struggled through 15 ballots to pick a speaker. She had Donald Trump on her phone to plead with members for support of McCarthy.

"If you're going to be in a fight, you want Marjorie in your foxhole," McCarthy said. I apologize. I never wrote about the advisability of being in a foxhole with Marjorie Taylor Greene.

Greene now is a leading spokesperson in setting the Republican congressional agenda, moving it toward opposition to coronavirus vaccines, questioning funding for Ukraine in its war with Russia and presenting a story of a peaceful Jan. 6 protest. McCarthy, not wanting her to leave the foxhole and dump him as speaker, as she could do, has appointed her to powerful committees.

Again, my apologies. It never seemed to me that Greene would ever become a top national spokesperson for Republicans. I was wrong.

**Heck, I thought** it was proper in the prior session for Democrats to knock her off committees for such things as questioning whether school shootings and the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks really happened, embracing QAnon conspiracy claims, delivering racist and anti-Semitic rants and promoting violence against Democratic officials in social media posts.

After all, many Republicans as well as Democrats were appalled by her conduct.

Eleven Republicans joined in the vote to strip her

of committee assignments. Many more than that stressed that they weren't endorsing her conduct, just rejecting a Democratic power grab in voting to let her keep committee assignments.

In the Senate, Sen. Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader, issued a scathing rebuke of the "loony lies and conspiracy theories" embraced by Greene. He called her a cancer on the Republican Party.

Indiana's Sen. Todd Young said at the time that Greene was "nutty" and "an embarrassment to our party." Young added: "There's no place for her in the Republican Party. There ought not to be."

I apologize for quoting Young on this in past columns. I thought he was right that there was no place for Greene in the GOP. I was wrong.

**The rise of Greene to national prominence** was authenticated by her recent appearance on the oft-acclaimed CBS program "60 Minutes." She did very well on the program, with attention-getting claims and charges.

When asked if she stood by contention that "Democrats are a party of pedophiles," Greene replied: "I would definitely say so. They support grooming children." She added: "Democrats support, even Joe Biden, the president himself, supports children being sexualized and having transgender surgeries. Sexualizing children is what pedophiles do to children."

As questioner Leslie Stahl was overwhelmed, Greene did what she sought, solidifying her strength with QAnon followers and the Trump vote base and upsetting only the Democrats and moderate Republicans she enjoys antagonizing. She counts on their cries of outrage to boost her highly successful fundraising.

I thought in the past that her future was dim. I was wrong. And I apologize for that.

Greene appeared with Trump at Mar-a-Lago right after his indictment proceedings and received high praise from the former president. He encouraged her to think of running for the Senate.

Maybe she will think of an even higher office. Greene is mentioned in social media

as a possible vice-presidential running mate for Trump in 2024. I don't think that will happen. But I sure was wrong before about Greene. ❖



**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).**

# Why trustworthiness matters in democracy

By **LEE HAMILTON**

BLOOMINGTON – Early this year, the Gallup organization came out with a survey of Americans on how they view the ethics of various professions. Nurses ranked at the top. Doctors, pharmacists, and high school teachers did well, too. Real estate agents and bankers were considered about average. Down at the bottom? Telemarketers. And members of Congress.



So you can imagine how our representatives in Washington feel, knowing that a proven liar in their midst, George Santos, continues to garner headlines and public attention. He casts a shadow over the entire body. The GOP House leadership seems reluctant to take any steps to expel him. Members of the New York

Republican delegation, concerned about how he reflects on them, are agitating for his ouster. And his constituents? They're the people who should be most concerned.

This isn't just because Santos won office by misrepresenting pretty much everything about himself. It's also because as voters, we depend on our representatives to speak and act effectively on our behalf. With a reputation for untrustworthiness, Santos will struggle to do that.

Over the course of my career in Congress, I dealt with hundreds of legislators over many decades and found the vast majority to be honest and ethical. Most understood that in Congress and other legislative bodies in this country, trust is the coin of the realm.

**One of the worst** things that can happen to a legislator is to have word get around that he or she is not trustworthy. This is because you're constantly making deals – hammering out the details of a bill, striving to get funding for a key infrastructure project at home, working with leadership or other members of your state delegation or even legislators from the other party to craft language that can command a majority on the floor. And as part of that process, you have to make commitments. If you don't follow through or you shade your language or you misrepresent your intentions, word

gets around.

So why do so many people hold the ethics of members of Congress in such low esteem and often tell pollsters that you can't trust what they say? I think in part it's because many politicians learn quickly to be very careful about how they use language in public – not for nefarious purposes, but because it's natural to want an audience's support even though, quite often, the issue in question is far more complicated than it's possible to convey in a few words. Or, especially these days, a politician may be entirely sincere in expressing a point of view, but it's based on misinformation or information that comes from what proves to be an untrustworthy source.

**At the same time, issues evolve.** Policy is a dynamic process and circumstances and legislation change; what you said a year ago might no longer be relevant or even useful today. In fact, as a member of Congress, I became very cautious in answering when a constituent or lobbyist asked me whether I would support a particular bill since by the time it reached the floor it might have gone through so many changes that it was unrecognizable. The problem is, as a legislator you don't get to vote "Maybe." A vote is a blunt response to a difficult issue; "Yes" or "No" rarely reflect a member's complete thoughts because of the complexities inherent in legislation.

Intriguingly, it's that changeability – in how legislation evolves, politics unfolds, and politicians think – that makes trustworthiness so important. If other legislators conclude they can't take you at your word, then you're

sidelined: As deals get struck and the details change, you have no influence. In the end, you're just occupying a seat. As Santos has found, you may have a megaphone in the press, but when it comes to affecting public policy or the course of legislative events, you're frozen out. And the losers are your constituents. ❖



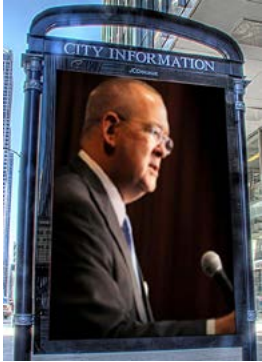
**Lee Hamilton is a senior advisor for the Indiana University**

**Center on Representative Government; a distinguished scholar at the IU Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies; and a professor of practice at the IU O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.**

# More truth on hospital monopolies

By **MICHAEL J. HICKS**

MUNCIE – This is not a trick question. What do Harvard, Yale, Cal Berkeley, Princeton, the Rand Corporation, the London School of Economics, Carnegie Mellon and Ball State all have in common?



Two things: First, each institution has one or more economists who've published a study finding hospital monopolies or monopoly pricing in Indiana. Second, Indiana's hospital lobbyists have criticized each of these researchers and the findings of their research. The gist of their criticism is that we are all biased, in cahoots or

simply not knowledgeable about the issue.

To be fair, those complaints could all be true. We could all be precisely wrong in the same way. Although, in my experience, getting two economists to agree on almost anything is about as common as a white buffalo. Still, there is an alternative explanation; the hospital lobbyists aren't telling the truth, because the truth hurts. Indiana has a hospital monopoly problem.

The main issue is whether or not Indiana's large hospital monopolies are overcharging, and whether that is tied to their high levels of monopolization. Not surprisingly, I think the evidence is pretty clear. The nation's most respected think tank, the Rand Corporation, has completed five different studies of the issue, using data provided by hospitals and insurers. They report Indiana statewide has among the very highest prices in the country, and in at least one place the highest.

**Another group of academic** economists created the "health care pricing project" that collected data for more than a decade. In a series of papers published in the leading economics journals over the last decade, they report nearly the exact same set of findings. Indiana has a hospital monopoly problem.

My work, and that of the health care pricing project, compared these prices to the level of monopolization, finding results that strongly conclude a monopoly is to blame for these higher prices. But, there's other data that points to a problem. The federal government collects spending patterns of families across the nation. That data reports that Hoosiers spend a whopping 32.4% more of their family budgets on hospitals than the average American. The health care lobby claims that is because we are sicker than the typical American. That is nonsense. The CDC ranks us 29th in overall health, but of the 21 states ranking lower than us, only two spend more per person on health spending than Hoosiers do.

The National Academy for State Health Policy just released data that shows the actual cost of hospital services over the past decade grew by less than 10%, while billing of patients and insurers almost doubled. That's why hospital reports to the IRS show annual profits of 20% to 30%, and per-worker profits of \$25,000 to more than \$40,000, are the industry norm for Indiana's large hospital systems. These are three to five times the typical profit rate for not-for-profit hospitals in the U.S. This is just more clear evidence of monopoly pricing.

Still, the health care lobby claims that all these studies and all these data are wrong. They say they are out of date and that the economists studying them are unqualified, biased or just plain ignorant of the complexities of hospital pricing. They argue that hospital pricing is so complex, that only hospital officials or their accountants can fully understand it.

**Let me offer a different** explanation. The "complexity" and lack of transparency of medical billing is a purposeful part of their ability to charge monopoly prices. That is why the Trump administration enforced a pricing transparency rule on hospitals. Sadly, transparency has largely failed, because the rules have too many loopholes for hospitals to work around. A couple examples make clear what is really going on.

Imagine you are a healthy 45-year-old runner in need of an artificial knee. This is a relatively straightforward procedure, requiring a surgeon, surgical nurses, anesthesiologists and other skilled technicians. You'll probably spend a couple of days in the hospital, receiving 'round the clock nursing care, visits by hospitalists and occupational therapists. You'll be fed, receive pain medication and have your dressing changed.

The knee replacement surgery will require an artificial knee, surgical equipment and supplies sourced mostly from the U.S. and a few other developed countries. You might eat salmon for lunch, imported from South America, a salad from Mexico and fruit from Costa Rica. The medical professionals will be licensed in Indiana, and the oxygen and anesthetics produced in FDA-regulated facilities in the U.S.

There are no more than 1,000 manufactured parts to this work, from individual sutures to the anesthesia, and you interact with perhaps three dozen hospital employees. They are regulated by two or three government bodies and source their products from a half dozen nations.

Your hospital will do several of these procedures per day, but I challenge you to figure out how much you will pay for this. You might be able to find a range of costs that vary by 50%, but you have to see through a clunky website to get even that. Let's compare that pricing experience with another regional monopoly we all complain about – cable television.

Imagine you wish to buy a cable TV subscription. You probably have the choice of two or maybe three providers. That immediately makes the experience less monopolized than about half the health care markets in

Indiana. However, this is a far more complex service to deliver.

Cable TV typically requires ground installation of a cable at your home and installation of a cable box. That cable is routed through a utility right-of-way with regulatory oversight by county, state and federal entities. Once completed, the TV shows you watch are delivered through contract from hundreds, if not thousands, of different media companies. These companies broadcast in multiple languages, with near-universal translation services provided by advanced language algorithms.

**Your cable TV shows are** financed by thousands of different banks and investors, and involve constantly changing contracts, across multiple jurisdictions. Rules about who owns a movie from the 1930s or a YouTube video from 2015 vary across 170 nations where they are shown. The signal to your cable TV is routed through a constellation of ground antennas and communication satellites, each of which has several hundred thousand component parts. These satellites are sourced from dozens

of nations, and regulated by international treaties, transmitting to dozens of countries in carefully managed orbit. Providing cable TV is hundreds of times more complex than a knee replacement.

It is funny that pricing information about your cable TV service isn't just abundant, it is incessant. That is not because cable TV companies are kind, thoughtful and caring. They are ruthless profit maximizers, just like the executives of Indiana's not-for-profit hospital systems. The reason it is so much easier to find pricing information about cable TV than a knee replacement is simply that cable TV providers are far less monopolized than your local hospital. It is time to remedy the hospital monopoly problem in Indiana. ❖

**Michael J. Hicks, Ph.D., is the director of the Center for Business and Economic Research and the George and Frances Ball distinguished professor of economics at Ball State University. He can be reached on Twitter @hicksCBER.**

## Let's get real about teaching

By **MORTON J. MARCUS**

INDIANAPOLIS – Indiana schools are not failing us. They are being forced to do what they should not be doing, producing automatons ready for the workforce. They should be preparing citizens ready for the real world of this 21st Century.



Our public schools, the bulwark of a civil society, are endangered by radical privatization and aggressive commercialization of education. The result is a full-on attack from failing religious institutions that see public monies as their fiscal salvation.

But let's talk about what we all know, the relatively low level of compensation for Indiana teachers.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics tells us, the annual average wage in 2021 for all Indiana workers was \$50,440, 37th highest (or 14th lowest) among the 50 states. Our median wage was \$38,330 (33rd). Half of those Indiana workers made less than that amount.

**Without the space** to discuss this travesty in detail, let's note that Hoosier Kindergarten teachers (leaving out those who provide special education) rank 40th in the U.S., with a median income of \$48,210. Elementary and middle school teachers rank 42nd.

Secondary school teachers (leaving out those special ed and the career/tech educators) rank 44th in the nation.

By contrast, those teachers who offer career and technical education in Indiana middle schools do rank 26th in the nation; at the high school or secondary level they rank 21st.

However, our special ed teachers from K thru 12 rank 44th or 45th in annual median earnings. Thus, compared to other states, our teachers are not well-paid unless they are teaching for the gullet of the business whale. We've heard it for decades and our political leaders always say they are addressing the problem. But they are focused on job training and not education for citizenship.

**Thus far, this year,** in 24 states, the Brookings Institution tells us, governors are going to their legislatures and asking for more school funding to increase teachers' income. That's true in Indiana as well.

If, we need more and better students enrolling in our schools of education, create more and better scholarships for that purpose. If we need more of our ed school graduates teaching in Indiana, then a bonus for such behavior should be financed.

More of our experienced teachers might remain in the non-vocational classrooms, if two things were done: First, provide more funds for retirement as a teacher reaches various advanced milestones in a career. Second, reduce the financial benefits of becoming a school administrator. The median earnings of a school administrator in Indiana is about \$36,300 (75%) higher than the median earnings of a standard K thru 12 teacher.

If we are to strengthen education, we need more and better teachers at all levels and in all programs. That requires more competitive compensation as well as more money for learning to teach and then teaching. ❖

**Mr. Marcus is an economist.**

# Guns, decorum and the Tennessee three

By **KELLY HAWES**  
CNHI Indiana

ANDERSON — In a letter to her colleagues, Tennessee state Rep. Gloria Johnson, D-Knoxville, said she had been overcome by emotion. Only days before, Nashville had been the scene of a school shooting, and gun control advocates had descended on the Capitol.



"When I saw thousands of people – mostly children and teenagers – protesting and demanding action from us after the slaying of six innocent people, including three nine-year-old children, it was impossible to sit idly by and continue with business as usual," she wrote.

Johnson and fellow Democrat Reps. Justin Jones, D-Nashville, and Justin Pearson, D-Memphis, had briefly taken over the House chambers, using a megaphone to lead the demonstrators in chants. Jones and Pearson were expelled Thursday. Johnson avoided that fate when six Republicans joined with the Democrats in opposing her ouster.

Asked why her outcome had been different than those of her Black colleagues, Johnson, who is white, didn't hesitate. "It might have to do with the color of our skin," she said.

During the debate, Rep. Andrew Farmer accused Pearson of "throwing a temper tantrum with an adolescent bullhorn."

"That yearning for attention, that's what you wanted?" he asked the first-year legislator. "Well, you're getting it now."

**Pearson fired** back. "Is what is happening outside these doors by Tennesseans who want to see change a temper tantrum?" he asked. "Sarah, whose son was at the Covenant school, showing up here demanding we do something about gun violence – is that a temper tantrum? Is elevating our voices for justice and change a temper tantrum?"

Jones was no less defiant. "What is happening here today is a farce of democracy," he said. "What is happening here today is a situation in which the jury has already publicly announced the verdict. What we see today is just a spectacle. What we

see today is a lynch mob assembled to not lynch me, but our democratic process."

What happened to the two Democratic lawmakers is rare. In the last 157 years, the Tennessee House had expelled only two members. One came in 1980 after a representative was found guilty of accepting a bribe, and the second in 2016 when a representative was expelled over allegations of sexual harassment.

In 2019, when Republican David Byrd was facing accusations of sexual misconduct dating to his time as a high school basketball coach three decades earlier, House Speaker Cameron Sexton suggested his colleagues should defer to the will of the voters.

Now, with three Democrats in the hot seat and Republicans holding an overwhelming majority, Sexton voiced no such reservations. "My opinion," he told a Nashville television station, "is they should be expelled."

**Democrats pointed out** that much of the demonstration had taken place while the House was in recess, but it didn't matter. "The rules here are for order," Rep. Johnny Garrett, R-Goodlettsville, told his colleagues. "We owe that to the constituents that we represent across this state."

Never mind that the misbehaving Democrats had already been stripped of committee assignments. They should all be sent packing.

Almost lost in the furor was what the demonstrators had been shouting about. "We called for you all to ban assault weapons," Jones told his colleagues, "and you respond with an assault on democracy."

Democratic Whip Jason Powell, D-Nashville, recalled going to his son's Little League game and seeing the red ribbons displayed in honor of one of the three children killed in the Covenant School shooting.



"I am outraged, and we should all be outraged," he said, his voice rising. "We need to do something, and expelling Justin Jones is not the answer. It is a threat to democracy."

Republicans acknowledged that Jones and Pearson might return to their seats rather quickly. In the end, Rep. Gino Bulso, R-Brentwood, told his colleagues, their constituents will decide their fate.

And the fight will go on. (**Editor's Note:** Both Jones and Pearson were reinstated by local councils this week.) ❖

**Kelly Hawes is a columnist for CNHI News Indiana.**

# Senate slashes House property tax reforms

## Howey Politics Indiana

INDIANAPOLIS – House legislation tackling high property tax bills lost the majority of those provisions during a Senate committee meeting Tuesday, with senators saying “permanent” relief could come in the future after Indiana reduces pension liabilities (Muniz, [Capital Chronicle](#)). They instead inserted three food and beverage tax bills into the proposal, wading into a local dispute. “It



looked like we were rather harsh with the House-passed version of property tax reform,” committee chair Sen. Travis Holdman, R-Markle, said. “But ... we have done several pieces of legislation with property taxpayers in mind.” House

Bill 1499 previously would have temporarily lowered the Indiana’s property tax caps, increased state income tax deductions and limited local tax levy boosts. House lawmakers passed the lengthy, complex bill 94-1, back in February. Since then, homeowners have begun receiving property tax bills that are averaging a 20% increase statewide. But the Senate has consistently been skeptical of far-reaching relief. And the bill itself has faced heavy opposition from school and local officials because it would reduce local revenues for necessary services. Holdman introduced a 34-page amendment cutting those provisions out. Senators of both parties changed their minds as well, with Sen. Fady Qaddoura, D-Indianapolis – formerly a municipal controller – thanking Holdman for the changes. But property owners might be left in the lurch.

## House calls for cig tax hike

Funding for two large health priorities remains in flux but House Republicans gave senators a proposal on Tuesday: increase the cigarette tax (Downard, [Capital Chronicle](#)). “We haven’t touched a cigarette tax in quite a few years and I honestly think if we’re going to create this big of a program, we need to honestly look at increasing the cigarette tax,” Rep. Chris Judy, R-Fort Wayne said about a public health proposal initiative. “I would like you to take that back to your (Senate) leadership and really consider that ... because this is not going to go away.” Judy, a former tobacco user himself, said lawmakers know that increasing taxes curbs tobacco use. According to the American Lung Association, a 10% price increase on cigarettes reduces consumption by 4% among adults and 7% among youth. The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, using 2022 information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, found that 17.3% of adult Hoosiers smoked – the eighth-highest rate in the country – compared to 5.2% of youth, which it did not rank.

## Bill makes PD lying to children illegal

Indiana law enforcement officers no longer will be permitted to lie to children during an interrogation in an effort to secure a confession or for any other purpose (Carden, [NWI Times](#)). The General Assembly has unanimously approved legislation prohibiting police officers from knowingly providing false information to individuals under age 18 relating to an alleged crime or the potential punishments for it. Senate Enrolled Act 415 additionally requires a law enforcement officer who takes a child into custody at a school to attempt to immediately notify the student’s parent, guardian or emergency contact.

## Fathers could be ordered to pay more

Indiana courts could order new fathers to help pay for more expenses related to childbirth under legislation a step away from becoming law (Smith, [Indiana Public Media](#)). Under current law, courts can order fathers to pay for half of expenses related to medical needs surrounding childbirth – prenatal and postnatal care, hospitalization and delivery. The Senate made a small addition, Rowray said: the expenses must be “reasonable.”

## GOP sought to rein in PLAs

For years, some Republican lawmakers have tried to prohibit Indiana’s local governments from choosing to require project labor agreements (PLAs) on public construction projects (Rayes, [Indiana Public Media](#)). They and the representatives of some non-union building trades groups say the practice often “discriminates” by effectively, albeit not specifically, limiting bids to contractors with union workers. Previous years’ attempts failed and it appears this year’s bill is likely to fail as well. House Bill 1024 contains the sixth attempt since 2019 to take away the power counties, cities and other local units have to limit bids to employers who have a PLA. These agreements typically set workers’ pay and other aspects of their working conditions during the project.

## Tax oversight for Bloomington, Monroe County

Several senators criticized Monroe County and Bloomington’s lack of transparency in food and beverage tax spending; they spoke at a Senate Tax and Fiscal Policy Committee meeting Tuesday (DeSantis, [Indiana Public Media](#)). Sens. Mike Gaskill and Travis Holdman (R-Markle) said the city and county engaged in unauthorized use of food and beverage tax revenues for COVID-19 relief. The County and City spent more than \$200,000 on 40 entities during the pandemic to keep tourism and businesses afloat according to County Commissioner Penny Githens (D). Gaskill said, “Although what you did with the restaurants during the COVID crisis was laudable and a good thing to do, I think you had to do it with other funds.” Holdman agreed, saying, “I don’t mean to scold you, or the City of Bloomington or Monroe County, but you have been collecting tax off of the taxpayer for almost five years and haven’t been using the money for its intended purpose.”❖



# How the other half votes in the Southwest

By **KYLE KONDIK**

CHARLOTTSVILLE, Va. – We received several kind emails from readers last week who enjoyed our reference to James Brown’s “Night Train” on our political trek up the East Coast, so this week’s itinerary is provided courtesy of Brown’s much lesser-known song “Day Train,” which follows a meandering route from Galveston, Texas to Grand Junction, Colorado.

Just kidding – no such song exists, as far as we know. The musical inspiration for this week should perhaps be Marty Robbins’s “El Paso,” or, if we want to stick to train references, maybe the movie 3:10 to Yuma.

We’re applying our top half/bottom half presidential voting analysis to five key states in the Southwest: Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas.

Unfortunately, this method of analysis – comparing how a state’s biggest counties that cast roughly half the statewide vote have changed from 2012 to 2020 versus the bottom half counties that cast the remainder of the statewide vote – does not work well with Arizona and Nevada, the most competitive states in the region and two of the seven states that were decided by less than three points in 2020. That’s because each has a single dominant county that casts considerably more than half of the statewide vote. But these two states are so interesting and important that we are going to look at them here as well.

As recently as 2004, George W. Bush carried all five of these states, but there’s been a Democratic trend in the region more broadly in the years since, with Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico voting Democratic in each of the last 4 elections, and traditionally Republican Arizona flipping to Joe Biden in 2020. Meanwhile, the megastate Texas – which now has 40 electoral votes – is showing signs of becoming markedly more competitive even as it is still clearly positioned to the right of the nation. We’ll start there and work our way across the region.

As with our similar pieces from the last couple of weeks on the Midwest and the East, the election results are from Dave Leip’s Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections unless otherwise noted, and the maps highlighting the “top half” counties in each state (in orange) are from Dave’s Redistricting App.

## TEXAS

Top half of counties that add up to half the statewide vote: Seven counties that are centered around 4 major urban areas: Harris (Houston); the quartet of Dallas, Tarrant, Collin, and Denton, which make up the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex; Travis (Austin); and Bexar (San Antonio). Harris is by far the largest single source

of votes, casting a little under 15% of the statewide vote, although combining the second and third-largest sources of votes, Dallas and Tarrant (Fort Worth), slightly surpasses Harris, as that combination casts a little over 15% of the statewide vote. Biden won all of these counties but Collin and Denton; Barack Obama lost Tarrant in addition to Collin and Denton, and his margin in mighty Harris was only about a tenth of a point, while Biden’s edge there was 13 points.

Bottom half counties that make up the remainder of the statewide vote: The other 247 of the megastate’s 254 counties. Suburban Houston’s Fort Bend is the biggest source of votes in this group, with about 360,000 cast in 2020 (roughly triple what the county cast in the 2000 election, which is a tribute to the county’s exploding

population), while the smallest source is Loving County in the western panhandle, which cast just 66 votes for president in 2020. When you’ve got 254 counties plus a lot of open land and even some desert, some of those counties aren’t going to cast very many votes. Biden won 17 of these counties; Obama won 22.

Outside of the core swing states, Texas is probably the most interesting state in presidential politics -- not for what it is, but what it could be. If it were to become an actual swing state, Texas would immediately become a gigantic prize – its 40 electoral votes are nearly half of the total cast by the seven total states that were most closely decided in 2020 (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, with 93 combined electoral votes under the most recent Electoral College apportionment). But the Lone Star State is still positioned clearly right of center: Donald Trump won it by 5.5 points while losing the national popular vote by 4.5 points, meaning that its margin was still 10 points right of the nation in 2020. However, that’s also much less red than in 2012, when Mitt Romney won Texas by 16 while he was losing the national popular vote by 4. So relative to the nation, Texas got markedly less red from 2012 to 2020. Another turn of that wheel would place Texas right around how the nation votes – whether it is coming is anyone’s guess.

Texas is similar to Georgia, which we covered last week, in that its top half has moved toward the Democrats from 2012 to 2020 while its bottom half remained fairly static. Romney actually won the top half of Texas, narrowly, in 2012 en route to his 16-point statewide win. By 2020, though, Biden carried the top half by 15 points; in the process, he became the first Democrat to carry Fort Worth’s Tarrant County since Lyndon Johnson, a Texan, in 1964. At the same time, Biden improved by a modest 3.5 points in the bottom half, although he still lost that half by about 27 points. In Georgia, the top and bottom voted, respectively, for Biden by 26 points and Trump by 26 points, an equilibrium that allowed Biden to narrowly win the state. In Texas, the GOP margin in the bottom half re-



mains about 10 points larger than the Democratic margin in the top half.

We have generally just restricted ourselves to comparing 2012 to 2020 in this series, in part because the national popular vote margin was almost identical between the 2 years (3.9 points for Obama to 4.5 points for Biden), whereas Hillary Clinton's popular vote margin was just 2.1 points in her Electoral College loss. We also wanted to capture the entirety of the changes from 2012 to 2020, as there were some added wrinkles in 2020 (continued suburban realignment toward Democrats, a drop-off for Democrats in some urban and/or diverse areas, a better Trump performance in some white rural areas, etc.). One other reason to stick to 2012 and 2020 is that the total vote share for third party candidates was just about 2% in each election, but it was a higher 6% in 2016. But we wanted to look at 2016 in Texas to try to see if the strong shift toward Trump in some heavily Hispanic areas from 2016 to 2020 (particularly in South Texas) contributed to some unusual patterns – namely, if Biden did worse in the bottom half counties than Clinton did despite his overall improvement.

The answer is no, although Biden's bottom half improvement over Clinton was very small. In 2016, Clinton won the top half of Texas by 9.9 points and lost the bottom half by 27.6 points. So Biden's margin in the top half was about 5 points better than Clinton's, and he did a point better in the bottom half. In order for Democrats to carry the state, we suspect Democrats would have to carry all four of the core Metroplex counties: Collin and Denton in addition to Dallas and Tarrant. That may happen in the not-too-distant future, as both Collin and Denton voted for Romney by about 31.5 points but only voted for Trump by about 4.5 (Collin) and 8 (Denton) points respectively. Our hunch is that Republicans aren't really going to have to worry about Texas for 2024, but maybe they will later on in this decade or in the next one.

## **COLORADO**

**Top half:** The top half is focused on Denver: four of its five counties are the city itself (which is the consolidated city/county of Denver) and the three suburban counties that surround it: Jefferson, Arapahoe, and Adams. Together they make up a little more than 40% of the statewide vote. However, the second-largest source of votes in the state (slightly behind Denver and just ahead of Jefferson) is El Paso County, home of historically conservative Colorado Springs and the U.S. Air Force Academy. However, El Paso County has been getting more competitive. Both Biden and Obama won 4 of these 5, with El Paso being the only exception.

**Bottom half:** The state's 59 other counties, of which Obama won 23 and Biden won 20. Colorado features a wide variety of counties. The eastern third of the state is sparsely populated and politically reminiscent of its neighbors in western Kansas and Nebraska (very Republican). There are also deeply blue ski resort areas (like

Pitkin County, home to Aspen), as well as some significant conservative pockets on the Utah border. Boulder County, home of the University of Colorado's flagship university, provides a substantial blue anchor in this group. Perhaps no Obama-era swing state has moved more decisively toward the Democrats in the Trump era than Colorado – of the states that were close in 2012, the only other real contender is Virginia, and Colorado moved a bit more from 2012 to 2020 than the Old Dominion did.

## **NEW MEXICO**

**Top half:** Half the statewide vote comes from just 3 counties: Bernalillo (Albuquerque), which alone casts a little over a third of the vote, along with neighboring Santa Fe as well as Dona Ana in the southern part of the state, which is just on the other side of the Texas border from El Paso and contains the city of Las Cruces. Both Obama and Biden swept these counties.

**Bottom half:** 30 other counties; Obama won 14, while Biden won 11. There are some blood red and decently-populated portions of the state, like San Juan County in the state's northwest corner and Chaves, Eddy, and Lea in the southeast corner. The oil-rich Permian Basin is mostly contained in Texas but covers some of southeast New Mexico, and the whole area is deeply Republican.

Since becoming a state in advance of the 1912 presidential election, New Mexico has only voted for the losing candidate three times: 1976, when it backed Gerald Ford, as well as 2000 and 2016, when it voted for Democratic presidential nominees who won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College.

## **ARIZONA AND NEVADA**

We're treating both of these states differently than the others we have covered because they break the rules of how we've constructed the top and bottom halves of states. Each state has a single county that casts well north of half the statewide vote, so it's impossible to separate them into 2 roughly equal halves (there's also not much point in a map, given that we would only need to highlight a single county). Still, we show how their dominant counties voted compared to the rest of their states in Tables 4 and 5.

In Arizona, Maricopa County (Phoenix) casts about 60% of the vote. It voted Democratic in 2020 for the first time since 1948; in that same timeframe, Arizona voted Democratic for president just 2 times (2020 as well as 1996, when Bill Clinton narrowly won Arizona despite losing Maricopa). In Nevada, Clark County (Las Vegas) casts an even greater share of the statewide vote – nearly 70%. Clark is still Democratic-leaning, but the Democratic edge has eroded in recent years, dipping into the single digits in 2020 after 3 straight double-digit margins from 2008-2016. This has left the Democratic statewide edge tenuous – a little under 2.5 points in both 2016 and 2020. ❖

**John Krull, Statehouse File:** Clarence Thomas is a one-man wrecking crew. His wife, far-right political activist Virginia "Ginni" Thomas, has given him a great deal of help in his campaign to demolish the reputation of the once-revered U.S. Supreme Court. The latest sledgehammer blows the power couple delivered to the nation's high bench have been revealed by the nonprofit, nonpartisan news outlet ProPublica. A few days ago, ProPublica published a meticulously reported story detailing 20 years of gift trips the justice and his wife had accepted, without declaring them, from a conservative billionaire who long has campaigned to move the entire judicial branch to the right. Just one of the trips Thomas took on Republican megadonor Harlan Crow's dime would have cost the justice more than \$500,000 if he had paid for it himself. But Thomas didn't pay for it himself. Nor did he disclose it. He just took whatever goodies that were offered to him and said nothing. This is not typical judicial conduct. ❖



**Steve Garbasz, KPC Media:** Let's talk about Tennessee. No, we're not going to talk about country music, although that's almost as much of a scourge as our topic today. ("Took my truck down the dirt road/whiskey's strong and my beer's cold/my girl in her blue jeans, looking fine/partyin' hard 'cuz it's summertime." There you go, I just wrote the chorus of the next big hit by Cody Jackson or Blake Johnson or Chet Chetson or whatever interchangeably generic white guy name you want to generate.) Nope, let's talk about the other horror out of Nashville — the Covenant School shooting from back on March 27. Twenty-eight-year-old Aiden Hale drove to his former school armed with three firearms including the always-popular-for-slaughtering-people-in-a-public-place AR-15, a second semi-automatic rifle and a handgun; shot out the glass of a side door; entered; and then went on a shooting spree, killing three adults and three 9-year-olds before being shot to death by police officers. Police arrived, entered and engaged the shooter in just under 15 minutes, a pretty fair response time to muster manpower and arm up to neutralize a threat like that, but still not fast enough to save six lives. Bigots quickly grasped onto the storyline of a transgender shooter to distract from the fact that more than 97% of public mass shooters are cisgendered men and the majority are white. As a transgender man, Hale also technically identifies a white man, but since the Fox News crowd only goes by biological sex so we'll let them have their one exception. I mean, they had to find something else to blame after their initial stupid "side door" argument was lost when it became clear the door wasn't open and instead the shooter had just shot out the glass and then ducked inside. I'm less interested in

demographics, however, than the more obvious elephant in the room the elephant-mascoted party seems happy to ignore — Hale legally purchased seven firearms between October 2020 and June 2022 and then used three of those firearms to shoot up his old school. Prior to the shooting, Hale was, as many millions of Americans are, a "law-abiding gun owner." He was your average model patriot, using his so-called God-given Second Amendment right to purchase a half-dozen-plus-one firearms in less than two years because this is America! Hale was just sitting on a stockpile of weapons for defense, until the day he decided he needed to defend himself against some elementary schoolers and staff members and then, woo, aren't we all glad he had seven different firearms to choose from? Police reports noted that Hale fired 152 rounds before being killed by police. Twelve dozen and change bullets sprayed around the school. A quick internet search suggests that the average U.S. Army rifleman will be equipped with about 210 rounds of ammunition when heading into a warzone. I haven't seen how many extra magazines police recovered at the scene, but unless Hale was on empty when police arrived, he walked into the school armed like a soldier. Why exactly does any American need multiple assault rifles and why do we, as a nation, continue to allow people to purchase them with little to no barrier? ❖

**Mark Bennett, Terre Haute Tribune-Star:** A couple stood in the front yard of their tornado-damaged home in Sullivan alongside a group of volunteer relief workers Tuesday morning. A leader of crew explained the distance some of the volunteers had come to help. The homeowners wiped away tears. As the volunteers plucked shattered glass from the lawn and sidewalk, raked torn roofing and twigs and piled up snapped-off fence posts and metal siding pieces, two women offered the workers bottled water and snacks, loaded in the back of a pickup truck. A guy pushing a wheelbarrow full of water and snacks came by minutes later. Another guy in a Gator stopped and asked if the wheelbarrow guy needed help. Employees from a Sullivan business dropped off containers of hand sanitizer. Soon, the crew got word that another business was serving free barbecue lunches. As the volunteers walked toward the smoke and aroma of the barbecue grill, people in a Salvation Army concession stand offered submarine sandwiches, chips, cookies, fruit and Gatorade. Once the volunteers chose their lunch option, they sat down on a park bench to eat, and a woman soon walked up and asked how she could join the volunteer group. Helpers helping helpers. In the midst of the hurt, mess and chaos, the potential of the human spirit shined bright in the days following the tornado. "The best part is, everybody is working together," Rutan said. ❖

## Holcomb announces \$133M in city grants

INDIANAPOLIS — Gov. Eric Holcomb and INDOT announced a combined \$133.4 million will be split between 224 Indiana cities, towns and counties as part of the Community Crossings program ([WRTV](#)). The Community Crossings program offers matching to local communities with planned roadwork projects. "The continued success of the Community Crossings program becomes more evident each year," said Gov. Holcomb. "Improving transportation infrastructure at the most local level makes communities that much more attractive for business and Hoosier families alike to connect and grow." Applications for the funding were due in January and evaluated based on need and current conditions. Funding for Community Crossings comes from the state's local road and bridge matching grant fund. The Community Crossings initiative has provided more than \$1.27 billion in state matching funds for local construction projects since 2016. "Safe, modern infrastructure at the local level makes Indiana's transportation network stronger," said INDOT Commissioner Mike Smith. "Partnering with locals on these projects is something INDOT looks forward to each year. The hard work and dedication of local entities to secure these funds and make improvements in their communities does not go unnoticed."



## Riley HS student charged for gun

SOUTH BEND — A 16-year-old has been charged as an adult after a firearm was found at Riley High School on Tuesday morning ([WNDU-TV](#)). Police say Riley High School administrators were alerted of a student possibly being in possession of a firearm. School officials found a firearm in the student's backpack

shortly after the student arrived at school. On Wednesday, the St. Joseph County Prosecutor's Office charged the student, identified as Kewan Johnson, with one count of unlawful carrying of a handgun, which is a level 5 felony. The sentencing range for a level 5 felony is one to six years.

## Evacuation order in Richmond persists

RICHMOND ([AP](#)) — An evacuation order affecting more than 1,000 people remained in place Wednesday night around a large industrial fire in an Indiana city near the Ohio border where crews worked to douse piles of burning plastics. Multiple fires that began burning Tuesday afternoon were still burning within about 14 acres of various types of plastics stored inside and outside buildings at a former factory site in Richmond, Fire Chief Tim Brown said. He said the fire was contained but not under control. Brown said his goal was to finish dousing flames by Saturday morning but "that's a guess." "We are attempting to put the fire out. We are not letting it burn. Evidently there's some misinformation out there that we're letting it burn," he said.

## State, city had flagged company

RICHMOND — [13 Investigates](#) sifted through legal and state documents and learned both the state and City of Richmond flagged the site of a massive April 11 fire for problems. City officials were specifically worried about a fire that could lead to evacuations, which is exactly what happened. "They are still accountable for everything on this site," Richmond Mayor Dave Snow said. "For the mess on this site. They are responsible for the fire that's happened and all the damage that ensued afterward." Investigators are calling this the My-Way Trading Warehouse fire. My-Way Trading is the former name of the company, but 13 Investigates learned it goes by differ-

ent names, including Diversified Green Solutions and Cornerstone Trading Group. All of those companies are connected to Seth Smith, who is listed as a company president, as well as a registered agent. In 2013, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management started investigating the site on NW F Street. State records appear to show the recycling plant did not properly report hazardous materials, some of which were very flammable.

## Active shooter dies in Kendallville

KENDALLVILLE ([WANE](#)) — Indiana State Police (ISP) and the City of Kendallville sent out warnings Wednesday evening telling residents to stay away from an apartment complex due to what ISP described as an active shooter in the area. The city warned residents to stay away from Drake Terrace Apartments on the southwest side of Kendallville near State Road 3. According to ISP, state troopers have been in a standoff for hours with a barricaded suspect armed with a "high-powered" rifle. KPC Media reported this morning: The Kendallville shooter was taken into custody shortly after 6 a.m. but has since died, via ISP Sgt. Brian Walker.

## Shooter's mother called 911 Monday

LOUISVILLE — The Louisville bank shooter's mother was informed of the unfolding situation as she made a tense 911 call saying she'd heard her son was heading to the bank with a gun ([New York Post](#)). Gunman Connor Sturgeon's mother Lisa sounded shaken as she tried to warn police after hearing about his plans from his roommate, in the newly released emergency call. "My son might be [redacted], because he has a gun and he's heading to the Old National [Bank]," she said. "This is his mother, I'm sorry I'm getting details second hand. Oh my lord. I don't know what to do. I need your help. He's never hurt anyone. He's a really good kid."