



COLTS DEFENSE NOT JUST 'FINESSE' SQUAD

Indianapolis proves it can play fast, smart and opportunistic in a brutal division matchup. **Page B4**

TIME TO BREAK OUT THE AUTUMN ARSENAL

A look at the best weapons to protect your yard from falling fall foliage. **Page A6**



DAILY JOURNAL

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2007

Johnson County, Indiana

50 cents

WEATHER



Today
Skies: Morning showers
Temps: High 61; low 44

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Taxes key issue in Franklin mayor race

Both candidates want to cut rates, but they disagree on the best way to do it



By ANNIE GOELLER
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The race for Franklin mayor is dominated by one issue: property taxes.

Both candidates want to reduce them.

While Franklin Mayor Brenda Jones-Matthews and her challenger, independent candidate Fred Paris, agree on some of the

ways that could be accomplished, they disagree on several others.

One issue: the recently created Mayor's Tax Advisory Council.

Jones-Matthews views the council as a way to give residents more input and allow governments to communicate.

Paris sees the board as a political ploy and would eliminate the three-person committee.

The candidates also have different plans for reducing spend-

ing in the city and making government run more efficiently.

Paris, who ran for mayor as a Democrat in 1999, wants to freeze the budget, reduce overtime spending, reinstate a reserve officer program in the Franklin Police Department and raise the overall values of properties throughout the city.

He doesn't want the city to hire any more workers until the state makes a decision on how to

reduce or eliminate property taxes and instead wants to focus on retaining current employees.

"Every time you add a person, it makes it harder and harder to give raises and compensate the people that are already there," he said.

Jones-Matthews wants the city to analyze spending, such as re-evaluating whether full-time employees are needed in positions

(SEE MAYOR, PAGE A2)

INSIDE: A look at where the candidates for Franklin mayor stand on the issues, **Page B1** ■ **COMING UP:** Questions and answers with Franklin City Council candidates, **This week**

PROPERTY TAXES

DANIELS' PLAN CAPS BILLS, HIKES SALES TAX

Homeowners would pay 1 percent of assessed value; consumers would pay another penny on the dollar



Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, left, talks with Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman after making a televised address on property taxes from his office in Indianapolis on Tuesday. In the address, Daniels announced a plan to cap property taxes and raise the sales tax.

By MIKE SMITH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Gov. Mitch Daniels proposed a sweeping property tax restructuring plan Tuesday that his administration says would lower homeowner bills by about a third on average statewide. Some replacement revenue would come from raising the sales tax from 6 percent to 7 percent.

The plan would cap homeowner property taxes at 1 percent of a home's assessed value beginning in 2009, with limits of 2 percent for rental property and 3 percent for business property. Daniels, a Republican, wants lawmakers to set the limits by law at first and then amend them into the state constitution so they are harder to undo.

The proposal includes expanded exemptions for homeowners, new spending limits on local governments; more centralized county oversight on spending; elimination of elected assessors to be replaced by a single appointed one in each county; and a requirement that all significant local construction projects be voted on in a public referendum. The administration said it would work with

AT A GLANCE

Gov. Mitch Daniels proposed a property tax restructuring plan Tuesday.

How it would work: The plan would cap homeowner property taxes at 1 percent of a home's assessed value beginning in 2009, with limits of 2 percent for rental property and 3 percent for business property. Some lost revenue would be replaced by raising the sales tax from 6 percent to 7 percent.

Making it permanent: Daniels wants lawmakers to set the limits by law first, then amend the state constitution so they are harder to undo.

What it would mean: Under the plan, someone with a home worth \$100,000 would pay no more than \$1,000.

Other changes: The proposal also would call for the elimination of elected assessors and a requirement that all significant local construction projects be voted on in a public referendum.

The state also would assume the remaining 15 percent of school operating costs it doesn't pay already, school transportation costs, and care for neglected, abused and delinquent children — all things largely funded by local property taxes.

lawmakers on defining "significant."

The state would assume the remaining 15 percent of school operating costs it doesn't pay for, school transportation

costs, and care for neglected, abused and delinquent children — all things largely funded by local property taxes.

Overall, the plan would provide about \$3.1 billion in property tax relief. However, some of that relief already is being provided in subsidies to local governments so a portion of local taxes are not passed on to property owners.

Daniels, who presented his plan in a speech from his office broadcast live by some TV and radio stations, said old approaches to reducing reliance on property taxes have not worked. Lawmakers have at times raised state taxes to reduce or limit the growth in property taxes, but the relief has not lasted.

"When Indiana acts this time, and we must, our steps must be fair, far-reaching and final," he said.

The plan was generally well received by two top lawmakers, Democratic House Speaker Patrick Bauer of South Bend and Senate Tax Chairman Luke Kenley, R-Noblesville. Bauer had some concerns with parts of the plan, but he and Kenley both said it was good that Daniels had presented a proposal well before the session

(SEE PLAN, PAGE A9)

Figures dispute mayor's claims

Local government, not just state, to blame for tax rate

By MICHELE HOLTAMP-FRYE
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Blame the state if your property tax bill went up. Neighboring businesses are paying less, and your wallet is making up for their savings.

But don't blame your local city, town, library, county or school government.

That's what Greenwood Mayor Charles Henderson told residents about their increasing property tax bills. He spoke to a group of Greenwood residents last week about his plan to repair their streets and sidewalks. At the conclusion, he wanted to tell a story about property taxes.

If your property tax bill went up this year, it's not local government's fault, he said. It's the state's fault. If you're paying more, it's because someone else, most likely a business, caught a break, the mayor said.

Schools, the city, the library district and county government aren't getting any more property tax money, Henderson said.

That's not true, according to a review of property taxes.

Greenwood city government, for example, collected \$10,561,984.33 in property tax money in 2006. This year, the city is due to receive \$11,239,407.

That's an increase of 6.4 percent.

Henderson didn't just defend Greenwood spending; he rattled off nearly every local unit of government except for township offices and fire districts.

Four out of five Johnson County homeowners had increased property tax bills this year. About 45 percent of the residential property tax bills increased up to 19 percent.

Henderson could not be reached for comment Tuesday. A secretary at the city building said the mayor was unreachable.

But his director of operations, Norm Gabehart, also attended the meeting and said the mayor was trying to explain that local government spending didn't grow beyond

(SEE RATE, PAGE A2)



STAFF PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERSON/roberson@thejournalnet.com

Jill Hamilton, director of education at Esperanza En Jesu-Cristo, second from right, works with preschool students Xiomara Martinez, left, Maria Morannchel and Fernando Lagunas, right, at the clinic. More photos, thejournalnet.com.

Hispanic preschoolers get unique help

Greenwood program aids students, parents with cultural, language barriers

By JOSEPH S. PETE
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At a Greenwood ministry, preschool-age Hispanic children sing "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" and "At the Hop" to learn English, a language that often isn't spoken in their homes.

Esperanza En Jesu-Cristo, which means "hope in Jesus Christ," is offering Hispanic children ages 3 to 5 preschool classes four days a week. The program also offers classes for students of all ages

and trains mothers in how to help their children do well in school.

About 120 students from preschool through high school take classes at the ministry, Esperanza director Margarita Hart said.

Esperanza has been offering more classes since doubling its office space at 435 E. Main St. in June. The education program, in its second year, focuses on improving study and language skills because many Hispanic students score lower on English, math and science tests, Hart said.

Cultural differences make it difficult for parents to understand the type of involvement required in school here, she said. Many parents who come from countries such as Mexico that don't have the same academic emphasis found here, Hart said.

For instance, the quality of schools in Mexico varies widely, education director Jill Hamilton said. Some Mexican schools are excellent, but many schools in rural areas teach students little more than how to write their name, she said.

(SEE HELP, PAGE A2)