

Engines start on governor's highway plan

By Mike Smith
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Gov. Mitch Daniels' major highway plan got several plugs during its first hearing before lawmakers Tuesday, with proponents calling it a bold proposal that would create jobs and boost economic development by funding numerous road and other transportation projects.



DANIELS

The plan would allow the state to lease the Indiana Toll Road in northern Indiana to a private venture for an upfront sum the administration hopes would be \$2 billion or more. That money would be used to pay for several projects around the state, and the private venture would get the toll revenue and operate the 157-mile highway.

The bill also would allow the state to make the planned extension of Interstate 69 from Indianapolis to Evansville a toll road and lease it. Proponents said without the overall plan, numerous projects the state has identified as priorities could be delayed for years.

Priority projects include enhancements to U.S. 31 from Indianapolis to the northern state line above South Bend and new bridges over the Ohio River in southern Indiana.

The leases could last up to 99 years, but the administration envisions them being 75 years. Proposed contracts already have been shopped for the Indiana Toll Road and bids are due by Friday, but Daniels may not reveal details about any of them until next week.

But the bids will give lawmakers an idea of how much money they could get through such a deal. The House Ways and Means Committee planned to take more testimony on the plan today, and vote and possibly advance a plan to the full House next Tuesday.

"We cannot have business as usual to get the greatness we demand," Indiana Department of Transportation Commissioner Tom Sharp said. The administration and other proponents refer to the leasing toll options as long-term, public-private partnerships that are gaining more favor around the nation. They are part of an overall \$5.3 billion proposal that Daniels, a Republican, says could create more than 100,000 jobs.

Lawmakers seek input on communications bill

INDIANAPOLIS — Fed up with what they called propaganda by big telecommunication companies, three House Democrats are urging residents to write their legislators and tell them to vote against a deregulation bill they claim would raise telephone prices.

State Reps. Win Moses, Dave Crooks and Matt Pierce, all Democrats, called a news conference Tuesday about the bill, which would deregulate phone companies and let them set their own rates by 2009.

Bill supporters say freeing phone companies from regulations would allow them to compete with other companies that are not restricted by the state and would lower prices.

Opponents point to part of the bill that allows telephone companies to slightly raise telephone rates if they provide broadband service to most customers.

Panel weighs bill on sex offenders

INDIANAPOLIS — The state would broaden its definition of sexually violent predators and bar them from residing within 1,000 feet of schools, parks or youth centers under legislation that received largely favorable discussion before a state Senate panel Tuesday.

Opponents of the bill however, objected that it was overly broad and would possibly banish some released convicts from their hometowns.

Other measures considered would place convicted child molesters under electronic monitoring and parole for the rest of their lives and would tighten requirements for those prison parolees who must register their addresses for the Indiana Sex and Violent Offender Registry.

Some have questioned that figure. Democrats are outnumbered in both chambers, and many have criticized the plan as one that could turn operations of state assets to private ventures that would aim for bigger profits by raising tolls higher and higher. Some also say the proposal is a new concept in Indiana and more study is needed.

"In light of the uncertainty, my view would be to go slow," said Rep. David Orentlicher, D-Indianapolis.

But State Budget Director Chuck Schalliol said any private operator would have to maintain the toll roads, meet a long list of standards and accountability provisions, and pay state troopers to patrol the highways.

Wind knocks probe off schedule

NASA hoping to launch today, but trip to Pluto could again be put off

By Mike Schneider
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

High winds forced NASA to scrub the Tuesday launch of an unmanned spacecraft on a nine-year, 3-billion-mile voyage to Pluto, the solar system's last unexplored planet.

NASA planned to try again today to launch the New Horizons probe, although the forecast held a greater chance of thunderstorms, clouds and gusty winds that could prevent a launch.

On Tuesday, winds at the launch pad exceeded the space agency's 38 mph flight restriction.

"The winds picked up sooner than expected," said MIT scientist Richard Binzel, one of the mission's investigators. "Blame the meteorologists."

A successful journey to Pluto would complete an exploration of the planets started by NASA in the early 1960s with unmanned missions to observe Mars, Mercury and Venus.

"What we know about Pluto today could fit on the back of a postage stamp," Colleen Hartman, a deputy associate administrator at NASA, said earlier. "The textbooks will be rewritten after this mission is completed."

The launch also drew attention from opponents of nuclear power because the spacecraft is powered by 24 pounds of plutonium, whose natural radioactive decay will gener-

ate electricity for the probe's instruments.

Pluto is the only planet discovered by a U.S. citizen, though some astronomers dispute Pluto's right to be called a planet. It is an oddball icy dwarf unlike the rocky planets of Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars and the gaseous planets of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

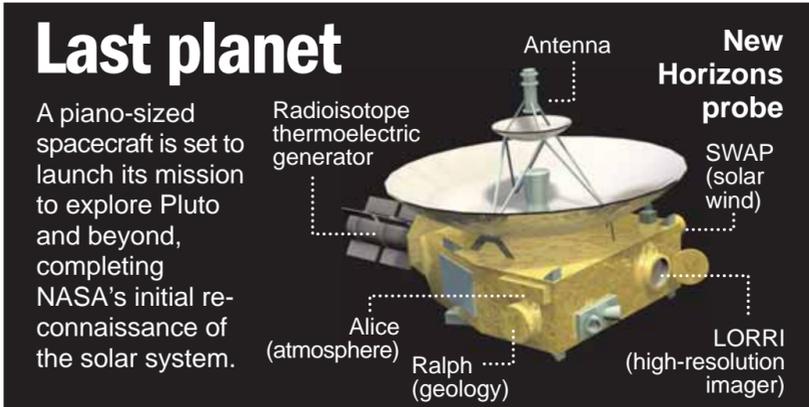
"My dad would be absolutely thrilled to see this," said Annette Tombaugh-Sitze, whose father, astronomer Clyde Tombaugh, discovered Pluto in 1930.

Pluto is the brightest body in a zone of the solar system known as the Kuiper Belt, made up of thousands of icy, rocky objects, including tiny planets whose development was stunted by unknown causes. Scientists believe studying those "planetary embryos" can help them understand how planets were formed.

"Something, and we don't understand what ... stopped that process of growth and left us with this fantastic relic, this forensic evidence of planets that were arrested in the midstage of growth," said Alan Stern, the \$700 million mission's principal investigator.

An Atlas V rocket had been programmed to speed New Horizons away from Earth at 36,000 mph, the fastest launch speed on record.

Once launched, the craft was expected to reach Earth's moon in about nine hours and arrive in 13 months at Jupiter, where it will use the giant planet's gravity as a slingshot, shaving five years off the 3-billion-mile trip.



SOURCE: NASA

Andy Fowle • AP



AP PHOTO
An Atlas V rocket will carry the New Horizons probe to its destination, Pluto.

Disputed study: Prison sexual assaults rare

By Kim Curtis
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN FRANCISCO

A bitterly disputed, government-sponsored study has concluded that rape and sexual assault behind bars may be rampant in movies and books but are rare in real life.

When inmates have sex, it is usually by choice, and often engaged in as a way to win protection or privileges, said Mark Fleisher, a cultural anthropologist who specializes in prisons and crime at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

He said inmates who cry rape are usually lying and looking for a transfer, money or publicity.

"Inmates say it may happen, but the conditions under which it happens are rare," Fleisher said. "It is unlikely all the stars are going to align properly for this to happen, particularly in prisons today. You're going to get caught."

The two-year study, commissioned by the U.S. Justice Department for \$939,233, has come under withering attack from other ex-

perts. The department has not endorsed the study, saying Fleisher has yet to turn over his data for closer examination.

"To take the position that it's not a problem and prisons are safe places is asinine," said Reggie B. Walton, a federal judge and chairman of the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, set up under a 2003 federal law. He said Fleisher's conclusions are totally inconsistent with what he has learned during 30 years in the criminal justice system.

Cindy Struckman-Johnson, profes-

sor of psychology at the University of South Dakota and one of nine commission members, said Fleisher's 155-page study is not in scientific form. She said there is no literature review, no raw data and no in-depth explanation of his subjects or research methods.

Fleisher said he spent more than 700 hours interviewing 564 randomly chosen inmates at dozens of institutions across the country. He said he never met anyone who claimed to be a victim of sexual violence.

He said his findings were no surprise to him, though he admit-

ted his conclusion flies in the face of what everyone believes.

Fleisher said he found that inmates' sexual activity is not routinely or overwhelmingly violent or aggressive and sex is engaged in by men and women who choose it. In his report, he suggested that what outsiders see as rape is regarded differently by inmates.

"Prison rape worldview doesn't interpret sexual pressure as coercion," he wrote. "Rather, sexual pressure ushers, guides or shepherds the process of sexual awakening."

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