

INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY: 2006 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

LEGISLATIVE
TIMELINE

The 2006 General Assembly meets in a short session of about 10 weeks. A long session, when the state's two-year budget is written, normally lasts 17 weeks.

The House of Representatives convenes Wednesday, and the Senate meets Monday. This year's session is scheduled to adjourn by March 14. Republicans hold a majority in both chambers.

STATE LEGISLATORS:
ON THE AGENDASenate President Pro Tem
Robert Garton, R-Columbus

Does not sponsor bills in his position.

Stance on local taxes and fees:

Wants an alternative to property-tax reliance to fund local governments and school districts. A local option sales tax is the most feasible example.

Expects to see a plan that will freeze local governments' property tax rates and fund all budget increases with new taxes.

Stance on governor's highway plan: Depends on support from the public near toll roads. Wants provisions in place for legislative oversight to keep toll rates fair and stop them from going up repeatedly. Wants assurances that roads will be maintained and road projects paid for. Tolls are an imaginative way to fund road repair and construction when an alternative is doubling or tripling the gas tax.

Stance on governor's education plan: Supports giving schools more flexibility to shift money into the classroom.

Sen. Brent Waltz,
R-Greenwood

Bills he is proposing include:

A bill to encourage small businesses to hire new employees. A small business would receive a tax benefit for each new person it hires. If a new employee is making \$32,000 a year, \$8,000 of that could be deducted from the small business's state tax liability.

Business would have to meet criteria including annual revenue between \$1 million to \$10 million, being able to increase revenue 20 percent a year for two years in a row, having at least 10 employees and being headquartered in Indiana. He said these criteria identify businesses most likely to succeed.

Making it a Class-B misdemeanor to take guns into school if those guns can shoot projectiles faster than 100 feet per second, which includes pellet and paintball guns. Currently, no state law prohibits carrying pellet and paintball guns into schools, although most school policies do prohibit that. The bill would not include toy plastic-dart guns, the kind a youngster might bring to school.

Stance on local taxes: Supports philosophy of giving local governments alternatives to property taxes. But wants to protect property taxpayers from getting hit with property-tax increases and new taxes at the same time.

Stance on governor's highway plan: Opposes it. Does not believe Interstate 69 will benefit businesses, partly because businesses will want to avoid paying extra tolls on trips from Indianapolis and Evansville. Owns a transportation business in Indianapolis and Evansville, and customers said they would avoid using the I-69 extension because of the toll road. Believes some jobs would be lost when Perry Township businesses relocate to make way for I-69.

Stance on governor's education plan: Supports philosophy of giving school districts more flexibility with their tax dollars. Wants provisions in place to make sure districts are responsible with what they spend.

For example, he would not want a school district to sell a bond and go into debt to fund a building project because money was taken from the capital projects fund and given to teachers and administrators for raises.

Sen. Richard Bray,
R-Martinsville

Bills he is proposing include:

A bill to ensure law enforcement agencies have all the facilities they need to clean up meth labs properly and safely.

Sponsor of a bill to restrict the use of eminent domain to benefit private developers. Eminent domain allows governments to seize property for public use. Eminent domain should be strictly for government and public school purposes. Against a private developer going to a city and asking that city to seize a piece of land and turn it over for use as a private subdivision. This infringes on the rights of property owners. Private developers wanting to build subdivisions should have to buy land they want and not have it seized by the government.

Stance on local taxes and fees: Need to do something to reduce reliance on property taxes. Would prefer local food-and-beverage tax or local sales tax to a local income tax. Need to balance new taxes out and not distort the revenue stream. For example, more money is probably spent in Greenwood Park Mall than all of Morgan County's retailers, and people from Morgan County drive to the mall.

Stance on governor's highway plan: Has misgivings about making I-69 a toll road, partly because of commuters who would pay a toll when crossing a county border to get to work. Skeptical about privatization of toll roads.

Stance on governor's education plan: Likes the governor's plan. Wants schools to have flexibility in terms of their spending. But need to make sure methods are still in place to keep schools from going overboard on construction, so dollars are spent in the classroom. Some schools have gone overboard with spending for construction and athletics.

Sen. Mike Young,
R-Indianapolis

Bills he is proposing include:

A measure to assist consolidation of Marion County fire and police.

A bill to allow law enforcement agencies to confiscate a person's vehicle if that person has a previous drunk driving offense and is pulled over for drunk driving again before his license is re-instated or if his license is suspended.

Stance on local taxes: Supports philosophy of giving municipalities alternative sources of revenue. Wants to make sure that if a municipality passes a new tax, it cannot raise its property tax rate.

Stance on governor's highway plan: Does not have enough information about it.

Stance on governor's education plan: Supports philosophy of giving schools more flexibility in terms of how they spend their money, as long as they do not get the freedom to raise more money at the same time.

Rep. Woody Burton,
R-Greenwood

Bills he is proposing include: "In God we Trust" license plate bill. If passed, this bill will allow license branches to distribute plates that say "In God we trust." He wants to counteract groups of people nationwide trying to remove "In God we Trust" and related symbols.

Stance on local taxes and fees:

Would look favorably on allowing municipalities to impose new fees and taxes as long as property taxes are guaranteed to stay down. Would like to eliminate property taxes altogether but realizes that probably will not happen. Is against wider use of slot machines as a method of raising revenue because it is unhealthy for the state to budget based on gambling.

Stance on governor's highway plan: A highway plan of some form will help attract jobs and new businesses along new roads. Wants more information about privatization to see whether it is a good or bad idea. Is in favor of toll road concept because that brings in money from people out-of-state.

Stance on governor's education plan: Totally supports. Wants schools to have more flexibility so they can spend less money on building projects and more on education. Expects discussion next year about streamlining school construction projects across the state by having Indiana offer a set of blueprints that different school districts can pick from, to save those districts millions of dollars in architect fees.

Rep. David Frizzell,
R-Indianapolis

Bills he is proposing include:

A cash-and-counseling bill for consumers on Medicaid. People on Medicaid would have the option of hiring their own help for at-home assistance, such as help with house chores. Giving them more flexibility with hiring has no cost, meaning the amount they get for Medicaid would not exceed what they are already receiving.

A bill that requires consumers to register medical discount cards with the state. People who have a medical procedure can present a card and get a discount, but some people confuse medical discount cards with health insurance. Consumers need to have insurance before they can use the card.

Stance on local taxes and fees: Supportive of finding ways to rely less on property taxes. Wants local governments to have flexibility in deciding what funding options, such as income or sales taxes, to choose since they are closer to their communities than state government. Wants to ensure that city, town or county's property tax rate will stay down if new local taxes are passed. Supports the state's efforts to pick up the bill for welfare, and take that cost away from the counties.

Stance on governor's highway plan: Concerned with the idea of privatization and toll roads. Questions the governor's proposal.

Stance on governor's education plan: Giving schools more flexibility is a great idea. Would like to see different school districts work together to buy things such as insurance so they can get a cheaper cost.

Rep. Ralph Foley,
R-Martinsville

Bills he is proposing include:

A bill that will allow people involved in an automobile accident to say "I'm sorry" without that statement being used against them in court as an admission of guilt. Currently, lawyers advise people not to say they're sorry or express words of sympathy. Simply being civil should not be used against someone in court.

Common-sense food consumption bill. Attempts to minimize people from filing lawsuits based on food consumption, for example, suing McDonald's for making consumers obese. The bill still allows suing for mislabeling ingredients or food making them sick, but to sue for addiction or voluntary consumption is inappropriate.

Stance on local taxes and fees: Local governments should be able to find their own methods of funding. Too soon to say which methods of

funding he would be in support of or against. Will review proposals with intense interest. Thinks municipalities should continue funding police and fire protection with property tax dollars, since that money is more reliable than money from a sales, restaurant or hotel tax, which are consumer driven. Supports shifting child-welfare costs away from the counties and to the state.

Stance on governor's highway plan: Questions privatization of toll roads.

Stance on governor's education plan: Likes the idea of shifting money into the classroom.

Rep. David Yount,
R-Columbus

Bills he is proposing include:

A sales tax exemption for people receiving energy assistance. People at poverty level who are getting energy assistance to pay utility bills still must pay state tax on that money, even though funding for energy assistance is funneled from the federal government through the state. Having people pay a state sales tax on that energy assistance seems illogical.

A bill to bring enterprise zone codes up to date. An enterprise zone is used to attract businesses into economically disadvantaged areas. The original bill did not include groups that didn't exist yet, such as limited liability corporations. The bill will bring the code up to date to include groups such as limited liability corporations.

Making more specific guidelines for when a government has to fully pay a contractor. Currently, local governments are allowed to keep 10 percent of a contractor's pay until workers are finished. But some governments choose to keep the money just because they can and do not give up the remaining funds, even after moving into a building that contractors built. This bill will require the final 10 percent to be paid once certain criteria are met.

Stance on local taxes and fees: Supports concept of giving municipalities different funding options. Wants a provision guaranteeing that property taxes stay down after a municipality starts using different funding options, such as local sales taxes.

Stance on governor's highway plan: Concerned that leasing Indiana Toll Road to a private company will cause toll rates to go up dramatically. Not convinced that toll roads will generate enough money to pay for new road construction.

Stance on governor's education plan: Looks appealing on the surface, because of putting more money into the classroom. But a lot of growth in school budgets comes from areas they don't have much control over, such as transportation, insurance, and utilities. Does not want any negative, unintended consequences that would hurt a school's ability to pay for these things.

LOCAL OFFICIALS
SOUND OFF

What local government officials want the state to accomplish during this legislative session:

Greenwood Mayor Charles
Henderson

Give municipalities different funding options to decrease their reliance on property taxes and lessen the financial burden on homeowners.

First, give counties the option of choosing different funding sources such as new local sales or income taxes. If a county chooses not to adopt any new taxes, give that county's cities and towns a chance to choose from the same list of taxing options.

Find a better way of funding roads and streets. Let the city have its own funding options for local roads.

Henderson was one of 13 Indiana mayors involved with the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns proposal to the state for alternate sources of funding to help keep property tax rates down.

Franklin Mayor Brenda
Jones-Matthews

Give cities and towns alternatives to property taxes to lessen the financial burden on property owners. Alternative sources of revenue could include food-and-beverage taxes and local sales taxes. Even people who rent apartments are burdened by property taxes, because the amount of rent they pay is partly driven by how much the landowner has to pay in property taxes.

Let municipalities decide whether to adopt a wheel tax, which would generate money for road and street repairs at the expense of vehicle owners. Counties currently have the option to pass a wheel tax, which Johnson County voted against, but cities and towns cannot debate whether to pass wheel taxes for their communities.

Allow cities and towns to bring in additional revenue for the sole purpose of funding public safety, such as police and fire protection. Budget constraints have not allowed Franklin to hire additional officers or firefighters. Other cities across the state have had similar problems.

R.J. McConnell, Johnson
County commissioner

Shift the funding of local municipalities away from a tax system based too heavily on property taxes. Options could include local sales taxes, user fees or an additional income tax. Continue improving methods for attracting economic development.

Help counties deal with the growing cost of medical care for inmates. State mandates require counties to pay the bill for inmate medical care. In 2004, Johnson County paid \$600,000 for medical care and prescription drugs for inmates.

Ron West, Johnson County
Council member

Wants the county to have more control of tax dollars spent in the county.

For example, if Johnson County residents combined were to pay about \$39 million from gas taxes, Johnson County would only get about \$4 million of that back. He wants the state to let counties retain more tax dollars.

Dan Maple, White River
Township trustee

Wants the state to do anything it can with energy assistance. Townships are responsible for helping people with low income pay their utility bills or rent if they need assistance. White River Township spent \$28,000 in 2004 and \$39,000 in 2005. The township is "really getting hammered" in terms of people asking for energy assistance. He has seven appointments scheduled this week for people asking for help, and he expects to pick up three or four more appointments, which is unheard of for White River Township.

Mark Dietel, Center Grove
school board member

Encouraged by governor's plan to give school districts more flexibility in terms of how they spend their money. Currently, the school district is limited, because each fund can only be spent on a specific category, such as capital projects and con-

struction. Wants more flexibility to make sure the highest percentage dollars possible are shifted to the classrooms and teachers.

John Perrin, New Whiteland
Town Council member

Wants towns to get their tax payments on time. For the past four months, New Whiteland's property tax payments have been about six months late. The town has to start spending in the red when tax payments are late.

Kevin Combs, Bargersville
Town Council member

Wants local municipalities to have more funding options available. Wants towns and cities to decide for themselves how to collect revenue and lessen the burden on homeowners.

HOW TO CONTACT
YOUR LEGISLATORS

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State Sen. Richard Bray
District 37: Hensley and Union townships, White River Township south of a line from Travis Road east to Morgantown Road south to Smokey Row Road and east to Honey Creek Road
Phone: 232-9840

Senate President Pro Tem Robert Garton
District 41: All of Nineveh, Blue River, Needham and Franklin townships; Pleasant Township predominantly west of U.S. 31 and south of Smith Valley Road
Phone: 232-9416

State Sen. Patricia Miller
District 32: Greenwood predominantly east of U.S. 31; Pleasant Township predominantly east of the Louisville-Indiana Railroad tracks; all of Clark Township
Phone: 232-9489

State Sen. Mike Young
District 35: White River Township north of a line from Travis Road east to Morgantown Road south to Smokey Row Road and east to Honey Creek Road
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State Rep. Woody Burton
District 58: Greenwood, Clark Township, Whiteland, the city of Franklin west of U.S. 31 and east of Hurricane and Graham roads and north of Jefferson Street; Needham and Franklin townships north of State Road 44
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State Rep. Ralph Foley
District 47: Union and Hensley townships
Phone: 232-9789

State Rep. David Frizzell
District 93: White River Township
Phone: 232-9815

State Rep. David Yount
District 59: Blue River and Nineveh townships; Needham and Franklin townships south of State Road 44; the city of Franklin east of U.S. 31 and west of Graham and Hurricane Roads, and the entire city south of Jefferson Street
Phone: 232-9981

LEGISLATIVE
BREAKFASTS

The 2006 legislative breakfasts let community members mingle with local representatives in state government during the General Assembly session.

Cost is \$10 per person, and reservations are required. Call 888-4856.

All breakfasts start at 7:30 a.m. on the following dates:

Jan. 10, Valle Vista, Greenwood
Jan. 24, Franklin College Dietz Center
Feb. 7, Valle Vista, Greenwood
Feb. 21, Franklin College Dietz Center
March 7, Valle Vista, Greenwood
March 21, Franklin College Dietz Center

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VOLUME

Volume 43, No. 145

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The Daily Journal is an award-winning newspaper published daily except Sundays and Christmas at 2575 N. Morton St., Franklin, IN 46131.

Founded in 1963, the Daily Journal is owned by Home News Enterprises L.L.C. and is one of Indiana's most widely recognized and honored community newspapers.

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The newspaper is a member of the Associated Press, Hoosier State Press Association, Inland Press Association and Certified Audit of Circulations.

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