

## BRIEFS STATE

DETROIT

### General Motors says it might sell Allison division

General Motors Corp. said Thursday that it may sell its Indianapolis-based Allison Transmission division as part of its effort to raise money and focus on its core business.

GM said in a news release that "it is looking at strategic options" for the Indianapolis-based transmission unit including a potential sale of the business.

The world's leading automaker lost \$3.05 billion in the first three quarters of 2006.

Allison Transmission has 3,400 employees and seven plants in Indianapolis. It makes and sells automatic transmissions for commercial and military vehicles.

"This process is another potential step in GM's plan to improve liquidity through the assessment of strategic options for a business that is not central to GM's mission of designing, manufacturing and selling cars and light trucks globally," the company said.

MARIION

### Trial of truck driver in Taylor crash to be moved

A judge has decided to move the trial of a truck driver accused of causing a highway crash that killed a Taylor University employee and four students, including one who was misidentified for weeks.

"The publicity has been excessive and emotionally charged and the volume and reach of the publicity has been enormous," Grant County Superior Court Judge Randall Johnson wrote in his order Wednesday.

The judge asked attorneys to select a new county for the trial in the next three days. He asked them to avoid neighboring counties and those that include the cities of Indianapolis and Fort Wayne.

Robert Spencer was arrested Sept. 1 on five counts of reckless homicide and four counts of criminal recklessness causing serious bodily injury, all stemming from the April 26 crash.

The crash drew national attention five weeks later when authorities announced they had mixed up the identifications of 19-year-old Whitney Cerak of Gaylord, Mich., who was severely injured but survived, and 22-year-old Laura VanRyn of Caledonia, Mich., who had been killed.

Authorities say Spencer fell asleep at the wheel of his semi-trailer and hit the Taylor van on Interstate 69 between Fort Wayne and Indianapolis.

MERRILLVILLE

### Report: Utility for sale, possibly to Duke

Northern Indiana Public Service Co.'s electric utility is up for sale and possible buyers include Duke Energy Co., whose PSI Energy subsidiary serves much of the remainder of the state, a report Thursday said.

The utility, which serves about 450,000 customers in the northern third of Indiana, could fetch a price of \$3.4 billion to \$4 billion, Crain's Chicago Business reported.

Quoting sources familiar with the negotiations, the report said the sale would not include NIPSCO's natural gas operations.

NIPSCO is part of Merrillville-based NiSource Inc., whose operations also include gas utilities in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio and Maryland and a gas pipeline business serving the eastern half of the United States.

NiSource spokeswoman Kris Falzone and Tom Shiel, spokesman for Duke Energy in Charlotte, N.C., declined to comment on the report.

GOSHEN

### Judge enters not guilty plea in abduction case

A Chicago man accused of abducting his ex-girlfriend and their four children after shooting a man in the face was being held on a \$500,000 bond.

Jerry White, 30, who has a criminal history that includes a conviction for attacking the same woman in 2004, is facing a felony count of attempted murder in the shooting and seven felony counts of criminal confinement.

Elkhart Circuit Judge Terry Shewmaker entered a not guilty plea on his behalf, which is usual at initial hearings in Indiana. White spoke only to give his name and age to the judge and to say he plans to hire his own attorney.

White is accused of breaking into Kimberly Walker's Elkhart home early Saturday and shooting the boyfriend of Walker's sister. After spending several hours in the home, police say he abducted Walker and their children, ages 16 months to 9 years old. On Tuesday night, police found the family safe at a motel near Walker's home and arrested White.

SOUTH BEND

### Some ex-toll road workers unhappy with new jobs

Some among the dozens of people who lost their Indiana Toll Road jobs last week are not happy about their assignments to new state jobs.

The private company that took over running the toll road last year terminated about 95 employees, who were eligible to be placed into other state government positions.

Dan Hackler, deputy director of the state personnel department, said among the displaced workers, 34 were assigned to the Department of Transportation, 19 to the Department of Correction and 11 to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Other were assigned to the Department of Natural Resources and at least one to the Department of Child Services.

Hackler said the workers were given six months to find another state job on their own, but those who could not were placed in jobs, with his office trying to place people in positions that matched their skills.

Linda Breniser, 60, of Elkhart, had been a toll-taker for 12 years and was assigned to a road crew job with the highway department, which would include snowplow driving, pothole patching, median mowing and other maintenance.

"I'm going to give it a try," she said. "I have to give it a try."

PLYMOUTH

### Police seek minister accused of sex with girl

A minister remained at large Thursday after being charged with molesting a 12-year-old female member of his Hispanic congregation.

Jose Alberto Martinez, 52, of Lakeville faces a Class A felony charge of child molesting that was filed this week in Marshall Superior Court after he had failed to appear for a Jan. 16 interview with investigators, Sgt. Leo Mangus said.

The girl said Martinez molested her several times recently in his van while it was parked in a remote area east of Plymouth, Mangus said.

Police did not know Martinez's whereabouts.

"We heard word that his car may have been impounded in Hammond so we are checking on that," Mangus said. "But we are not sure why he would go to that area, because he doesn't have any family around there."

# Bill would close Open Door loophole

## Indiana House approves measure to ban 'serial meetings' such as those used by IU trustees

By MIKE SMITH

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### INDIANAPOLIS

The Indiana House passed legislation Thursday that would prohibit so-called "serial meetings," separate gatherings of less than a quorum of government officials to discuss the same subject with the purpose of conducting official business.

The bill, approved 89-7 and sent to the Senate, would close what proponents call a loophole in Indiana law that allowed Indiana University's trustees to meet without public notice to discuss basketball coach Bob Knight's fate shortly before his firing in 2000.

Such meetings are currently permitted under Indiana's Open Door Law but would not be under the bill. It is authored by Democratic Rep. Russ Stilwell of Booneville and co-authored by House Speaker Patrick Bauer, D-South Bend, and three others.

"I just think it's good open government," Stilwell said.

Proponents of the bill say some public officials skirt the spirit of the Open Door Law by conducting serial meetings, in which a mayor or council president, for example, meets with only a few members at a time to discuss public business. That avoids the requirement of a public meeting because there is no quorum, a majority of members present.

Serial meetings drew public attention in 2000 after then-IU President Myles Brand met with IU trustees no more than four at a time to discuss Knight. It takes five to make a quorum since there are nine trustees. After the meetings, Brand announced that he was firing Knight.

Several basketball fans sued the university claiming that the meetings violated the Open Door Law. But a judge ruled in the university's favor, which the Indiana Court of Appeals upheld.

The appeals court said the General Assembly specifically defined "meeting" under the Open Door Law as a gathering of a majority

of the governing body.

"Thus, without a majority present, no meeting occurs," the ruling said.

"The conduct of the IU Trustees was in direct contravention to the public policy behind the Open Door Law," the ruling said. "While a more open process in matters of governance such as this might be preferable, the legislative branch of our state government has spoken."

Stilwell's bill declares that the Open Door Law would be violated if they met all the following requirements:

- At least two but less than a majority of members attend each gathering.
  - The total number of members attending all the gatherings equals a majority.
  - All gatherings concern the same subject matter.
  - The gatherings are for the purpose of conducting official business.
- The definition of serial meetings includes in-person gatherings and telephone conversations.

## GARTON HONORED

INDIANAPOLIS — Former state Sen. Robert Garton and public officials from



GARTON

Lawrenceburg and Fort Wayne were recognized by the state's largest organization of newspapers for their work in promoting open government.

Garton on Thursday received the Hoosier State Press Association's highest award, the First Freedom Award, for helping to enact Indiana's public-access laws while he was Senate president pro tem during a 36-year legislative career.

Garton, a Republican from Columbus who represented part of Johnson County, was honored primarily for working to pass the state's Open Door Law of 1977, a bill he co-sponsored, and the Access to Public Records Act of 1983.

# Study: Distractions fuel teenage driver crashes

By JAN DENNIS

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### BLOOMINGTON, Ill.

More teenagers are heeding warnings about drinking and driving, but they routinely face behind-the-wheel distractions from cell phones to passengers that contribute to thousands of fatal crashes every year, according to a study released Thursday.

Teens often take the wheel amid commotion, angst or fatigue that would be challenging even for older drivers, said Dr. Flaura Winston, chief investigator for the study.

"We need to go beyond the message of drinking and driving and also talk about the message of distractions," said Winston, a pediatrician with the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

The study by the children's hospital and State Farm Insurance Co., the nation's largest auto insurer, asked high school students what happens when their peers drive that makes them unsafe. The 2006 survey of more than 5,600 students was a scientific sampling of the 10.6 million students in public high schools across the country.

Ninety percent of teens said they rarely or never drive after drinking or using drugs, reflecting a trend that has seen teen traffic



AP PHOTO

Steve Arends, 21, of Melvin, Ill., speaks at a news conference conducted by State Farm and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia on Thursday in Washington. Arends discussed how excessive speed played a role in the car crash that injured him and killed his twin brother.

deaths involving alcohol drop by about 35 percent from 1990 to 2005, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data.

But teens reported a host of other in-car distractions that researchers say help make traffic accidents the No. 1 killer of U.S. teens, with a fatality rate four times higher than drivers age 25 to 69, based on miles driven. About 5,600 teens died in traffic accidents in 2005, and about 7,500

were driving cars involved in fatal accidents.

Researchers found that one teenage passenger with a teen driver doubles the risk of a fatal crash, while the risk is five times higher when two or more teens ride along. Most states have laws restricting passengers when teens drive, but 15 states do not.

Nearly 90 percent of teens reported seeing peers drive while talking on cell phones, and more

# Lawmakers consider tax break to lure Super Bowl to Indy

The Associated Press

### INDIANAPOLIS

State lawmakers could consider giving tax breaks to football teams and the NFL in an effort to bring the 2011 Super Bowl to Indianapolis.

A Senate bill would give a sales tax exemption to the NFL and the two teams that would be in the

Super Bowl, said Sen. Luke Kenley, R-Noblesville. Lawmakers might also consider amending the bill to include an income tax exemption as another incentive.

"It's part of this cat-and-mouse game," Kenley said.

Not all lawmakers are enthused about giving teams the tax breaks, Kenley said, and the bill could change as it moves through

the legislative process.

Meanwhile, Indianapolis officials have been sounding out business leaders' willingness to donate cash and services if the city makes a bid for the 2011 Super Bowl in the new Lucas Oil Stadium, which is being built to replace the RCA Dome.

Indianapolis has until April 2 to submit a bid, a challenging process that requires securing 27,000

hotel rooms, lining up locations for dozens of events and detailing how it would accommodate thousands of fans as well as media that would descend on the city.

The 32 NFL team owners likely will choose the location for the 2011 game at their spring meeting, scheduled for May 21-23. Dallas and Arizona also are considered serious contenders.

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