

# OPINION

DAILY JOURNAL

JEFFREY W. OWEN  
PUBLISHER  
E-mail address:  
jowen@thejournalnet.com

SCARLETT SYSE  
EDITOR  
E-mail address:  
syse@thejournalnet.com

"The Daily Journal is dedicated to community service, to defense of individual rights and to providing those checks upon government which no constitution can ensure."

SCOTT ALEXANDER  
founding editor, 1963

## AT ISSUE

The U.S. House approved restrictions on gifts and congressional travel.

## OUR POINT

Rep. Dan Burton's explanation for voting against the measure is, at best, weak, if not disingenuous.

## Explanation about vote on gift rules not enough

The Daily Journal

The U.S. House voted overwhelmingly in favor of restrictions on congressional travel and gifts from lobbyists.

Overwhelmingly might even be an understatement.

The measure was approved 430-1. The lone "no" vote was cast by Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind.

The new House ethics rules banned gifts and meals from lobbyists. Also, after March 1, representatives and their aides would no longer be able to accept nearly any travel financed or arranged by lobbyists or organizations that employ them.

Exceptions include trips paid for by colleges and 24-hour trips with minimal involvement by lobbyists.

Trips by groups not connected with lobbyists would require approval by the ethics committee in advance.

The Senate will consider its own set of ethics rules. Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind., who voted for the package said, "Effective government in a free society depends on the integrity of our institutions and public servants. I am pleased to support this bipartisan ethics reform package as an important step toward restoring public confidence in the fundamental integrity of our legislative process."

Burton explained his vote by saying the new restrictions aren't airtight or would be difficult to follow.

We find this weak at best, if not disingenuous. According to PoliticalMoneyLine.com, a nonpartisan Web site, Burton ranks 151st among all House and Senate members for the largest value of privately funded trips taken over the past six years.

This is not to say that Burton has been unduly influenced by these offers. But the important element here is transparency.

Voters must feel they can have confidence in their elected representative.

Also, Burton isn't the only member of the Indiana delegation traveling. In fact, topping the congressional travel roster is Sen. Richard Lugar.

Jim Morris of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan group that reviewed lawmakers' travel records, said: "The No. 1 reason (for new disclosure requirements) was the scrutiny that was generated by all the scandals over the past year."

Burton's no vote sends a bad message.

But the good news is that the measure passed, and Burton will abide by it.

## Focus: Castro redux

Chavez leading Venezuela down failed path

Scripps Howard News Service

Why anybody would want to model himself on Fidel Castro and his country on Cuba is anybody's guess, but there was Hugo Chavez of Venezuela promising — threatening, actually — "socialism or death" just like Castro.

Chavez was being sworn in to a new six-year term as president, technically his last, but he promised his luckless countrymen that he was planning to do away with constitutional limits on his tenure so he could run for "indefinite re-election."

Chavez is given to loopy pronouncements — he horribly embarrassed himself at the United Nations by saying President Bush was the devil — and this inaugural was no exception.

He called Jesus Christ "the greatest socialist in history," although in point of fact Christ was a self-employed businessman.

Socialism is much on Chavez's mind. He had earlier announced plans to nationalize Venezuela's largest electric and telecommunications companies, both U.S.-controlled, causing the stock market there to take a big hit and scaring off badly needed foreign investment.

He announced plans to have the tame National Assembly enact "revolutionary laws" so he can rule by decree and to begin nationalizing private commercial farms and private education.

And he plans to consolidate his ruling coalition of multiple parties into a single, socialist, of course, party controlled by him.

Chavez was cheered by Venezuela's desperate and gullible poor, whose support he has bought by openhanded spending from a gusher of oil revenues. But inflation is running at 17 percent, the nationalized oil industry is bloated and inefficient, and he is dependent on oil remaining well above \$50 a barrel.

We have seen this kind of grandiosity before, specifically the Cuban model, and it can only end in poverty and repression. Chavez's 21st-century socialism looks a lot like common, ordinary 20th-century totalitarianism.



BURTON

YOUR

## IEWS & COMMENTARY

### In Indiana, manufacturing is core economic element

To the editor:

Manufacturing is the key component of the Indiana economy. Indiana is the No. 1 most manufacturing-intensive economy in the nation when compared to direct employment (568,000) and contribution to the state's domestic output (\$87 billion or 28 percent of total output).

The more than 9,000 manufacturing firms pay average wages in excess of \$48,000 per year and have better benefits than any other sector.

A recent study estimated that more than 59 percent of Indiana's total employment is tied to the success of the manufacturing value chain.

In 2005, manufacturing was 98 percent of Indiana's exports and exceeded \$21 billion. Roughly 32 percent of our total production is export dependent.

Indiana's manufacturing economy is mature, diverse and advanced. However, all domestic manufacturers face fierce international competition and extreme cost-related pressures, with high wages and benefits, as well as high-input costs from materials and energy.

External overhead costs from taxes, health and pension benefits, tort litigation and rising energy costs add approximately 31.7 percent to manufacturing labor costs when compared to our competitors.

These external costs reduce profitability and tie up dollars that would otherwise be spent on investment, research and development, training and new product lines. If you truly want more advancement in

### WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Daily Journal invites readers to submit letters, opinion columns and e-mail comments for the opinion page.

#### GUIDELINES

- Letters published must contain the writer's name and city or town.
- Letters sent to the Daily Journal must be signed and must include a daytime telephone number for verification to be considered for publication.
- Letters should be kept as brief as possible.
- Make sure the e-mail letter includes the writer's name, mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address for verification.

• Opinion columns for the community forum section of the editorial page also will be considered for publication. The article should be kept to a reasonable length and should include the writer's name, address and telephone number for verification.

• Because of space and legal considerations, the Daily Journal reserves the right to edit any letters or articles and to limit comments.

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P. O. Box 699  
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Franklin

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manufacturing, you cannot ignore these issues.

It is becoming progressively less expensive to automate functions that used to be performed by people. These are mostly middle-class jobs that will continue to decline. Indiana is one of the largest middle-class states in the nation, and this is reason for serious concern. The choice is clear — higher skills or lower wages.

As Congress and the Indiana General Assembly convene, we hope they will consider the facts. Education and cost structures matter.

Our future is in our own hands and no one else's. In order to advance manufacturing in

Indiana, we do not need any more studies. We need action.

We can start by changing the way we tax businesses based on wages, output and investment. Remove all taxation from investment in machinery and equipment used in research or production. Our tax, education and training systems were designed in another era and continue to impede our ability to break out.

We need a data-driven strategic plan and assessment system that improves outcomes. We need a coordinated effort to raise expectations and change attitudes.

Most of the people who will be in our work force are already

here; and if they can't master new literacy skills, little else will matter.

We've failed to motivate and educate students to work harder and take tougher courses. The state has instituted "Core 40" as the new graduate standard but has done very little to explain to parents, teachers and students why it's important to their future.

The problem is the system, and it must change. Adding full-day kindergarten will only marginally improve achievement under the current system, and it will be minimally 13 years from now before the work force benefits. With our current high school graduation rate at 74 percent, we need action, and we need it now.

We have extensive funding mechanisms for public education and providing college funds for our youth, but we don't have the same effort for adults with jobs and families to get the continuing education and training they need to survive.

Improvements have occurred in the past several years in many areas, but education needs to be brought to the forefront. We need an honest discussion about all education processes and funding.

Every day we wait, we can expect to underperform.

Manufacturing is the nation's leader in productivity with gains of at least 5 percent in each of the past five years. No other sector comes close.

The bottom line is that a positive business climate and a prepared, skilled work force are synonymous and will attract investment; and investment creates high-wage, high-skilled jobs.

Pat Kiely, president  
Indiana Manufacturers  
Association

## Guaranteeing free, correct elections essential

As the 110th Congress convened Jan. 4, its members had only to look around them to be reminded of an issue they should be addressing this session. Indeed, they could look the reminder right in the face.

His name is Vern Buchanan, and he was sworn in as the duly elected representative of Florida's 13th District. He won his seat by 369 votes, but his opponent has called into question why some 18,000 people in the district who voted for other races on the ballot seem not to have cast votes in the House contest.

It will be up to the courts to decide on the opponent's charge that she was the victim of a voting-machine malfunction.

But the questions that have arisen over whether the computerized voting machines in Sarasota County operated properly — or whether, as some suggest, a poorly designed ballot page caused some 18,000 voters to skip choosing a congressional candidate — are yet another reminder of a serious problem that our representative government faces and that Congress needs to address: Our voting system is fragile and desperately in need of shoring up.

Ever since the 2000 presidential election recount in Florida, Americans have been aware that the systems by which we record, tally and verify votes don't always work.

Why does this matter? I'll let the 2005 report by the national



Lee Hamilton

Commission on Federal Election Reform, on which I served, give the answer.

"The vigor of American democracy rests on the vote of each citizen," the panel wrote. "Only when citizens can freely and privately exercise their right to vote and have their vote recorded correctly can they hold their leaders accountable. Democracy is endangered when people believe that their votes do not matter or are not counted correctly."

In other words, what might seem an obscure and technical subject — the accuracy and verifiability of our voting process — is in fact part of the bedrock of American democracy.

While we do not face a crisis in our voting system, the problems do need to be addressed.

It puzzles me that there seems no particular sense of urgency, either among the public or in Congress, about making sure we fix things right now. If elections are defective, our entire system is at risk.

Admittedly, fixing the system won't be easy or inexpensive. For one thing, it involves

questions about how far the federal government should reach into a matter that has largely been left to states, counties and local governments to resolve.

Some states and smaller jurisdictions do a fine job of conducting elections; others, however, try to do it on the cheap, with machinery and processes inadequate to the task.

So let's ask ourselves: Is it too much to expect that every American voter, regardless of where he or she lives, can go to the polls on Election Day confident that there won't be long delays and that his or her vote will actually be registered as cast?

The federal government took a step in the right direction with the Help America Vote Act of 2001 which for the first time set national requirements for state and local elections, in exchange for funds to improve the administration of elections.

Now it's time for Congress and the states to focus on what additional steps are needed.

To begin, it will take a lot of money to be sure that every precinct in the country is equipped adequately.

A lot of jurisdictions have adopted computerized voting screens, but without going to the added expense of making sure they include a voter-verifiable paper trail; as the election reform commission suggested, Congress should require such an audit trail and, if need be, help fund it.

As the 2005 report noted, "The purpose of voting technology is

to record and tally all votes accurately and to provide sufficient evidence to assure all participants — especially the losing candidates and their supporters — that the election result accurately reflects the will of the voters."

Several other steps might also be needed to ensure that Americans have confidence in the system.

Voter registration systems need to be strengthened, voters accurately identified, voting made more convenient, votes counted accurately and the administration of elections improved.

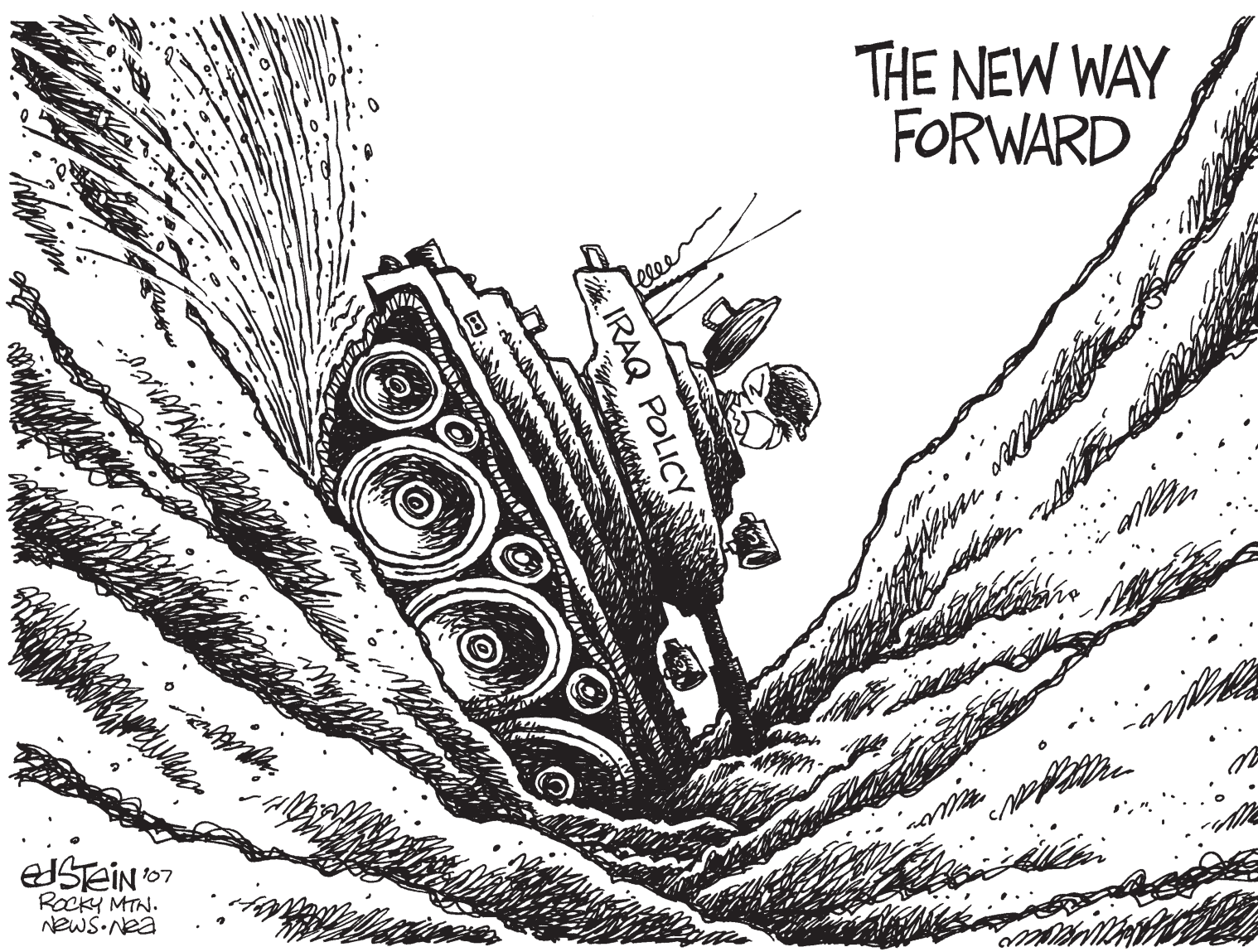
Why my sense of urgency about all this?

Because we have less than two years until the next presidential election and a set of House and Senate elections that might affect the majority in both chambers.

As the election reform commission noted, "Election reform is best accomplished when it is undertaken before the passions of a specific election cycle begin."

The time to fix things is now, not after the next instance in which voting snafus cause some number of Americans to wonder whether they really live in a democracy.

Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.



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