

OPINION

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"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

ISTEP scores from the fall testing period have been released.

OUR POINT

The figures need to be examined carefully to draw useful conclusions.

Results of ISTEP testing require a closer look

The Daily Journal

When statewide scores from fall ISTEP testing were released last month, they showed about 70 percent of Indiana 10th-graders passed the exam required to qualify for graduation.

For Johnson County, the passage figure for 10th-graders on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus exam was about the same.

In both cases, the figures were largely unchanged from last year.

A superficial examination of the numbers would show no change, but this kind of casual interpretation helps neither the school districts nor the students who failed the test.

For example, the passage rate at county high schools ranged from 49 percent to 84 percent.

The ISTEP is given to all students in Grades 3 through 10. Parents, teachers and others are eager to see how their respective districts and schools stack up against others.

This is natural, but it can be shortsighted. Just because the scores of a grade at a school or a district go up or down does not necessarily reflect a significant change. The scores also must be compared to the previous year's scores for the next younger grade.

For example, in one district, 69 percent of fifth-graders passed both the language arts and the math portions of the exam this year. In 2005, 78 percent of fifth-graders passed.

While the drop in the passing rate is a cause for concern, it must be balanced against the fact that 70 percent of fourth-graders passed both portions of the test in 2005. This comparison indicates that roughly the same group of students had at least kept pace with the material, even if they didn't post the same scores as the fifth-graders the year before.

In another district, 54 percent of fourth-graders passed both portions this year. However, 66 percent of third-graders passed both portions the year before.

These examples show how the data must be analyzed carefully before conclusions are drawn.

Going back to the high school figures, it is interesting to note that the level of passage for graduation qualifying exam is roughly the same as the percentage of students who end up graduating from high school. In other words, 30 percent failed the exam, and 30 percent drop out of high school before obtaining a diploma.

But is the one group the same as the other? Only a case-by-case analysis could determine that, and that is why no one should be too quick to draw firm conclusions from the data.

This spring, the state will issue its list of schools and districts that have made adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind standards. These ratings take into account not only overall scores but also scores of subsets of students within each grade and school.

Use the ISTEP scores as a tool, but only one tool among many.

Increases in passing rates are reason to celebrate, and schools and districts can be justifiably proud.

But at the same time, drops should be examined for the underlying reasons. Raw figures serve no one well.

Focus: Ethics

Reform plans should be viewed with skepticism

Scrrips Howard News Service

After the House Republicans' miserable record on ethics, and having four members resign in disgrace within a year qualifies as miserable, the new Democratic majority is promising a program of major ethics reform.

Fine. We hope they get right to it, clamping down on lawmakers' access to recreational travel, gifts, meals, luxury sky boxes, corporate jets and other freebies that special interests are wont to shower on the people doing the people's business.

However, the new leadership should look with great skepticism on one proposal being mulled over by new House Speaker Nancy Pelosi: creation of an independent outside office of public integrity, which would be staffed by nonpartisan professionals to investigate charges of ethical misconduct.

Presumably, that body would replace the much-abused House ethics committee, which has been missing from action most of the past two years. Even though that committee is not a popular assignment and many members don't want to serve on it, the committee, when allowed to do its job, has operated acceptably.

In fact, in the opinion of the Republican leadership, the committee was doing its job too well in admonishing one of their number, Majority Leader Tom DeLay, three times, and set out to gut the committee by rewriting its rules and packing it with DeLay loyalists. It was an ethical blunder that led, along with much else, to the unraveling of the Republican majority. The point here is that the committee can work.

Congressional members accused of crimes are subject to federal and state prosecution, and indeed some are in jail or headed there. The Constitution gives them some protections against libel and slander charges and arrest while doing congressional business with the pretty broad exception of "treason, felony and breach of the peace."

If the House must create an independent investigatory body, it should be mindful of the government's experience with special prosecutors whose investigations tend to grow all out of proportion to the original allegation.

Finally, the House consists of 435 individuals — most of them lawyers, by the way — chosen by the people supposedly because of their character and talent. What horrible message does it send that they cannot be trusted to police themselves?

YOUR VIEWS & COMMENTARY

Daniels' toll road conflicts with plans for Franklin

To the editor:

In November 2002, the Franklin City Council adopted Resolution No. 02-12, the comprehensive plan for the City of Franklin. This plan detailed the areas and ways Franklin's leaders have chosen for the city to grow.

In November 2006, Gov. Mitch Daniels announced his plan to create the Indiana Commerce Connector, a toll road designed as a bypass around the south and east sides of Marion County. A portion of the connector would go near Franklin, being located somewhere between State Road 44 and State Road 252, but most likely as close to the existing Franklin city limits as possible.

The connector is a waste of money and the wrong plan for Franklin. It runs counter to the comprehensive plan. Why adopt a long-term plan if we are going to ignore it when any idea comes our way?

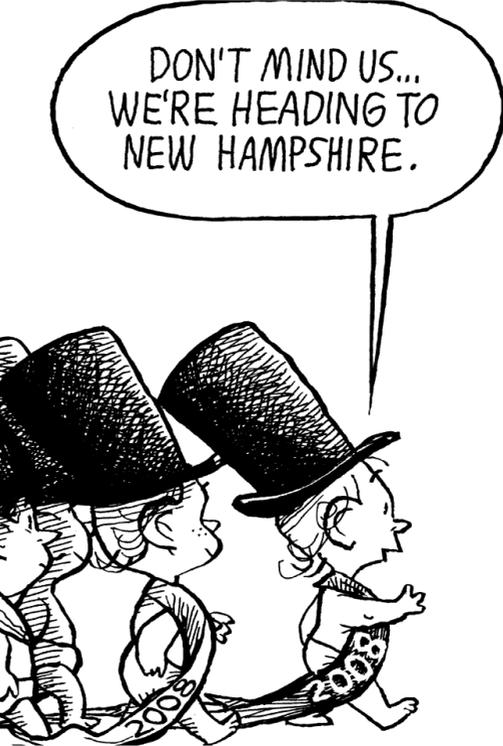
Instead of the connector, what should be done is that each community should determine their needs and act accordingly at the local level.

The best way to deal with and encourage growth in Franklin is to use the areas on the east and north sides of the city as they were designed.

On the east side, we already have a business district and an area planned for residential development. This area is already part of the infrastructure as it is connected to the water and sewage lines. The area being considered for the connector is not and would require extensive and expensive upgrades and expansion on the current systems.

Why would a business decide to move to Franklin if the new road is built if they aren't knocking down our door to move into the existing business district at Interstate 65? A new toll road isn't the answer to attract new business.

A toll road would not be favored



WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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

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by trucking and delivery companies because it would increase their shipping costs. In fact, the Owner, Operator, Independent Drivers Association, a nonprofit organization representing truck drivers, is adamantly opposed to the increasing number of toll roads because of the ever rising costs and declining profits for truck drivers.

Let's get some businesses interested in Franklin so we can fill the established business and residential areas before we create a new one. There is no need to destroy the farm land and rural feel of the southern border of Franklin when there are empty buildings, houses and lots ready and waiting for new companies and new employees.

The comprehensive plan states we should discourage threats to "small-town character, such as segregated land use patterns, prioritizing of the needs of the automobile and the dominance of large-lot suburban zoning. Large-lot subdivisions and rural dwellings should be provided consistent with the goals of providing a diversity of housing options and creating an overall compact form for Franklin."

Adding the connector to the area south of Franklin could cause the city to annex the land outside the current city limits. This would destroy the "small-town character" as the sprawl brought to southern Franklin grows to become part of

the south side of Marion County. Annexation would cause property taxes in the annexed area to go up as well.

I have heard it said that the business district on the north side of Franklin was a mistake because there is no direct access to the interstate. This could be handled by simply adding an interchange on County Road 300N (Earlywood Drive) and I-65. Instead of building a new terrain road, Earlywood Drive could be upgraded to handle an increase in traffic.

The comprehensive plan calls for this interchange. The interchange would be approximately two miles from the business district and fewer than three miles from U.S. 31. This also would alleviate the problem of bringing trucks through downtown Franklin and the 90-degree turns on State Road 44. Instead of exiting the interstate at Exit 90, trucks could use Exit 92 and make a straight shot to U.S. 31 and then south to connect with State Road 44.

This would possibly be a quicker way since there are no 20 mph speed zones along this route and at least a portion of it would be two lanes in each direction. Much of the upgrade could be done without taking land through eminent domain as the land along the side of the roads is already available for use for just this type of thing.

I don't understand why our

mayor was so quick to jump on board with the governor's toll road plan, unless it's a perceived promise of lots of new revenue for the city, which, in reality, may never materialize.

It is evident we have a very workable plan already in place. The plan we have would require fewer acres of land being confiscated from private land owners and would eliminate the need, at least as far as Franklin goes, for the connector altogether. Eminent domain for the benefit of a private business, which is what the connector would be, is completely un-American, regardless of what the Supreme Court says.

Let's attract businesses and jobs to the areas we already have set aside for such purposes. When those areas are filled, then we can discuss the expansion to the south.

Building something and calling it progress doesn't make it progress. How are we progressing if we just continue to set aside more and more land for commercial development that never gets used?

Brad Manzenberger
Franklin

Northern route would be better than toll road

To the editor:

After reviewing the toll road proposal, it would be better to circumnavigate Indianapolis by going west from Interstate 69 on the northeast side of town and circling the city through Boone and Hendricks counties.

But from what I have been able to gather, this option was not even explored because of the people and funds in those areas. Since the administration did not want to affect people they know, they went the other way.

This route would do little to alleviate the congestion on the current freeways. A route on the north side would do far more to alleviate their problems in my opinion.

Troy Webb
Greenwood

Ford's honesty helped heal the nation

In an Oval Office interview in 1976, I asked President Gerald Ford about charges made to me and many others by Indira Gandhi, prime minister of India, that the CIA was trying to overthrow her.

Ford said it was nonsense but declared that Gandhi was pro-Soviet and no friend of the United States. As he spoke, an aide sitting by got noticeably fidgety.

"Ah, excuse me," the aide said. "Can we please make that off the record? It will cause no end of trouble with India."

I agreed — then put the question to Ford again for what I expected would be a more diplomatic answer. The second answer was practically identical with the first, and the aide just threw up his hands.

That was Ford: straightforward, honest, uncomplicated, salt-of-the-earth Midwestern, an Eagle Scout nearly incapable of dissembling.

He was just what the country needed after the traumas of Watergate, the product of former President Richard Nixon's deviousness and paranoia.

Ford's pardon of Nixon also was pure Ford. He saw that Nixon's fate — prosecution and possible suicide — would preoccupy the country and dominate his presidency.

"This American tragedy could go on and on," he told the country. "Someone must write an end to it. I have concluded that only I can do it, and if I can, I must."

The pardon cost Ford dearly in political support, but he thought it was the right thing to do and he did it. As history has proved,



Morton
Kondracke

it was not part of a deal to make him president — though one was offered to him — and it was the right decision to heal the nation.

He was straightforward and right-minded, too, in handling the country's second great trauma: Vietnam. When North Vietnam launched its final offensive against the South in 1975, Ford wanted to stand by an ally in distress and asked Congress for \$650 million in emergency military aid.

Congress refused. South Vietnam's army collapsed and all Ford could do was rescue as many Vietnamese as possible.

When some American communities balked at accepting refugees, he said such attitudes were unworthy of America.

Ford's straightforwardness limited his imagination, too. As a regular Republican congressional leader, he voted against federally funded housing, aid to education, the Medicare program and former President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty.

Johnson, a highly complex character, declared that "Jerry Ford can't fart and chew gum at the same time," which the press cleaned up to read "walk and chew gum."

When Ford was president, his first domestic preoccupation was inflation, which rose to 7 percent.

Ford termed it a menace to the country as great as any foreign enemy and launched the ill-fated "Whip Inflation Now" campaign that had no effect whatsoever.

Then, when unemployment rose to 9 percent, Ford kept to his conservative fiscal principles and tried to restrain federal spending, which Democrats thought could temper the recession.

Ford vetoed 66 bills passed by the Democratic Congress, most of them appropriations designed to relieve unemployment. Ford said he'd saved the Treasury \$9 billion.

In foreign policy, Ford was a realist, not an idealist like Presidents Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush. Ford followed the guidance of his (and Nixon's) secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, who had a pessimistic view of human nature and the prospects of the West.

Kissinger believed that detente and co-existence with the Soviet Union were the best arrangement the United States could achieve. Reagan, by contrast, thought that the West could defeat the "evil empire."

Reagan, it turns out, was right. And Ford's detente policy, as much as the pardon, may have cost him his presidency.

Ford turned back Reagan's challenge in GOP primaries in 1976, but questions about detente undoubtedly caused the debate gaffe that elected President Jimmy Carter.

In 1976, Ford signed the Helsinki Accords, which critics attacked as guaranteeing Soviet control of Eastern Europe. Ford was trying to refute that charge in the debate when he denied that Poland was Soviet-dominated.

Going into that debate, Ford

had pulled even with Carter. The gaffe — and his stubborn refusal to walk back from it for days — caused him to lose the election by a hair.

If Ford had won, chances are he would have been at constant war with Congress. And, probably, Reagan never would have been president. He would have won the 1980 GOP nomination, but the country would have blamed Republicans, not Carter, for the nation's stagnant economy and would have wanted a change after 12 years of GOP rule.

In character, Ford presided over one of the most open White Houses ever. His first chief of staff, Donald Rumsfeld, was capable of intrigue, constantly trying to oust Treasury Secretary William Simon with leaks.

But after Rumsfeld became Defense secretary, Ford installed Dick Cheney as chief of staff, and Cheney was one of the most accessible figures ever to hold that job, amazing as that now seems, given Cheney's now-deserved reputation for secrecy.

The Washington Post's Bob Woodward reports that Ford told him in an interview to be published only after his death that he opposed the Iraq War launched by his old proteges and President Bush.

It's a mark of Ford's decency that he didn't try to undermine a successor by speaking out as Bush was preparing for war. But it's also a flaw: He might have given the country pause.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.