

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

Edinburgh Superintendent Rebecca Sager will leave the school district at the end of the school year.

OUR POINT

The school system and county as a whole will be losing a visionary leader.

County losing visionary, dedicated superintendent

The Daily Journal

Long before the state's legislators began to discuss full-day kindergarten seriously, Edinburgh already had a program in place.

This effort is just the most visible example of Superintendent Rebecca Sager's efforts to help the district's students.

Sadly, Sager won't be in Edinburgh to see the first class of full-day kindergarten students take the statewide exam to test their skills. But she has promised to keep a close eye on next year's results.

Sager is leaving the district at the close of the school year for personal reasons.

She will be missed, and not just by her school district. The entire county will miss her. Where some people might see challenges or even roadblocks, Sager saw opportunities.

For example, rather than despairing over a declining population, she worked with town officials and local real estate professionals to market the positive aspects of the community. Instead of complaining about small staff, she worked with building principals to reach out to classroom teachers to improve education across the district.

Many of the challenges Edinburgh schools face are the same other districts encounter. Sager refused to let the district stand still or be defeated by them.

The responses were shaped to fit the needs to the community and the schools, building on unique strengths.

In her letter of resignation, Sager talked at length about her pleasure in working with the school board, administrators, teachers and students and expressed her sadness at having to leave them.

"During my five years in Edinburgh, I have come to regard this community as my home and its residents as my friends," she wrote. "I have been blessed to be part of the many positive changes that collectively we have perceived, believed and achieved for the children and families of our school community."

She said later, "Serving as superintendent ... has been an ideal job ... because I have been productive and I have made a difference. ... I believe Edinburgh is exactly where I was supposed to be for these five years, and that is why it has been such a wonderful and rewarding experience."

Sager has Edinburgh pointed in a positive direction. It's sad she won't be able to see the results of her efforts from the superintendent's office. But her impact clearly will be felt.

We wish her luck in whatever new position or endeavor she pursues. Our loss will clearly be someone else's gain.

Focus: Plame leak

Trial is good theater, but where's the crime?

Scripps Howard News Service

One of those political trials that the national capital loves gets under way this week.

It involves the mighty. The defendant is Lewis "Scooter" Libby, the vice president's former chief of staff, for whom Dick Cheney himself is likely to set the precedent of being the first sitting vice president to testify in a criminal trial. Senior Bush adviser Karl Rove is expected to testify as well.

It involves the famous. NBC News bureau chief Tim Russert is expected to testify for the prosecution; author and Washington Post editor Bob Woodward for the defense.

And it involves an implacable and relentless special prosecutor, Patrick Fitzgerald, who has spent three years investigating and building his case.

The proceedings should make for fascinating courtroom drama, except that there is no underlying crime. Libby is charged with perjury and obstruction of justice in connection with the investigation. Depending on who's talking, he either lied or misspoke about his conversations with reporters or simply didn't remember them.

In the summer of 2003, former U.S. Ambassador Joseph Wilson attacked one of the Bush administration's justifications for war — that Iraq had sought uranium in Niger — as deliberately false. Shortly thereafter, it was leaked that his wife, Valerie Plame, worked for the CIA and may have arranged for Wilson to visit Niger.

It looked like a deliberate leak to discredit an administration critic, and nothing would still the outrage except the appointment of a special prosecutor. Under some highly limited circumstances, leaking a secret agent's name can be a crime, but Plame's status didn't rise to that level.

And the leak, at least as far as we know now, came in reporters' casual conversations with a senior State Department official and not as the result of a White House-orchestrated conspiracy to somehow get Wilson.

However, the investigation has been anything but inconsequential. Libby's career in government has been wrecked. If convicted, he faces jail time unless the president pardons him. One reporter, Judith Miller, spent 85 days in jail for refusing to testify and was ultimately forced to leave The New York Times. All those connected with the case, no matter how parenthetically, face — or their employers face — huge legal bills.

And most damaging of all, the CIA-leak case has shredded the unwritten law that allowed reporters to protect their sources, with unforeseeable consequences for the free flow of information.



YOUR

VIEWS & COMMENTARY

Legislative actions must keep budget balanced

To the editor:

Full-day kindergarten! Franchise the lottery! The Indiana Commerce Connector! These headlines and other issues — the most important being the enactment of the state's next two-year budget — are being debated by legislators, educators, commentators and others as Indiana approaches the 2007 legislative session.

For the first time in several years, Indiana enters a legislative session with a structurally balanced budget and a forecast of over a billion dollars of additional revenue for the next two years.

The state's next budget is the means by which state government will define its priorities.

There is indeed much that needs to be done. Yet, in spite of the calls for new programs and the exhortation to "do what is right," our elected leaders must adhere to three standards for the next budget.

First, the budget must be structurally balanced. Second, the remaining payment delays must be reversed. And finally, reserve balances must reach 10 percent of operating revenue, or \$1.35 billion.

The job of recovering completely from the 2001 recession must be finished before any other spending is considered. One need not retreat far into the past to remember the budget surpluses of the 1990s.

When surpluses begin to develop, it is tempting to label aggressive spending as "investments" and "one-time" in nature, as was the case in the late 1990s. Those spending increases contributed to huge budget deficits once the recession arrived in 2001.

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.

WHERE TO SEND THE LETTER

Mail

Letters to the editor
The Daily Journal
P.O. Box 699
Franklin, IN 46131

E-mail

letters@thejournalnet.com

Drop-off

2575 N. Morton St. (U.S. 31)
Franklin

Fax

736-2766

In addition, cutting taxes with little or no fiscal policy rationale led to serious revenue shortfalls as the recession began.

Enacting a balanced budget will help ensure the history of the late 1990s is not repeated.

The remaining payment delays must be reversed. While

delaying payments to local governments, schools, and colleges and universities creates some hardships, it is a budget management tool that has been used effectively in each of the past three recessions to avoid more onerous actions, such as tax increases. Reversing the remaining payment delays now makes this tool available when the next recession arrives.

Historically low reserve balances need to be increased to at least 10 percent of annual revenue. While nobody knows when the business cycle will

reverse, prudent fiscal management requires that we prepare for it. Ten to 12 percent of revenue will not insulate us from a recession, but it will provide the governor and the General Assembly time to respond effectively when the recession comes.

Proposals for more spending abound. Included is full-day kindergarten, which has been debated for nearly a decade in Indiana. The governor also has proposed an increase in the cigarette tax to fund health insurance for Hoosiers who cannot afford it.

Another of the governor's proposals is to create scholarships for students of the state's colleges and universities who remain in Indiana three years after graduation.

The Indiana Fiscal Policy Institute analyzed and

documented the state's "brain drain" in the Human Capital Retention Project, a series of reports issued between 1998 and 2000 (http://www.indianafiscal.org/docs/HCRP_Report2.pdf).

Many legislators are proposing property tax relief again this year. Property tax relief impacts the budget not because it is a tax cut; rather, it is a state subsidy of property tax payers. Yet, the underlying property tax assessment system remains defective. The institute's Tax Equalization Study found property tax assessments to be inconsistent and inequitable across the state (<http://www.indianafiscal.org/REPORT.pdf>).

The General Assembly needs to complete the transition to the market value assessment standard and eliminate township level assessment before any more tax relief is considered.

Without consistent, equitable and accurate assessments, any policies enacted will inevitably result in unintended consequences and may not accomplish their intended purpose.

All of these proposals, and many others, deserve a rational and civil debate. Not all of them will be included in the next budget, but progress in many areas can be made. Indiana's responsibilities to its Hoosier citizens transcend a two-year budget.

Indiana's education and economic challenges are long term in the making and will require more than one budget session to solve.

Adherence to the benchmarks of maintaining a balanced budget, reversing payment delays and building reserve balances will help ensure the state's ability to address these issues with vision and consistency now and into the future.

Steve Johnson, president
Indiana Fiscal Policy Institute

Belonging with Colts fans and goddesses

I'm walking down Massachusetts Avenue heading for the downtown Borders Bookstore. Becky is away on a "Goddess Weekend," and I am in the city on my own.

Becky and three longtime friends — together they are "the Goddesses" — are off on one of their weekend getaways. They have been doing Goddess weekends for several years now, long before she and I met. It's a chance for them to catch up with each other's lives and reconnect. The group is an important and necessary part of their lives.

I'll probably get drummed out of the Man Club for saying this, but I had forgotten about the Colts-Ravens game until I walk by a bar and see the TV through the window.

I stop to see the score and watch for a while. I start walking again when the commercials go too long.

The sky is gray and dark. The lights at the top of the tall buildings peek through the fog. The air is chilly and moist, ready for rain. The streetlights shine on the brick streets radiating from the Circle. It's a strangely beautiful



Norman Knight

night in the city. Then I hear some yelling and cheering.

The commotion is coming from in front of the WIBC studio on the Circle. People are pressed up against the window, watching the television turned on inside the radio station.

The ones in front have chairs they procured from somewhere, maybe the eatery next door. More people are standing behind them watching the action.

Everyone is whooping and hollering. Lots of cheers of encouragement for the Colts players. Lots of easy, casual profanity. Lots of laughing. Someone pulls a nearly empty half-pint of whiskey out of his pocket.

Two guys off to the side pretend they're rooting for the

Ravens. They cheer when Peyton Manning is sacked. Then they look over to see if the others hear them and get the joke. Everyone seems to know everyone else. Everyone is smiling.

Because of some stray conversation, I think some of them are street people. But who knows? Maybe they just wanted to get out of the house. Maybe they just wanted to be in a group to watch the game.

After a while, I continue on to Borders. The ground floor of the store is divided into two sections by a lobby with a guard desk. The guard has one of those cheap clock radios tuned to the game. I stop to listen to the remaining couple of minutes, and soon another customer joins us.

The guard says he doesn't really follow football and isn't really a fan, but he hopes the Colts do well, hopes they go all the way to the Super Bowl. Successful sports teams are, for better or worse, one of those intangible elements that make a city great, and Indianapolis is a great place to live.

He wants people to know that. The other customer and I agree.

The final seconds of the game on the radio tick away. The Colts win.

After the game, the streets are filled with fans, many of them wearing Colts clothing. Lots of Peyton Manning jerseys. Everyone is excited because we won. I decide that I can say "we" won, even though I am not the most devoted of fans. They are the home team, and Indianapolis is my home. I am part of the group.

I wonder about this group thing. We human beings are social creatures, that's understood.

It's more than cultural, though, isn't it? Is this desire we have as individuals to be part of something bigger built into our DNA?

Am I thinking too much about it? Probably.

Whatever the reason, it's nice to be part of a group, like the Goddesses, or the people watching the game through the window or the Colts fans coming out on the street after the game.

Norman Knight, a teacher at Clark-Pleasant Middle School, writes this weekly column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.