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IBJ | the rundown

This week in Indiana politics

Lindsey Erdody

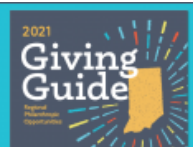


Friday, December 18, 2020

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2021 **GIVING** GUIDE

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A year without gaming?

Legislation related to the state's gambling industry has been front and center in recent years, but it may not be on the table this year.

During the Dentons Legislative Conference, which was held virtually on Thursday, state Rep. **Terri Austin** suggested there might not be much of an appetite for gaming-related bills this year, as lawmakers have other pressing issues to deal with and have to juggle new safety precautions.

In 2019, [a massive gambling bill](#) passed through the Legislature and allowed sports betting, live dealer table games at the horse-track racing casinos one year earlier than planned, a new land-based casino in Gary and a new casino in Terre Haute.

"It's sort of like what alcohol did—you were coming very close to wearing out your welcome in the General Assembly," Austin, D-Anderson, said, referencing years of debate over the state's alcohol policies that ultimately led to legalizing Sunday alcohol sales.

If any gambling legislation does come up, look for it to be about online gaming (think betting on poker or blackjack on your computer or smartphone instead of having to go to a casino to play and place bets), which is something at least a few lawmakers would like to see happen now that sports betting is legal online.

Interestingly, this is exactly why some lawmakers hesitated to allow mobile sports betting—because they predicted it could be a slippery slope.

Austin said she is not sure it's a good idea to move forward with legalizing online betting without lawmakers' having a complete understanding of how it works—something she believes they don't have right now.

Plus, Austin said, online gambling could add to the state's dependency on gaming tax revenue, which totaled close to \$300 million in fiscal year 2020.

"You know, for years, we kind of wanted to pretend like we weren't necessarily dependent on gaming, but we're dependent on gaming," Austin said.

Ed Feigenbaum, publisher of Indiana Legislative Insight and Indiana Gaming Insight, spoke on the same panel as Austin and also questioned whether there'd be an appetite for new gambling laws, such as online gaming.

"I don't know that there's a whole lot of stomach on the part of some people for going forward with new things, particularly I-gaming and particularly in an environment where we're still trying to figure out what the new normal is or is going to be," Feigenbaum said. "I don't think we're going to know that for another year or so."

Holcomb's agenda: Stay the course

Gov. **Eric Holcomb** announced his legislative agenda on Thursday, and for the most part, it [centers on continuing projects and programs](#) his administration had already been pursuing.



He wants to finish Interstate 69 (who doesn't?), keep expanding broadband internet access, build more trails, continue work on the commuter rail West Lake Corridor project and equip Indiana State Police with body cameras by next spring—all things we've heard him talk about in the past.

He also wants to study certain issues and gather more data on things like the state's housing inventory, local health departments, unfunded school mandates, early learning expansion options and equity in state government programs and services.

Given that he just won a second term in office and has Republican supermajorities in both chambers of the Indiana General Assembly, it may be a little surprising the agenda wasn't a little more bold. But Holcomb doesn't see it that way.

"Every single thing on this agenda is big, whether that has to do with being new and shiny or finishing what we started," Holcomb said.

One of the new items on his agenda is providing COVID-19 liability protections for businesses, schools and not-for-profits, which is an issue you can read more about in this week's IBJ, [which will delivered to mailboxes today](#), and go online this afternoon.

Bonus: Several items on Holcomb's agenda will require additional dollars, such as increasing K-12 funding, but money is going to be tight for the next two years. Sure, [the revenue forecast was better than expected](#), but an expected increase in Medicaid costs could cause a problem.

Holcomb's agenda: What's missing

All right, now you know what is on Gov. **Eric Holcomb's** agenda, but what about what didn't make the cut?

Business leaders will surely be [disappointed to see raising the cigarette tax](#) is not one of his priorities. It's still unclear if it's something he'd even support.

When asked about it on Thursday, Holcomb said his position is still "to be determined."

Another item that Republican lawmakers are certain to talk about next year that was perhaps not surprisingly absent from Holcomb's agenda is changing the governor's executive powers.

After seeing the broad power Holcomb has had over the past 10 months of the pandemic, some lawmakers would like to tweak how much he can do before the General Assembly has a say in things.

This could mean, for example, limiting how long a governor can continue extending public health emergency orders. Holcomb has been able to renew the order every 30 days without lawmakers weighing in.

Holcomb said he'll have to learn more about exactly what changes lawmakers would like to make, but it sounds as though he's going to hold his ground that he needs the freedom to make quick decisions.

"The virus doesn't take 30 days to discuss what a health emergency is," Holcomb said. "I don't get to go to COVID-19 and say, 'Hey, can you call a timeout for a second? We gotta have a big discussion about this and I don't know how long the discussion will be.'"

Democrats, meanwhile, criticized his agenda for not doing enough to help Hoosiers who have lost their jobs or may be struggling due to the pandemic.

"The governor made no mention of helping the hardest hit in our communities not lose their homes," Senate Minority Leader **Greg Taylor** said. "Where is any assistance with rent or mortgage payments? Where is any mention of state support

of food banks that are stretched incredibly thin right now? There is nothing in this agenda that gives our neighbors the real help that they need now."



Eddie Melton
@SenEddieMelton

...

Replying to @SenEddieMelton

Yet, when you look at the governor's priorities for 2021, there seems to be a glaring lack of solutions for the Hoosiers who are most in need." Click the link to read my full statement:



Melton responds to governor 2021 legislative agenda - Indiana Senate Democ...
INDIANAPOLIS—On Thursday, Governor Holcomb announced his Next Level agenda for the 2021 legislative session. State Senator Eddie Melton (D-Gary) ...
indianasenatedemocrats.org

The Indiana Black Legislative Caucus also didn't think his agenda had enough focus on racial justice, equity and inclusion, even though it's something Holcomb has said he wants to prioritize.

"He spoke for 15 minutes on completing highways and improving our manufacturing capacity, but didn't take the time to address his new chief equity, inclusion and opportunity officer by name," IBLC Chairwoman state Rep. **Robin Shackelford**, D-Indianapolis, said in a statement. "Additionally, it is unreasonable to suggest that a new cabinet position, regardless of who is appointed, will be able to adequately address and resolve the abundance of racial disparities occurring in our state without significant support."

From Rhodes to roads

Please excuse the pun, but I couldn't resist.

President-elect **Joe Biden** announced this week that former South Bend Mayor and one-time presidential candidate **Pete Buttigieg** (who is a former Rhodes Scholar) is [his pick for secretary of transportation](#).

📌 Pinned Tweet



Pete Buttigieg ✓
@PeteButtigieg

...

This is a moment of tremendous opportunity—to create jobs, meet the climate challenge, and enhance equity for all.

I'm honored that the President-elect has asked me to serve our nation as Secretary of Transportation.

7:19 PM · Dec 15, 2020 · Twitter Web App

Hoosier Democrats were excited about the nomination, to say the least. It does seem appropriate that the next secretary of transportation could be from the Crossroads of America.



Brandon Evans
@BrandonxxEvans

...

I watched @PeteButtigieg accept his nomination as Secretary of Transportation as I ride the Red Line, and on its free WIFI to every rider, and felt good to see a fellow Hoosier and Millennial in such a prestigious and important role in our country **#HOPE**
#TransportationSecretary

12:36 PM · Dec 16, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Even some Republicans have well-wishes for Buttigieg.

Gov. **Eric Holcomb** said Buttigieg understands how important different types of transportation infrastructure, such as ports, roads and railways, are because of his time in Indiana.

"The heart of the heartland will be well served," Holcomb said.

But not everyone is supportive of Biden's choice.



Jim Banks ✓
@RepJimBanks



They don't call him [#potholePete](#) for nothing!



Pete Buttigieg, Transportation Secretary nominee, had a pothole problem as ...
President-elect Joe Biden tapped Pete Buttigieg to serve as transportation
secretary, but as leader of South Bend, Ind. the former mayor had a pothole ...
[foxnews.com](#)

9:39 AM · Dec 16, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

	GET THE WORD OUT SUBMIT NOW	New hires? Promotions? Board appointments? Show them off in IBJ's People section.	
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Rundown Reads

- The Indiana Supreme Court [ruled in favor of Bloomington this week](#), saying the Indiana General Assembly overstepped when it barred the city from annexing any part of Monroe County through 2022.
- A barbecue restaurant upset with Gov. **Eric Holcomb**'s statewide mask mandate [is taking the battle to the courtroom](#).
- Vice President **Mike Pence** will oversee the final confirmation of President-elect **Joe Biden**'s victory, and then it [looks as though he's heading out of the](#)

[country.](#)

- Pence [was in Bloomington this week](#) to tour a facility manufacturing one of the COVID-19 vaccines.

The StatehouseFile and Indiana Citizen team up

The Indiana Citizen Education Foundation has a new partnership with the StatehouseFile.com, the news website powered by Franklin College student journalists.

Daily content from the StatehouseFile will be shared on the Indiana Citizen's website, and stories will be edited by the newly hired executive editor of the StatehouseFile, **Colleen Steffen**, and the editor-in-chief of the Indiana Citizen, **Kevin Morgan**.

The Indiana Citizen is a nonpartisan organization that launched in 2019 to provide Hoosiers with information on candidates, voting and public involvement with the democratic process.

The legislative coverage from the Indiana Citizen will focus on redistricting and election procedures.

Time to get your shot

In an effort to show that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe to receive, Vice President **Mike Pence** was [inoculated Friday morning](#) on live TV.



BREAKING: Vice Pres. Mike Pence receives COVID-19 vaccine. abcn.ws/3nrmcTf



8:07 AM · Dec 18, 2020 · SocialFlow

President-elect **Joe Biden** is [expected to get the vaccine](#) next week.

Indiana Gov. **Eric Holcomb** said this week that he would get the vaccine, but he's waiting his turn and will not be jumping the line.

The first round of vaccines in Indiana has been reserved for front-line health care workers in hospitals and nursing homes.

Judging by the [calculator from The New York Times](#), it could be awhile for Holcomb. At his age, and without being in a high-risk category, he's behind 2.7 million Hoosiers. *(For purposes of the calculation, we assumed governor is an essential job that can't easily be done remotely.)*

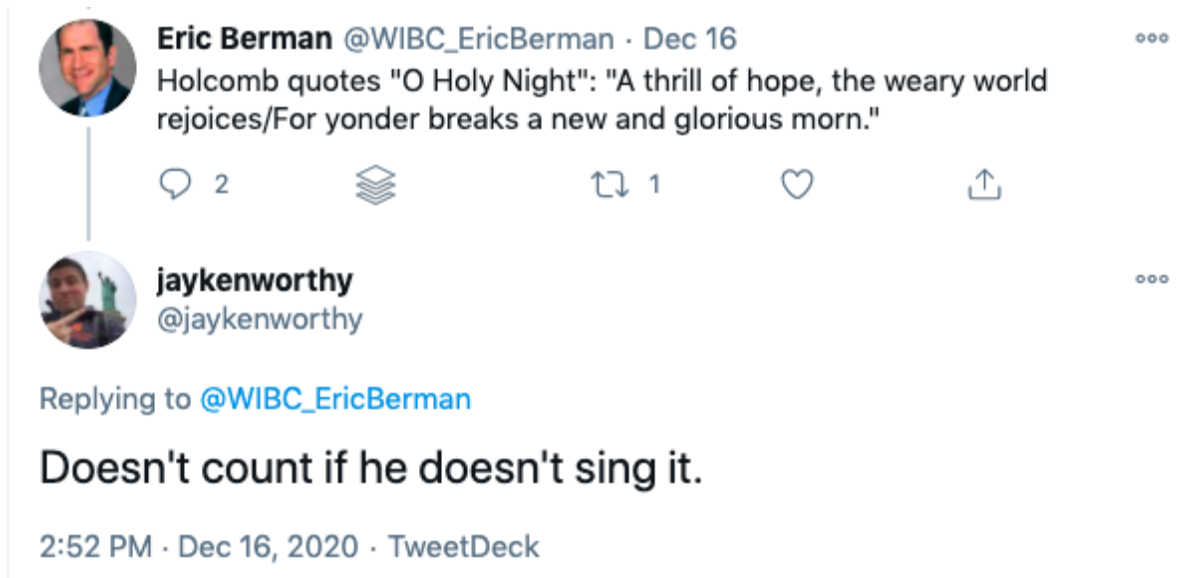
One planning thing: See you next year!

It's hard to believe it, but the holidays are here. IBJ's offices (yes, even the one from my home) will be closed next Friday (Dec. 25) and the Friday after that (Jan. 1). That means no newsletter until Jan. 8.

That is expected to be the end of the first week of the 2021 legislative session, so it's sure to be packed with news.

Thanks for reading, sending tips and sharing feedback this year. It's certainly been a wild ride. See you in 2021.

*Bonus: Speaking of the holidays, Gov. **Eric Holcomb** quoted "O Holy Night" during his briefing on Wednesday. He did not sing it, unfortunately.*



Your weekend lineup

On [Indiana Week in Review](#), host **Brandon Smith** will chat with the regular crew: Republican **Mike O'Brien**, Democrat **Ann DeLaney**, TV host **Jon Schwantes** and Statehouse reporter **Niki Kelly**.

On this week's edition of [IN Focus](#), catch interviews with Indiana Republican Party Chairman **Kyle Hupfer** and Indiana Democratic Party Chairman **John Zody** and coverage of Vice President **Mike Pence**'s visit to Bloomington. The panel will be **Jennifer Wagner**, **Mike Murphy**, **Rima Shahid** and **Tony Samuel**. You can catch IN Focus at 7:30 a.m. Sunday on CBS4 and at 9:30 a.m. on FOX59.

If you have tips, story ideas or thoughts on this newsletter, drop me a note at lerdody@ibj.com. Thanks for reading.

More headlines

Indiana, nine other states sue Google for 'anti-competitive' online ad sales

Fox 59 bringing news anchor Miller back to Indianapolis

Nearly 8 million Americans have fallen into poverty since the summer

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