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# IBJ | the rundown

This week in Indiana politics

Lindsey Erdody



Friday, July 31, 2020

	<p>What can your organization do to <b>fight racism?</b></p> <p>Central Indiana Community Foundation has some specific suggestions.</p>		<p><b>IBJ CARES</b></p> <p><a href="#">LEARN MORE</a></p>
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## When will Gov. Holcomb act on social justice issues? 'I'm working on it,' he says.

Almost exactly two months ago, Gov. **Eric Holcomb** addressed Hoosiers after a weekend filled with protests and riots fueled by racial inequality, [and he committed to making changes](#)—and doing so quickly.

But he didn't share any concrete proposals at the time, and he hasn't announced anything since, then even though groups including the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus and the COVID-19 Indiana Health Disparities Task Force have [offered dozens of suggestions](#) for actions.

Some of those recommendations include banning law enforcement from using chokehold restraints, urging all police departments to immediately implement the use of body cameras for all officers and establishing a statewide criminal justice coalition.



So, why haven't we heard from Holcomb on this since June 1?

"I'm working on it," Holcomb said while talking to reporters on Thursday.

He said he's been having a lot of discussion and meetings about how to best address racial inequity, including talking to leaders of his own state agencies about hiring and training policies.

"I can tell you people are fired up," Holcomb said.

Holcomb said there are things all parts of government can do—but he's focusing on what his administration can control first.

"All level branches of government, all three levels of government have some responsibility here," Holcomb said. "And what I have done is I have taken stock of what's going on in my house, in this administration. What are we doing?"

Holcomb said he plans to be transparent about any shortcomings he's found and expects to make some announcements by mid-August.

He stressed that with all the conversations he's had with people about addressing racial inequity and injustice, people want real change.

"Something's going to be different on the other side," Holcomb said.

*Bonus: Indiana Avenue from Blackford to West streets in downtown Indianapolis is closed until Monday afternoon [to accommodate the painting](#) of a street mural that will say "Black Lives Matter."*

## What will debates look like in the fall?

If you are someone who enjoys attending in-person candidate debates I have bad news for you. It doesn't look like debates are going to have live audiences at all this year.

The Indiana Debate Commission plans to have two gubernatorial debates with the moderator and candidates in the studio but no audience. The debates will be aired live on TV and online.

In case you want to mark your calendar now, those debates are scheduled for Oct. 20 and Oct. 27 and both will feature all three candidates—Republican incumbent **Eric Holcomb**, Democratic candidate **Woody Myers** and Libertarian candidate **Donald Rainwater**.

Indiana Town Halls is taking a similar route with its planned debate between the two candidates for Indiana's 5th Congressional District—Republican state Sen. **Victoria Spartz** and former Democratic state lawmaker **Christina Hale**.

That debate, scheduled for Sept. 22 (mark your calendar now so you don't forget), is also likely to have the candidates in a studio and air the debate live on TV and online, but the possibility of a live audience is still up in the air. Blame COVID-19, but this is still an upgrade from the primary debates, where all the candidates were virtual too.

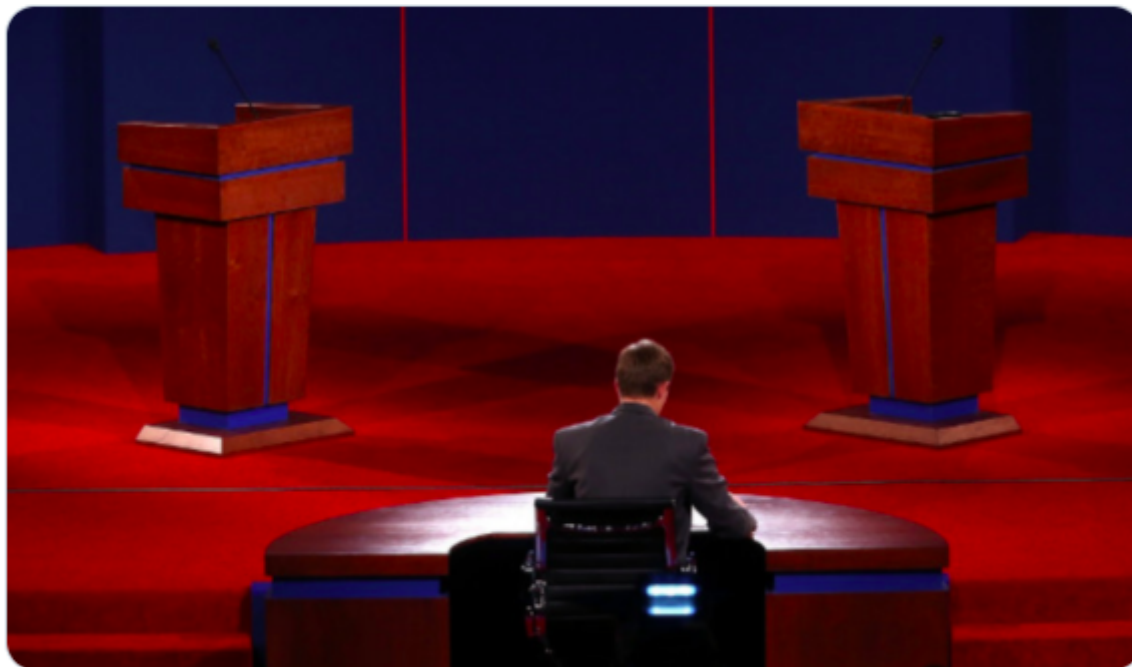
Earlier this week, Spartz challenged Hale to commit to at least three debates, including the one hosted by Indiana Town Halls. Spartz's campaign says these would not have an in-person audience, but could be done safely from a television studio or virtually.



**Victoria Spartz** ✓  
@Victoria\_Spartz



Today I am challenging Christina Hale to at least 3 debates, giving Hoosiers the opportunity to understand the clear differences in policy and substance between candidates.



9:58 AM · Jul 27, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

**Joann Saridakis**, campaign manager for Hale, told me that the campaign looks forward “to finding additional neutral forums, along with the Spartz campaign, that will allow Hoosiers to see the clear policy differences between Christina Hale and Victoria Spartz.”

For now, don't look to the Indiana Debate Commission to make that happen. Commission President **Elizabeth Bennion** told me that the board has considered expanding to other races outside of the governor's race and U.S. Senate race (which Indiana does not have this year), but no decisions or plans have been made to do so.

*Bonus: Remember how the University of Notre Dame was supposed to host the inaugural presidential candidate debate this year? [Not anymore.](#)*

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## Pressure growing to expand vote by mail

The calls for Gov. **Eric Holcomb**, Indiana Secretary of State **Connie Lawson** and the Indiana Election Commission to expand the option of casting a ballot by mail to all Hoosier voters in the Nov. 3 election keep rolling in.

State officials [allowed the no-excuse vote-by-mail option](#) for everyone in the June 2 primary, but Holcomb has maintained it's not necessary to do so for the fall election. Holcomb says with enough in-person early voting days available, Hoosiers should be able to safely cast ballots.

Plus, Holcomb said this week, when the decision was made to expand voting by mail for the primary, the state was still in a stay-at-home order. That is no longer the case.

But this week, Vote Safe Indiana, the ACLU of Indiana, Vote.org, Indiana Vote By Mail, League of Women Voters of Indiana, Women 4 Change, Progressive Thought Matters, Greater Indianapolis NAACP and Common Cause Indiana sent a letter to Holcomb, Lawson and the commission to again push for allowing all voters to cast a ballot by mail, allow those ballots to be counted if postmarked by Election Day and received by Nov. 9 and allow safe drop-off locations to collect ballots in each county through 6 p.m. Election Day.

Former Republican Lt. Gov. **John Mutz**, former longtime Democratic congressman **Lee Hamilton**, former Fort Wayne Mayor **Paul Helmke** and Marian University political science professor **Pierre Atlas** [also published a column this week](#) calling for expanded vote-by-mail.

And Mutz is joining former Democratic Lt. Gov. **Kathy Davis** in a virtual press conference this afternoon to talk about the issue.

Indiana Vote by Mail and 12 Indiana voters have also [filed a federal lawsuit](#) against the state to allow widespread voting by mail. That lawsuit is still pending.

[According to the Washington Post](#), Indiana is one of eight states that is not allowing all voters to cast a ballot by mail without an excuse. Probably not the best list to be on. Almost every state surrounding Indiana has changed its policy this year due to the pandemic.

*Bonus: President **Donald Trump** [suggested in a tweet on Thursday](#) that the Nov. 3 election be delayed. When a reporter asked Holcomb about this on Thursday, he said that he was glad he had a mask on (indicating it was a good thing we couldn't really see his facial expression). He then made it clear Indiana is not postponing its election. "I think we have the ability to pull off a very safe election, and we plan to have ours on the date scheduled," Holcomb said. At least one GOP member of Indiana's congressional delegation agrees with Holcomb.*





**Susan W. Brooks** ✓  
@SusanWBrooks



Only Congress has the authority to change the date of the election, and we will not be changing or delaying the [#2020Election](#).

2:01 PM · Jul 30, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

## Flip-flop? Or plan all along?

When Gov. **Eric Holcomb**'s executive order requiring Hoosiers to wear a mask was published a week ago, one thing was missing—any penalty for violating the order.

Holcomb [initially said last Wednesday](#), when he announced the mandate, that there wouldn't be "mask police" but violations would be considered a Class B misdemeanor, which is subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 and 180 days in jail. That upset some leaders within his own party, including several state senators [who sought legal guidance](#) on whether Holcomb could legally impose a penalty.



In the end, [the executive order did not include](#) any criminal penalties and instead says the state and local health departments are responsible for enforcing compliance by educating the public about the importance of wearing face coverings.

When asked what changed his mind from Wednesday to Friday, Holcomb said nothing changed—he just didn't articulate his position clear enough last week.

He said when he said there would be no "mask police" that meant no criminal penalty, but he now understands how people misunderstood.

"I wasn't retreating from my position," Holcomb said.

*Bonus: Speaking of masks, the Indiana Democratic Party sent Republican Attorney General candidate **Todd Rokita** a box of masks after he [posted photos from an event](#) that show him without a mask on.*



Indiana Democrats ✓  
@INDems



Look @ToddRokitaIN refuses to wear a mask.

We wanted to help keep Hoosiers safe. So we shipped the Rokita campaign a little care package.

#MaskUpHoosiers



2:01 PM · Jul 28, 2020 · Twitter Web App

<p>IBJ's 2021 <b>GIVING GUIDE</b> RESERVE YOUR SPOT</p>	<p>Put your organization in front of Indianapolis' philanthropic and business leaders.</p>	<p>Reserve by August 14 and receive the Early Bird Rate! Publication Date: November 20, 2020</p>
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## Hey wait! The state can't actually impose its own restrictions on CARES Act money after all.

After [I wrote a story this week](#) about how Gov. **Eric Holcomb**'s administration has not considered rental assistance programs as one of the reimbursable expenses for local units of government seeking CARES Act funding, a reader pointed me to existing guidance from the U.S. Department of Treasury.

The guidance says that states that are passing down CARES Act funding to local governments (as Holcomb is doing through its \$300 million fund) cannot impose additional restrictions on how local governments use that money.

Cities and towns have to follow the existing federal guidelines for the money, but beyond that, any expense should be allowed. And rental assistance is allowed under federal guidelines.

Housing advocates have argued that Holcomb should allow local governments to be reimbursed for rental assistance programs, but Holcomb administration officials have said they don't want that money to be duplicating what the state is doing [through its \\$25 million rental assistance program](#).

But as I noted in my story, the state is allowing locals to be reimbursed for programs helping small businesses, even though the state has a \$30 million program to help small businesses.

Holcomb administration officials say that's not apples to apples, though, because small business programs could target a variety of costs, so a local program wouldn't necessarily be duplicative. For example, the federal Paycheck Protection Program helped with payroll, while the state program targeted expenses such as rent or utilities.

After pointing out the guidance from the Treasury Department, Indiana Office of Management and Budget Director **Cris Johnston** said the state isn't saying "definitely no" to allowing local governments use the \$300 million fund for rental assistance.

"It's just, 'Hey, are you aware of what we're doing?'" Johnston said.

He said any questions the Indiana Finance Authority, which is disbursing the reimbursements, receive about the eligibility of local rental assistance programs are referred to the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, which is overseeing the state's rental assistance program.

"I haven't heard any pushback," Johnston said.

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## Rundown Reads

Welcome to a new section of the newsletter where I recap some news you may have missed this week or stories you might find interesting.

- Indiana lost a "bona fide America hero" this week, in the words of Gov. **Eric Holcomb**. That's former Gov. **Joe Kernan**. Read about everything he did for the state in [IBJ's coverage here](#).



- Former South Bend Mayor and presidential hopeful **Pete Buttigieg** [is throwing the weight of his political action committee](#), Win the Era, behind several Indiana Democratic candidates this year: gubernatorial candidate **Woody Myers**, 5th District candidate **Christina Hale**, 2nd District candidate **Pat Hackett** and Attorney General candidate **Jonathan Weinzapfel**.
- What stage of reopening are we in now? [The latest from Gov. Eric Holcomb's plan](#).
- The four women who say they were groped at a bar by Indiana Attorney General **Curtis Hill** [have renewed their court challenges](#) against him.

## One Indy 500 thing

IU Health [says it's unsafe to have fans](#) at the Indianapolis 500 in a few weeks, but Gov. **Eric Holcomb** is still OK with it.



He says that's partially because the Marion County Public Health Department has signed off on the lengthy safety plan Indianapolis Motor Speedway officials have prepared.

But Holcomb said he would be interested in knowing more about IU Health's concerns.

"We've got great owners who care about fans and safety," Holcomb said. "It is on their every thought and I don't want to put words in their mouth, but they're not going to do anything that's unsafe."

## Your weekend lineup

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

On this week's edition of [IN Focus](#), catch an interview with Democratic gubernatorial **Woody Myers**. Also, Washington, D.C., correspondent Joe Khalil will talk with President **Donald Trump**. The panel will be **Jennifer Wagner**, **Mike Murphy**,

**Robin Winston** and **Tony Samuel**. You can catch IN Focus at 8:30 a.m. Sunday on CBS4 and at 9:30 a.m. on Fox59.

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*If you have tips, story ideas or thoughts on this newsletter, drop me a note at [lerdody@ibj.com](mailto:lerdody@ibj.com). Thanks for reading.*

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## More headlines

**Marion County health officials cap middle, high school capacity at 50%**

**Former presidential candidate Herman Cain dies of COVID-19**

**Lawmakers question Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google chiefs about market power**

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