

You Talk; They Will Listen

Employees Want to Hear About Policy Issues

By Tom Schuman

Business owners and top executives: How many decisions made in Indianapolis and Washington impact your company's bottom line?
Employees: Do you realize the laws and regulations passed by your state and federal governments affect your paycheck?
The days of business vs. labor are largely a thing of the past. All parties in the workplace must come together to attain maximum productivity and financial performance. That includes the role of electing the people who will make it easier for everyone to achieve success.

"There is a tighter, better relationship between management and the workforce," shares Indiana Chamber President Kevin Brinegar, a veteran of 16 years with the organization and 26 years as part of the legislative process in Indiana. "Generally, there is more trust, more understanding of the big picture. Companies are more open, and rightfully so, with employees about their financial performance."

Brinegar uses a personal example to illustrate another change in the workplace. "Employees work together in teams and have more responsibility for the quality of their work. That's in stark contrast to a summer college job I had at the General Electric plant in Bloomington in which one or two quality control people were at the end of the assembly line.

"Now, you do it right before you send it on. Defects and scraps affect the cost of doing business, which impacts your compensation. It's the same with the outside decisions that influence a company's performance. There's a real financial connection – a 'we're all in this together' mentality."

Meeting employee wishes

While many employers have been reluctant in the past to share information on political candidates and their positions, employees are asking for the assistance. This is a trend that has continued to increase throughout the last three election cycles.

Fifty-five percent of working voters (including 72% of those between the ages of 18 and 24) wish their employers would provide more information about candidates, issues and elections. In 2006, 46% of voters said the information they received from their employer was influential in how they voted. The numbers are from a Public Opinion Strategies poll in December 2006.

"To go in the voting booth and pull the curtain closed is a very personal and private thing," Brinegar states, "and employers have been respectful of that. But in recent years employees have become increasingly cynical of some of the traditional sources of information – which includes

political parties, the media and unions – and employers have actually become among the most credible sources for political and policy information."

The balance between distributing information and maintaining the individual rights of employees at the ballot box is easily achievable.

Brinegar says company leaders might point to issues – he lists property taxes, immigration, environmental regulations and workforce training initiatives as examples – that significantly impact their workplace, which, in turn, can impact the jobs and livelihood of the employees.

"You provide the information, the candidates' positions on the issues, but the voters still make up their own minds," he offers. "It's one factor in their decision-making process. You definitely stop short of "therefore, you should vote for ..."

Michael Davis, Chamber vice president for political affairs, adds that the time is now to enhance policy communications between employers and employees.

"We know from our statewide polling that Hoosier voters are less educated on business issues than people in other states," he says. "It's time to talk about these issues in the campaign and give people another opportunity to try and differentiate between the candidates."

Legislative Turnover

Election Cycle	House	Senate	Total
1988	8	8	16
1990	19	4	23
1992	24	9	33
1994	19	4	23
1996	17	4	21
1998	13	7	20
2000	5	4	9
2002	20	3	23
2004	13	4	17
2006	18	7	25
2008*	15	10	25

*Through August 1, 2008

Banging the Indiana House Gavel Will Be ...

In recent election cycles, a focal point has been control of the Indiana House. Extremely close races in pivotal districts, recounts and uncertainty on election night have become commonplace.

In 2008, a number of other factors (see the roundtable discussion on Page 28) come into play – from presidential politics, the gubernatorial contest, race and gender issues and more. Michael Davis, vice president of political affairs for the Indiana Chamber, echoes the thoughts of many others when he says, “All indications are it’s going to be a good Democratic year.”

But Davis, with 11 years of experience at the Chamber, adds, “This year, more than the last several, anyone willing to make a firm prediction at this point (in mid-July) is a little crazy.” Those Democrat indicators he refers to include:

- Huge increases in voter registration, largely due to the contested Democratic presidential primary. The *Kiplinger* business newsletter puts the national numbers at 700,000 additions for Democrats. The Indiana totals are reflected in the map on page 26.
- Davis: “A presidential candidate like (Barack) Obama who generates so much emotion and enthusiasm in people. You can’t easily measure the impact of emotion on elections.”
- The economy, which is not helping either party, but is hampering the Republicans more, Davis says.
- At the state level, Democrats drew the district maps, are in control now and Republicans have too many vacancies on the ballot.

“Control of the House is a numbers game, and right now the numbers are stacked in the Democrats’ favor,” Davis offers. He explains that of 18 potential competitive races, Republican candidates have to win 13, while the Democrats only need to capture seven.

Part of the challenge for the GOP is that it has to defend 11 of the seats, including two in which its candidate was a recount winner two years ago. Four of the 18 are currently open or appointed seats (the person elected in 2006 is not up for re-election) and three are held by Democrats.

The Chamber’s Indiana Business for Responsive Government political action committee has had to contend with a 2008 legislative session that left far fewer incumbents eligible for endorsements. Votes on property taxes and immigration, among others, that were detrimental to businesses and their employees resulted in only five members of the General Assembly recording a score of 90% or higher on the organization’s annual *Legislative Vote Analysis*.

Davis says those five – representatives Matt Bell, Randy Borrer, Bill Friend, Eric Gutwein (retiring) and Jerry Torr – deserve credit for their efforts during a difficult session.

Playing the futures game

While all eyes are on the next few months, outcomes will also impact the 2009 legislative session and even the election in 2010.

The 2008 Legislature took a partial step forward by eliminating township assessors (and moving control to the county level)

in all but 43 townships. The ones remaining, however, are in areas with more than 15,000 parcels of land. Thus, property tax assessments for 64% of the residential parcels in the state remain mired in a system that has proven inefficient and ineffective.

At the bottom of the ballot in those 43 townships will be the referendum question: “Should the assessing duties of the elected township assessor in the township be transferred to the county assessor?”

Indiana Chamber President Kevin Brinegar explains the importance. “More accurate and more consistent assessments are the first step to more stability in our property tax bills. We have to streamline the process. The impact of incorrectly assessed higher property tax bills on business impacts the companies and their employees.



“What happens in those 43 townships will be crucial. If voters say ‘yes’ to consolidating those operations at the county level, there will be strong momentum and enthusiasm to pursue other elements of the Kernan-Shepard (Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform) recommendations. The election will either create that momentum or let a lot of air out of the sails,” he concludes.

For 2010, redistricting is the name of the game. Whatever party has the majority in the Indiana House after that year’s election will control the process for drawing the state and congressional district maps for the next 10 years – a perk that cannot be underestimated.

“This year’s results could go a long way toward determining who will play cartographer in 2011,” Davis states. “It’s possible that Democrats could gain enough seats to make it extremely difficult for Republicans in 2010. If it’s plus or minus three seats on either side, 2010 could be the most expensive, competitive, pressure-packed election ever for the Indiana House.”

Resource: Indiana Business for Responsive Government at www.ibrg.biz



Employees understand the relationships, Davis points out. “They know they may not get the raise they want or the bonus – or in the worst case scenario lose their job – if the company’s performance is limited by ill-advised laws and regulations.”

Prosperity for all

The employer-employee communication is, of course, not unique to Indiana. Other states have experienced success in recent years through the Prosperity Project (www.indianaprosperty.org), a program initiated by the Business Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC) in Washington. The Indiana Chamber and Indiana Manufacturers Association (IMA) are partnering to bring those assets to Indiana companies and their employees.

Davis explains that available resources include information on elected officials and candidates, how those in office have voted on business bills in the past, voter registration and absentee ballot periods and more. Tools that employers can use, depending on what works best for them, include direct mail, e-mails, web site postings, break room posters, payroll stuffers, etc.

Some employers have been using the system to let their employees know when key votes are occurring at either the state or federal level – and encouraging them to write letters to their elected officials to share their thoughts or concerns. In other words, democracy in action.

IBRG Endorsement Guidelines

The mission of Indiana Business for Responsive Government (IBRG) is to aid in the election of candidates whose legislative voting records and/or positions on business-related legislation will enhance the Indiana General Assembly's commitment to a favorable business climate. In this regard, IBRG seeks to be an example to the Indiana business community whose philosophies support broad business issues.

1. Eligibility of a candidate, incumbent or challenger to be endorsed shall be based on evaluation of his or her public record on business-related issues as identified by the legislative policies of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, expectations of winning and other considerations consistent with enhancing the pro-business make-up of the Indiana General Assembly.
2. Endorsements shall be made without consideration of political party affiliation.
3. Every incumbent candidate whose two-year aggregate vote score is 70% or greater on key business bills shall be eligible to be considered for endorsement. Four-year aggregate vote score information will also be provided to the IBRG Policy Group for its consideration.
4. The voting record of an incumbent or anticipated voting record of a challenger may be indexed to the district's P-Base rating* in evaluation of the candidate's pro-business performance or potential. Any incumbent with a P-Base score of 1.5 or greater and an aggregate vote score of 50% or greater is eligible for consideration.

5. Endorsement shall not carry with it the guarantee of financial assistance. Financial assistance will be given only where need is clearly indicated or from the Pro-Business Champions' Fund**, the race in question has significant implications to the pro-business commitment of the Indiana General Assembly and with the approval of the Financial Control subcommittee or the Policy Group.
6. Endorsement shall be made by an affirmative vote of three-fifths of the Policy Group present in accordance with the foregoing guidelines.
7. Endorsements may be given to opposing, pro-business candidates, whether primary or general election, when appropriate, and when each candidate meets all of the criteria in the endorsement guidelines, with no guarantee of financial assistance to either of such opposing candidates.
8. Financial assistance will only be granted to candidates that have received an endorsement or are considered a Pro-Business Champion. **
9. Endorsements and financial assistance shall be confined to candidates for the Indiana General Assembly.
10. Debt retirement contributions shall not be given to candidates following a campaign.

*A research document that expresses the support for business by the registered voters within a legislative district.

**An exception is made for the Pro-Business Champions' Fund, which is designed to recognize incumbent legislators who have demonstrated conspicuous leadership on important issues to the business community.

“BIPAC is among the most trusted sources of business and political information at the federal level,” Davis contends. “We’re pleased to work with the IMA and be able to include relevant state data to give employers and employees a valuable political education tool.”

According to BIPAC, nearly 1,700 employers and associations in 13 states used the Prosperity Project to communicate with employees, retirees and shareholders by Election Day 2006. The employers delivered more than 57 million pages of information, prompting 1.9 million employees to use their company’s web site to download voter registration or early ballot forms. Those same employees also wrote 1.1 million letters to their elected officials on issues related to their jobs and industries.

Changing of the guard

Adding more importance to the employee education factor is the continually growing turnover rate in the Indiana General Assembly (see chart on page 20).

Davis cites a combination of factors – election upsets, retirements, health issues and what some have described as an ever-growing partisan atmosphere – for the changes. The result, however, is a Legislature that is less representative of the people it serves.

“The time demands for what is called a part-time job have definitely made it more difficult for individuals of a certain background to run, get elected and serve. For the small business owner, it takes away too much time for many of them to do this. People from a small business background are seriously

under-represented at the Statehouse.

“There are plenty of retirees, teachers and people with labor union backgrounds,” he continues. “Schools and unions allow their people to take the time off. But there are less people in office who understand what it takes to grow a company, to run a business.”

Brinegar says he understands the time commitment of the General Assembly and the pressures on companies to keep their best and brightest on the job. The importance of the decisions being made by state government, however, entices him to encourage business leaders to at least consider the possibility.

“We need people who understand the big issues and the impact of the public policy decisions,” he asserts. “Without that perspective and understanding, the impact on business is sometimes lost. Many businesses provide an opportunity for employees to volunteer in the community and make a difference. While this goes well above volunteering, serving in the General Assembly is one of the most important, visible, significant ways to allow employees to make a difference for themselves, their company and the entire state.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Kevin Brinegar, Indiana Chamber, at (317) 264-6882

Michael Davis, Indiana Chamber, at (317) 264-7544

Prosperity Project at www.indianaprosperty.org

2008 IBRG Endorsements (as of July 16)

Senate Incumbents

Jim Arnold, LaPorte, District 8
 Richard Bray, Martinsville, District 37
 John Broden, South Bend, District 10
 Ed Charbonneau, Valparaiso, District 5
 Beverly Gard, Greenfield, District 28
 Luke Kenley, Noblesville, District 20
 Connie Lawson, Danville, District 24
 Teresa Lubbers, Indianapolis, District 30
 David Long, Fort Wayne, District 16
 Earline Rogers, Gary, District 3
 Vi Simpson, Bloomington, District 40
 Brent Steele, Bedford, District 44
 Brent Waltz, Greenwood, District 36

House Incumbents

Bob Behning, Indianapolis, District 91
 Matt Bell, Avilla, District 83
 Randy Borrer, Fort Wayne, District 84
 Brian Bosma, Indianapolis, District 88
 Tim Brown, Crawfordsville, District 41
 Woody Burton, Whiteland, District 58
 Bob Cherry, Greenfield, District 53
 Suzanne Crouch, Evansville, District 78
 Bill Davis, Portland, District 33

Tom Dermody, LaPorte, District 20
 Dick Dodge, Pleasant Lake, District 51
 Cleo Duncan, Greensburg, District 67
 Sean Eberhart, Shelbyville, District 57
 Jeff Espich, Uniondale, District 82
 Ralph Foley, Martinsville, District 47
 Bill Friend, Macy, District 23
 David Frizzell, Indianapolis, District 93
 Tim Harris, Marion, District 31
 Phil Hinkle, Indianapolis, District 92
 Tom Knollman, Liberty, District 55
 Eric Koch, Bedford, District 65
 Don Lehe, Brookston, District 15
 Dan Leonard, Huntington, District 50
 Jack Lutz, Anderson, District 35
 Rich McClain, Logansport, District 24
 Mike Murphy, Indianapolis, District 90
 Tim Neese, Elkhart, District 48
 Cindy Noe, Indianapolis, District 87
 Phyllis Pond, New Haven, District 85
 Kathy Richardson, Noblesville, District 29
 Tom Saunders, Lewisville, District 54
 Milo Smith, Columbus, District 59
 Greg Steuerwald, Brownsburg, District 40
 Amos Thomas, Brazil, District 44

Jeff Thompson, Lizton, District 28
 Jerry Torr, Carmel, District 39
 Eric Turner, Marion, District 32
 Jackie Walorski, Lakeville, District 21
 David Wolkins, Winona Lake, District 18

Endorsed Challengers/Open Seats (Senate)

Jean Leising, Oldenburg, District 42
 Marlin Stutzman, Howe, District 13
 Carlin Yoder, Middlebury, District 12

Endorsed Challengers/Open Seats (House)

Ed Clere, New Albany, District 72
 Wes Culver, Goshen, District 49
 Kelly Gaskill, Pendleton, District 37
 Bob Heaton, Terre Haute, District 46
 Tim Hunt, Sellersburg, District 70
 Mark MacKillop, North Judson, District 17
 Mark Messmer, Jasper, District 63
 David Miller, Elkhart, District 5
 Brook Tarr, Orleans, District 62
 Randy Truitt, West Lafayette, District 26

New Voter Registration by County

(January 1-July 17, 2008)

Monthly Registrations

(highest to lowest)

April: 62,440
 March: 31,801
 February: 22,116
 January: 21,911
 June: 17,759
 July: 14,778 (through July 17)
 May: 5,815

Busy April

Top 5 Counties

Marion: 14,421
 Lake: 4,782
 Monroe: 4,097
 Allen: 3,920
 St. Joseph: 3,512

Calmer May

Top 5 Counties

Marion: 837
 Monroe: 394
 Hendricks: 383
 Tippecanoe: 347
 Floyd: 280

Key

Total New Voter Registrations

- 3,000 or more (14 counties)
- 1,000-3,000 (19 counties)
- 700-999 (18 counties)
- 500-699 (15 counties)
- 300-499 (18 counties)
- 100-399 (8 counties)

