



GOVERNMENT LEADER OF THE YEAR

STAN JONES

To win people over takes a certain personality – one with passion, commitment and patience. It’s a near mission impossible to achieve that repeatedly within government circles.

But someone forgot to tell that to Stan Jones.

First as a state legislator, then as a top aide to then-Gov. Evan Bayh and, until earlier this year, as the state’s commissioner for higher education, he fought for – and realized – many reforms to Indiana’s education system.

“In my career, at that intersection of business and government, I’ve never known anyone more effective at public policy change than Stan Jones,” asserts Chris LaMothe, former Indiana Chamber president and current CEO of Sherry Laboratories in Daleville.

That’s especially high praise considering he and LaMothe don’t share the same political ideology.

“My initial impression of him, based upon his legislative record, was he was a very liberal Democrat. And my initial meeting with him was one I went into with a lot of questions.

“I quickly learned though that Stan was a man that was very driven by principles and by a passion for education improvement. I quickly learned to respect him, and then I came to admire his effectiveness in his role as the commissioner for higher education,” he recalls.

“He was well liked by Democrats and, frankly, a lot of Republicans liked him too.”

Making his mark

Jones’ career path in education began quite naturally, as he puts it, when, in 1974 at age 24, he was elected to the state Legislature. The reason: The district he represented included Purdue University.

“I served initially on the (House) Ways and Means Committee and later on the Education Committee. Both areas dealt quite a bit with education finance and then education policy – to the point where education was really my number one issue that I spent my time on.”

In 1990, his last year as a state representative, Jones authored legislation that formed the Twenty-first Century Scholars Program designed to help raise educational aspirations and opportunities for low- to middle-income Hoosier families. In exchange for financial assistance to an in-state college or university, high school students pledge to meet certain academic requirements as well as stay out of trouble with the law.

“It’s almost 20 years later, and every spring they have a graduation ceremony for high school seniors that have completed the pledge for a Twenty-first Century scholarship and are ready to go to college. The students and parents are pretty excited because had it not been for this program they would not have had the opportunity to go to college,” Jones offers.

He joined the Bayh administration later in 1990, spending five years as the governor’s senior education advisor and adding the legislative director hat during his final two years there.

When asked to select Jones’ biggest contribution to Indiana’s education policies over those years, Bayh was initially hesitant because they were “so numerous, successful and varied.”

He ultimately chose “his work on our attempt to enact world-class education standards, cutting edge assessments to determine how individual students, schools and districts are performing in any of those standards, and a robust system of remediation to assist students who need to do better.

“That may seem obvious today, but it was controversial at the time. It is still a work in progress, but without Stan, nothing would have been accomplished.”

Right place, right time

Despite his past successes, Jones found the education landscape to be a tricky one when he became the higher education commissioner in 1995.

“It was difficult. We had a period of years when the General Assembly had little success, really no success. There was constant

Increasing higher education graduation rates is the singular goal of Stan Jones’ new organization – the National Consortium for College Completion.



battling between the education groups and the business groups, between Republicans and Democrats.

“We had a split General Assembly; the Senate was controlled by Republicans and the House by Democrats. We had a Democrat governor and a Republican state superintendent. We went about three or four years at a virtual standstill on education issues and legislation,” he recalls.

“When people start out not trusting each other, relationships are hard to build. Ultimately, we were successful because we worked pretty hard on those relationships. There was a focus on new academic standards; that helped. A number of us had known each other for quite some time and had a history of working together on previous issues; that helped too.”

Downplaying his role, Jones states matter-of-factly, “I think part of bridging the gap was that we simply had no choice. There was no way to get anything done without people working together.”

Current Indiana Chamber President Kevin Brinegar says Jones deserves more credit for his role as both referee and one who united different factions.

Specifically, Brinegar recalls how the commissioner helped get a comprehensive K-12 accountability program (P.L. 221) passed in 1999: “There was a vast chasm between the education establishment, the business community and various legislators on those accountability concepts and policies that were ultimately in that legislation, but Stan just wouldn’t take no for an answer. He just kept moving the two sides together to achieve the ultimate outcome.”

His successful stubbornness, if you will, also came in handy when Jones was trying to put together a group of the most interested stakeholders to form Indiana’s Education Roundtable.

LaMothe vividly remembers Jones’ dogged approach to get him to participate.

“He told me that I had to be a member of the roundtable if there was any hope that it was going to work. I resisted because I thought it was going to be nothing more than a union vehicle or a superintendent’s vehicle or something.

“There was such an embedded interest in keeping the status quo in education that I didn’t think that the administration would support change, and I didn’t think Stan was capable of bringing about the change that we (the Chamber) dreamed about and envisioned. So I said ‘no’ for at least four or five months,” LaMothe shares.

“Stan finally wore me down and convinced me that I had to join it. And really from the first meeting, he set the pace of an open-minded approach to find common ground and then to begin to look at facts of education and from that begin to devise a plan. He very quickly had my very enthusiastic

support for the roundtable.”

LaMothe became increasingly impressed with the way Jones handled the collective groups vying for a piece of the pie.

“He would listen carefully to each position without showing any bias one way or the other toward who he was talking to. So it didn’t matter if he was talking to the teachers’ union, business interests or legislators, he would listen very carefully and then search for any kind of common ground to begin a basis of discussion. That’s what made him so incredibly effective.”

The creation and initial work of the roundtable was a real turning point, Jones believes, and demonstrated the state’s seriousness in improving education.

“The roundtable was behind the push for academic standards. The Fordham Foundation later gave Indiana straight A’s on our academic standards and another national organization labeled them among the best in the country. That was a proud moment for Indiana and the roundtable.”



Jones was ready for a new challenge after 34 years of state government service in several capacities.

Signature achievement

When reflecting back today on his time as commissioner, the accomplishment Jones singles out above all is the initiative that led to establishment of the Ivy Tech Community College system. At the time, Indiana was one of only six states to not offer a community college.

“Back in the 1960s, we had developed regional campuses instead as Indiana’s answer, which worked for a while. But we really missed out on about 40 years worth of development of lower cost, more available opportunities for our people – both younger people and older people. It was showing up in the data that we were looking at,” Jones explains.

“When we reintroduced the (community college) concept in 1999 with Gov. O’Bannon’s blessing and support, it was met with mixed feelings.”

The existing postsecondary institutions were initially concerned that their enrollment would go down instead of viewing the proposal as a way to reach those likely not currently in the college pool.

The measure ultimately passed and Ivy Tech’s enrollment took off. Since then, the two-year college has more than doubled its student population.

Steve Ferguson, a member of the Commission for Higher Education at the time and chairman of Cook Group in Bloomington, talks about the significance of this milestone – both for students and the schools.

“It helped define the individual missions of the institutions. It changed the structure in terms of broadening the base with a community college, changing admissions requirements at the institutions like the IU campuses and at Purdue. These are significant contributions to the educational

On a personal note

Sen. Evan Bayh:

“Stan Jones is one of the most decent people I know. He has dedicated his life to helping others, which is something I admire greatly.”

Teresa Lubbers:

“We always laughed about the scarf he wore because he would come to the Statehouse without a coat. He often didn’t have on socks either, but he had that wool scarf around his neck.”

Chris Murphy:

“Stan has a great sense of humor. He’s comfortable like an old shoe.”

structure in Indiana,” he notes.

“Stan was passionate about that and he had a vision ... to make another entry point into the higher education system that we didn’t have previously.”

Adds Brinegar, “A lot of folks were involved, but no one deserves more credit for that, what we have today and the direction we’re headed in this state with vocational education and workforce training, the two-year community college system, than Stan Jones.”

A new framework

While public policy was always at the forefront of his activities, Jones also recognized the value in evaluating procedures and how the commission worked, and listening to new voices in the education arena.

One of those voices was that of Chris Murphy, another Commission for Higher Education member who serves as president and CEO of 1st Source Corporation in South Bend.

“When I first came to the commission, I was a threat to him because I was aggressive and wanted to change everything. Instead of taking that as a negative, Stan made it into a positive in how he altered his approach and the course of the commission. That’s the sign of a good leader. Stan’s greatest asset is his ability to change depending on the needs at hand,” Murphy contends.

“Over the years I worked with him, there was a dramatic change in the commission. He was very responsive to taking it in a new direction – having the commission become more involved in setting the course. He also attracted a good group of people to his staff that wanted to see Indiana have the best higher education system in the country.

“He moved the state and commission to looking at the big picture and setting aggressive goals – moving to a much more qualified accounting (of colleges and universities) and setting substantive incentives that put the universities in concert with the commission in improving higher education,” Murphy surmises.

This mindset of setting aggressive goals culminated with the 2007 *Reaching Higher* report and framework for improvement.

“The number one issue there is the focus on degree completion and emphasis on having more students graduate from college. It’s a shift from focusing on enrollments to recognition that we haven’t been very successful at having students complete college,” Jones admits.

“That’s the overriding issue from that report. Related to that is a renewed emphasis on accountability and public reporting for higher education. ... I think *Reaching Higher* and the focus on college graduation is an important thing for Indiana to work on, and that’s really what I’m doing in my new world.”

On to the nation’s capital

After working a collective 34 years on education here, Jones felt he “needed to move on and go do something else,” leaving his post as higher education commissioner in the spring.

“Probably for a lot of that time I was working, I always felt there was an unfinished agenda that we needed to accomplish. But I got to a point where I felt pretty good about where we were,” he shares.

“I think a lot had been accomplished, and I think I felt that there wasn’t much more that I could accomplish. I just felt the need for new challenges.”

The next chapter for Jones is running a new non-profit in Washington, D.C. focused on improving college graduation rates nationally.

“This was an issue that I believed in quite strongly and was the last piece of unfinished business I was involved with in Indiana, so to me it was a natural step to take. Honestly, one of the other reasons I was able to take that step is that on a number of issues Indiana has received national recognition – on Core 40 (required high school graduation curriculum), the roundtable, our community college initiative and our most recent efforts in college completion – I’ve known and have worked with a number of people I’ll be working with on a national level on issues,” Jones describes.



Colleagues cite Jones’ determination and ability to bring varying factions together as among the reasons for his education successes.

The organization, the National Consortium for College Completion or NCCC, got started initially out of conversations with the Gates Foundation, according to Jones. The effort is also being supported by the Lumina Foundation, headquartered in Indianapolis, which has increasing college attainment as its number one goal.

“There are some pretty significant efforts nationwide focused on college graduation – so the time is right; the stars are aligning to focus on this issue,” Jones remarks.

“We started in June and have half a dozen staff members (including Bayh’s former chief of staff in the Senate, Tom Sugar, and Cheryl Orr, who worked with Jones at the Indiana commission), and we’ll probably grow to 12. We have a laser focus on degree completion and a laser focus to work with states on developing state policies, plans and strategies around increasing degree completion at community colleges and universities.

“Indiana is a significant part of that and we know how hand in glove education and the economy is. If Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio are going to move into the next century of job growth, then it’s really got to be through a much, much higher level of education for all of our citizens,” he suggests.

“The president has made it a national goal to be first in the world by 2020 in college attainment. Currently, we’ve slipped to 10th. We are going to be working with states to help – and there will be federal money available to assist states to do that.”

Teresa Lubbers, Jones’ successor at the Higher Education Commission, looks forward to what he will achieve in his new endeavor and is grateful for the strong foundation he left her to build on.



Jones provides an update on education issues in September for attendees at the Chamber’s annual D.C. Fly-in.

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May 4, 2010

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All lunch events are held at the Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, 12:00 p.m.-1:30 p.m.

Jones' snapshot of Indiana's education landscape

“With respect to higher education, Indiana has a huge increase – especially at the community college level – in numbers of students. That’s continued through the recession, so the education outlook is pretty vibrant in terms of people participating. We’re starting to make progress on completion, but there’s a pretty substantial effort that needs to take place.

“Overall, one of my concerns is that the focus on K-12 has probably been temporarily derailed because of the huge financial situation and people are worried about keeping the schools open and teachers employed. The focus on accountability and achievement, however, will return.

“I’m very pleased that (former state Sen.) Teresa Lubbers took my position (at the Higher Education Commission); she’ll do a great job. I think there will be some new energy with Indiana’s Education Roundtable, and I think it’s also probably time to bring people – Republicans and Democrats – back together again. There needs to be a renewed effort on education reform, and it’s probably helpful that I moved on and Teresa is there, with a little different perspective and renewed energy.”



“Stan clearly cared about all students, but I think he had a particular passion and commitment to first generation and under-represented populations in the college arena, and that’s why he’s so perfectly well-suited to what he’s doing now,” she says. “He served this population and all students very well.”

Adds Bayh, “Every student who attends an Indiana educational institution will feel the benefit of Stan’s labors. It is not too much to say that the next generation of Hoosiers will be brighter, better informed and better equipped to meet the future because of the fine efforts of Stan Jones.”