

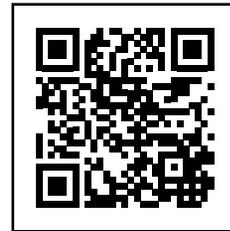
DRIVING FORCE

Leonard Delivers Results

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

Old habits die hard. And that's a good thing – for Hoosier businesses and their employees – when linked to Dan Leonard's propensity to serve others.

He fondly recalls time spent as a child at his parent's country grocery store. Leonard started ringing up customers as soon as he was tall enough (aided by a trusty bar stool) to reach the cash register.

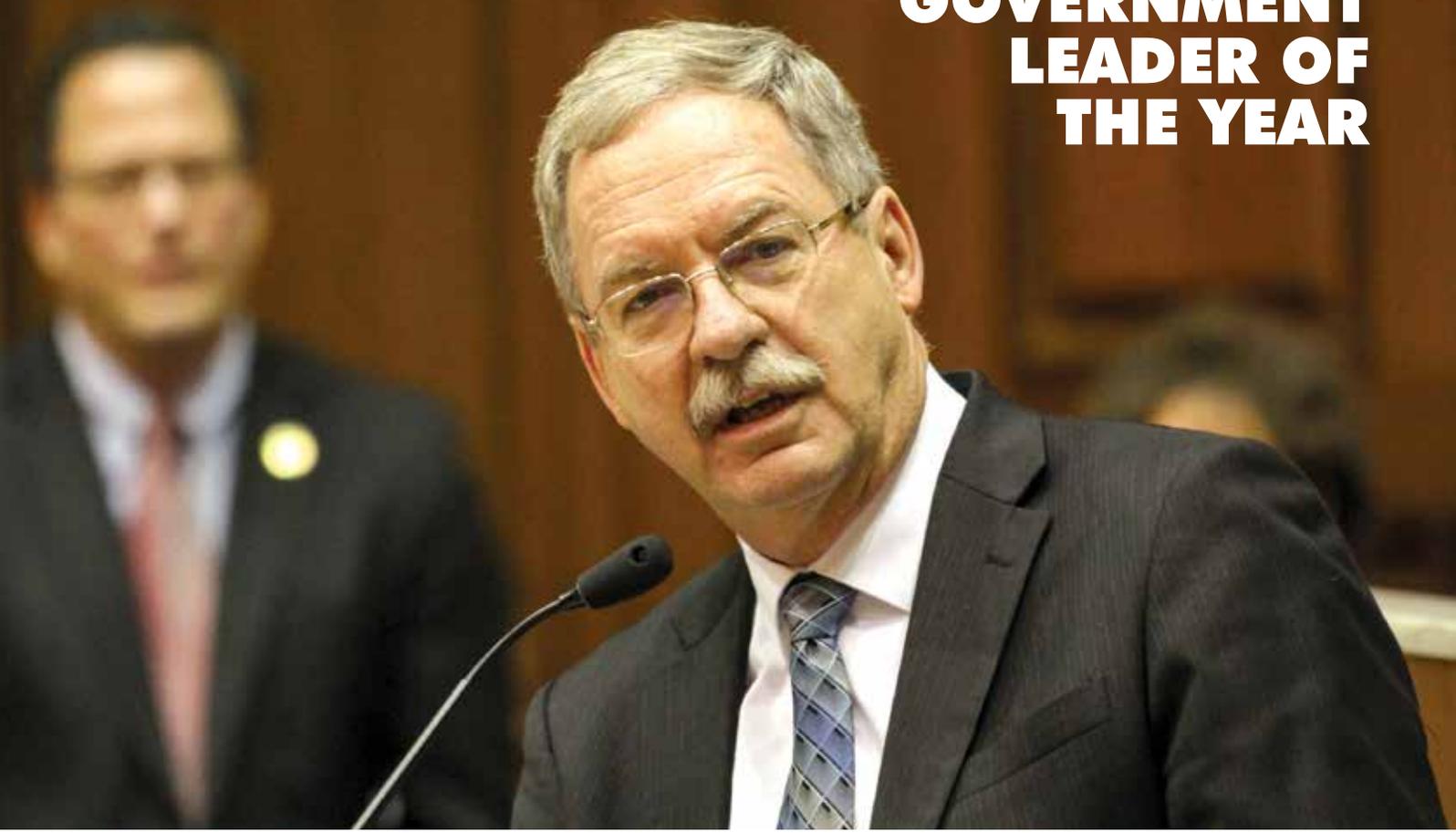


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Dan Leonard enjoys his roles as a pilot, legislator and businessman.



**GOVERNMENT
LEADER OF
THE YEAR**



"I remember the first day we had a \$100 day in the grocery store. It was a big deal!" he says with a laugh.

Those early memories sparked a penchant for building relationships and a passion for making a difference – whatever the scale.

Leonard owns South Side Furniture of Huntington, a business he purchased from his father in 1978. Elected to the Indiana House of Representatives in 2002, he serves Huntington County, and portions of Wells and Allen counties. He's a member of the House Ways and Means Committee (and local government finance subcommittee chair), Judiciary Committee and is the speaker of the House's appointee to the Native American Indian Affairs Commission.

House colleagues Randy Ober and Matt Lehman admire his leadership approach.

"Dan is kind of the dean of our (Northeast Indiana) delegation now," Ober suggests. "He's been there the longest on the House side. He's one of our older members and serves as a mentor to a lot of folks in our delegation. He definitely fulfills the role of someone who's been around the block a few times, and is more than happy to sit down and give people pointers and help us all



"I'm just finishing up 14 years and it's been a real learning experience. Sometimes you come out on the good end, and sometimes you come out on the bad end. You have to learn how to work with people. That's a big advantage for me because I'm in retail and I work with people on a regular basis – different people with different views and different thoughts."

become better representatives of our district and of the state."

Lehman chimes in: "Dan's a 'lead by example' person. He's a very laid-back guy. He doesn't get excited about things. He tries to get people to think – and to be a 'thinker' and not just a 'doer.' "

Leonard takes such praise in stride, marveling at the untold opportunities awaiting every time he walks through the Statehouse doors.

"I'm just finishing up 14 years and it's been a real learning experience. Sometimes you come out on the good end, and sometimes you come out on the bad end," he quips. "You have to learn how to work with people. That's a big advantage for me because I'm in retail and I work with people on a regular basis – different people with different views and different thoughts."

Among his most significant accomplishments are authoring and guiding landmark unemployment insurance (UI) legislation in 2011 and 2015, respectively.

The first prevented a substantial tax increase on employers by restructuring the UI schedules. The other added an early payoff option for a \$250 million outstanding balance



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on a federal unemployment insurance loan. The legislation, and subsequent action by the Pence administration, saved Hoosier employers \$327 million (or \$126 per employee) in federal unemployment tax penalties this year.

“Those are two very substantial pieces of legislation in a fairly obscure area of law,” remarks Indiana Chamber President and CEO Kevin Brinegar. “He’s helped the business community and the Chamber bring common-sense solutions that have saved employers in excess of \$2 billion.

“We’re grateful that someone like Rep. Leonard is willing to make the sacrifices it takes for anyone – especially a small business owner – to serve in the General Assembly.”

Mike Ripley, Indiana Chamber vice president of health care policy and employment law, served with Leonard for several years at the Statehouse. “I don’t think there’s one legislator who understands that system better than he does,” he declares. “His knowledge of UI is amazing.”

Back in the black

It’s mid-morning at South Side Furniture as music softly plays overhead. An employee carries on a pleasant conversation with a customer. Sunlight pours in stain glass windows.

South Side Furniture, housed in a former church, spans approximately 16,000 square feet and three levels. Couches, mirrors, recliners, vases, curios, bedding and upholstery, and more adorn the floors and walls.

Leonard bought the building in 1988, relocating from across the street when a



Governor Pence’s October 2015 announcement involving the early payoff of Indiana’s federal unemployment insurance loan. Rep. Leonard authored the legislation; Sen. Luke Kenley (left) was among its sponsors.

major supermarket came to town.

“We did a lot of interior remodeling, but tried to keep the atmosphere the same,” he comments.

Thoughtfully rocking in a leather chair, Leonard reflects on how his experiences as a small business owner help in his work at the Statehouse.

“I do all of the bookwork here at the furniture store,” he shares. “We farm out the taxes at the end of the year and that’s it. I do payroll. I do all of the tax forms. Everything.

“Government could make it so much easier for employers. There’s a lot of issues

that create more paperwork for employers that hold back economic development.

“If you look at the General Assembly, most people won’t understand because they don’t do tax forms and don’t actually pay the bills,” he asserts. “You get a little different perspective (as someone who shares the passion with unemployment (insurance). There’s tons of issues – one after another after another.”

Looking back at the long journey that led to the UI early loan payoff, he recounts how it all began.



Leonard testifies at an interim study committee meeting on employment and labor issues.

“We had at one time a surplus balance in the fund of over \$2 billion. And – right or wrong, I don’t know – the General assembly looked at it and said, ‘Why do we have this glut of money over here? Why don’t we get it back in the economy?’

“We lowered premiums for employers and raised benefits for unemployed Hoosiers. The fund started coming down. That wasn’t bad – but all of a sudden, the recession started to hit.”

By 2008, the fund – which is totally financed by employers and not related to the state budget – was empty and the state began borrowing money from the federal government to pay claims.

Through persistence, determination and collaboration, the federal loan was paid off in late 2015 and unemployment taxes were used to reimburse the state in early April this year.

“It’s been a huge improvement and accomplishment, but it wasn’t just Dan Leonard,” he stresses. “It was everybody working together and maybe Dan Leonard was just lucky to be in the right place at the right time.”

His response when the early payoff legislation was being considered and a colleague posed the question: “What’s to keep somebody from going out and buying a new boat?”

“I said, ‘Hell, I hope they do! I hope they buy 10 boats (or recreational vehicles – they’re made in Elkhart). I don’t care what you do with it. You buy a boat, and the guy up there (who’s selling it) is going to invest the money into something else. That’s what stimulates the economy and keeps things rolling.’”

Bill Waltz, Indiana Chamber vice president of taxation and public finance, attributes much of Leonard’s success to his ability to work across the aisle.

“He’s refreshingly independent in a productive and positive way,” Waltz affirms. “He’s not divisive. He’ll continue to work with people. You have to have those kinds of voices.”

Leonard, who says he’s not as politically oriented as some legislators, emphasizes that the UI movement “wasn’t Republican. It wasn’t Democrat. It had nothing to do with that. There were efforts to make it political, but part of the success was trying to keep it non-political.”

Toasting success

Stan Zihlerl, president of Five-Star Distributing, met Leonard in 2005 when his company acquired an existing beer wholesaler in Huntington.

“Ours is a highly-regulated industry ... so it’s important to stay in tune with and in touch with the men and women that represent us in the General Assembly,” Zihlerl comments. “One of the first folks we reach out to are people like Dan. Since that’s where we were headquartered (in Huntington), it was a perfect fit.

“Early on, we knew we would need to relocate our warehouse and distribution point to provide a more central location and a little better access to the market,” he continues. That day arrived in 2007. “When we were doing our search, we came upon a great opportunity in Whitley County (which Leonard represented prior to redistricting).”

The goal: Construct a new 100,000-square-foot distribution facility in Columbia City. The challenge: A Prohibition-era law required that beer distribution warehouses be located within a city’s limits.

Leonard led the charge in updating the outdated legislation.

Today, Five-Star is thriving with over 90 full-time employees and 80-plus suppliers.

“He was instrumental in carrying the legislation that allowed beer distributors – not just us – to locate their businesses outside of the city limits,” Zihlerl declares.

“I’ll never forget that and – he’s not a guy that’s out there for the headlines. He’s out there doing the right thing for small business people.

“Along the way, we’ve added jobs. We’ve added infrastructure. We’ve invested in the market. And candidly, it’s allowed us to contribute more to the communities we serve to raise the quality of life in Northeast Indiana.”

Creating connections

Leonard has long been active in his community, with past roles in the Indiana Freemasons (grand master), Huntington Chamber of Commerce and South Side Business Association (president of each) and Salvation Army (board member), to name a few.

But the connections don’t stop with people and organizations. He



Rep. Leonard’s affinity for building relationships has served him – and his constituents – well during his 14 years at the Statehouse.

also strives to link places and opportunity.

Enter the 900-Road project.

Leonard supported legislation in 2014 to allocate \$30 million in Indiana Department of Transportation funds to improve CR 900N/Lafayette Center Road between U.S. 24 at Roanoke (in Huntington County) and I-469/I-69 (in Allen County).

“It’s a project that’s needed to be done for years,” he asserts. “We got a grant. The state wrote a check for \$30 million and said, ‘Fix it.’”

The effort led to a huge investment by a major employer.

“General Motors has maybe 4,000 employees up here,” Leonard explains. “It was ready to do an expansion in Michigan, and when we announced (that the project would materialize), they said, ‘We’re going to bring \$1.2 billion to Fort Wayne (by expanding its assembly plant there).’ It stimulated growth in that area, which I was really pleased with.”

But he emphasizes the overall statewide work is far from done.

“It was a short-term fix versus something that would sustain road funding out for 10 years or 15 years,” he acknowledges. “We’ll come back in 2017 and hopefully have a long-term plan for road repair. There’s a big issue of helping locals out too with road repair. It’s not just a state issue.”

Man of honor

It’s not all business talk at South Side Furniture as the conversation shifts to one of Leonard’s passions: aviation.

“Both of my parents had their pilot’s license,” he remarks. “When we had the grocery store, we were small and flew all over, and loved it.”

He obtained his pilot’s license about 20 years ago and bought a

1946 Ercoupe.

“My plane’s not fast, but it’s a little bit faster than driving – and I like to fly much better than I like to drive,” a beaming Leonard offers.

He often takes the two-seater to business lunches, golf outings and aviation gatherings.

Leonard is also a Native American history buff.

“There’s just so much history (in Northeast Indiana),” he says, clearly in awe. “Whether you talk about the rivers. Whether you talk about names of places.”

He hosts an annual fundraiser in Indianapolis that includes a Native American quiz. Winners have received items such as arrowheads, spearheads, necklaces and beads.

Lehman shares a parting thought.

“Dan’s a humble guy. When you look at people who talk about their mistrust of government, I think of people who have never met Dan Leonard. He’s a very selfless legislator. He puts a lot of things above himself, and he does it with a lot of humility.

“We need more people like Dan Leonard in the Legislature.”

Ober couldn’t agree more.

“He’s the type of legislator we should hope to model ourselves after as far as leading the state of Indiana. He’s an incredibly hard-working guy. He doesn’t let anything get in the way of trying to find the right policy and that’s something I admire in Dan.

“It’s really cool to see him get this honor because I know he doesn’t do anything so he can get a pat on the back; he does it because it’s the right thing to do. This is well deserved.”

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