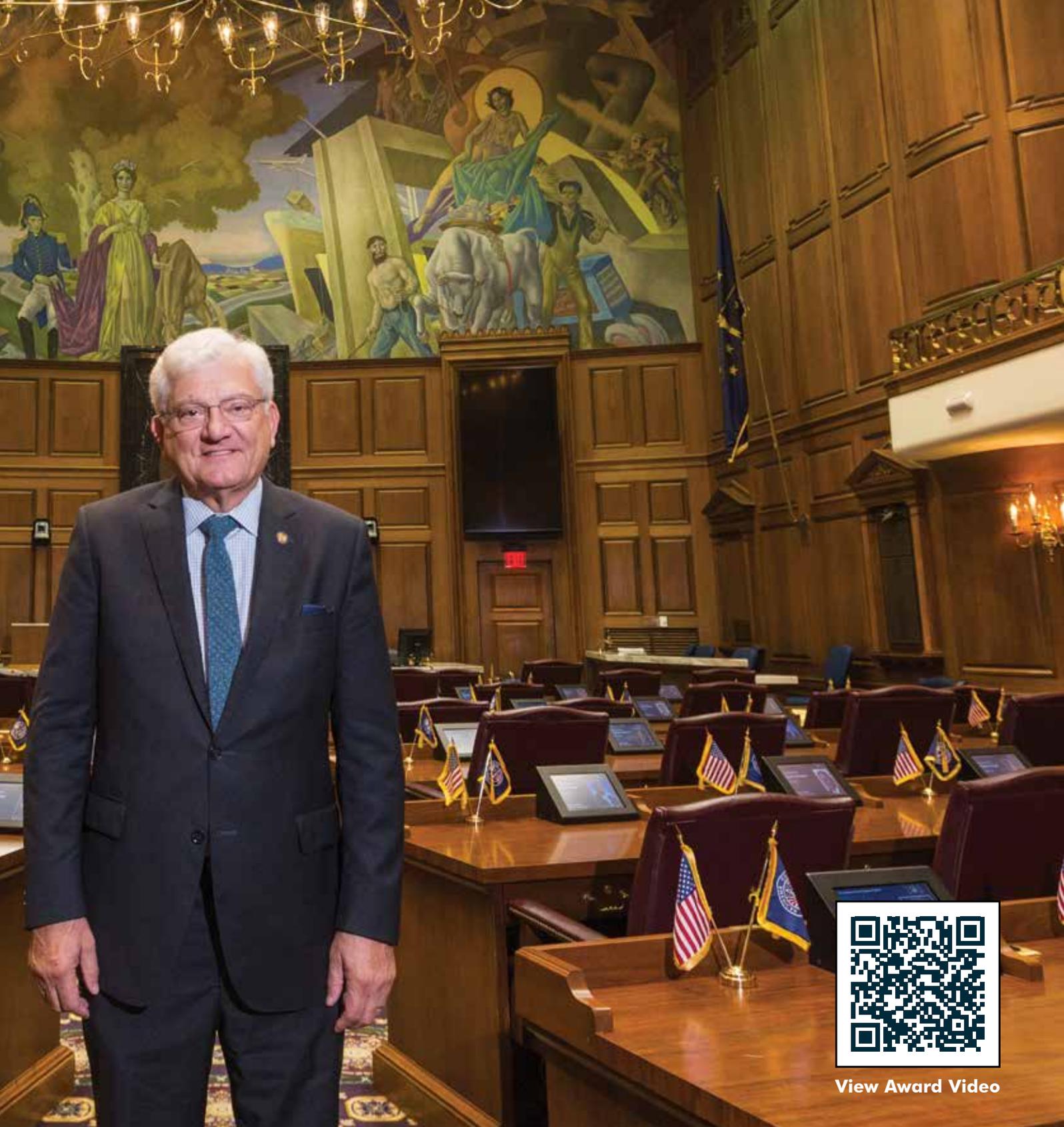


**GOVERNMENT LEADER OF THE YEAR**

# PILOT GOES ON GROUND ATTACK

Soliday's Persistence Propels Road Funding

By Charlee Beasor



[View Award Video](#)

On an afternoon in late August, Rep. Ed Soliday answers the door to his Valparaiso home with a cell phone pressed to his ear. He motions to follow him inside and into an office packed to the ceiling with books and mementos, with overstuffed chairs bathed in sunlight.

As Soliday talks on the phone, a long-haired cat slinks by. There are two more felines on the premises and one with clear plans to find a cozy spot on my lap as we discuss Soliday’s life and career. (His wife, Mary, comes to collect the curious cat a few times during our interview.)



As author of House Bill 1002, Rep. Ed Soliday notes teamwork from often disparate groups was one of the keys to success. "In the reflection of Washington and what we were able to do in Indiana ... (state marketing) says Indiana is a 'State that Works' and we just kind of proved it."



Soliday later explains the call concerned details of House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1002, the landmark infrastructure funding bill signed by Gov. Eric Holcomb earlier this year. Soliday authored and championed the legislation.

Though his lengthy career with United Airlines took him to the skies, he has been instrumental for ground transportation and infrastructure issues, among other topics, in the Indiana General Assembly.

Starting out as a pilot, earning the rank of captain and eventually becoming a company executive and safety consultant, he spent over 35 years with the airline.

After retiring from United, Soliday was elected to the Indiana House of Representatives in 2006, representing District 4 (Valparaiso and surrounding area). He serves as assistant majority floor leader and is chairman of the House Roads and Transportation Committee (among other committee assignments).

Valparaiso Mayor Jon Costas has known Soliday for 40 years and highlights the representative's "relentless energy."

"I don't know where he gets his energy because he just works tirelessly. When you combine all these skills and strengths, Ed makes for a formidable leader and his record clearly shows that. Not only has northwest Indiana benefitted, but the entire state has benefitted," Costas asserts.

That energy is evident in hearing Soliday recollect about becoming a pilot and learning how to navigate the corporate and eventually the policy world.

### Tools of the trade

Also apparent for Soliday are themes and traits from his business career that he has woven into his policy work: leadership, teamwork, communication and perseverance.

Another attribute Soliday is known for is his desire to make informed decisions based on facts and data.

"It's a model I learned a long time ago ... it's really simple: Define the problem first. Because in aviation, 80% of the accidents that happen are because somebody solves the wrong problem," he explains.

"Define the problem, gather information, make a plan, act on a plan. A lot of people make plans and never act. The most important part is critique all along the way. Have I taken my mind off what the real problem is? We see that happen in government over and over."

Soliday marvels at the leadership styles of his colleagues in the Legislature, including Rep. Tim Brown (R-Crawfordsville and chair of the House Ways and Means Committee), among many others.

Brown calls Soliday the "perfect example of a citizen legislator because of his business experience, government taskforce interaction."

He continues, "He's a family man with a charitable heart and he brings all those things together – and his life experiences – to the Indiana General Assembly."

Brown appreciates Soliday's desire for fact-based decisions.

"I think he's driven by data and facts and once the facts speak and he lays them out, he has the feeling that the facts will drive the bill. We don't have to use the

emotional part of it to bring people to support it; let's talk about what the data is."

### **Pounding the pavement**

Information collection and teamwork were the keys to victory for this year's HEA 1002, which – when fully implemented in six years – will allow Indiana to raise \$1.2 billion annually for infrastructure costs.

Adequate funding is one of the goals in the Indiana Chamber's long-term economic development plan, *Indiana Vision 2025*.

"(Soliday) was a stalwart in working through the necessary information, building the case and offering forward-thinking legislation that was not without controversy," notes Indiana Chamber President and CEO Kevin Brinegar.

Getting competing interests to band together helped overcome backlash from some groups over the gas tax increase. The possibility of tolling is another contentious issue.

"A senator who's no longer a senator said to me, 'You're going to learn, Ed, politics isn't a team sport (for some)'," Soliday recalls. "If you're there to make speeches, it probably isn't. If you're there to get something done and you think you're going to get it done alone, you're fooling yourself."

Similar legislation fell short in 2016. Soliday points to Gov. Holcomb as the "completion for the team this year."

"I can't say enough good about this guy. He doesn't care if he gets the credit. He basically said, 'Explain it to me.' And we did and he said, 'Here are some things that are concerning to me' and so forth and he did not micro-manage for a second," he says. "That guy was there for us; he stepped up to the plate and that's courage in politics.

"As the team grew and came together, in the end we wound up with a team decision out of the Senate," Soliday notes.

"These people that just think politics is a track meet, it's not. It's a basketball game."

Brinegar highlights Soliday's persistence on the issue.

"It took a lot of information gathering, a lot of making the case by seeing what needed to take place between six years ago, which is roughly the time we started on this venture, and now. (Soliday) could look forward and see the need, as did the Chamber," he contends.

Unlikely allies – municipalities, unions and business advocacy groups, for example – joined forces. People and organizations with competing interests won't always agree and that's fine, Soliday says. But it takes working

through ideology and accepting compromise at times to get legislation such as HB 1002 across the finish line.

Gary Langston, president of the Indiana Motor Truck Association (IMTA), notes that he and Soliday disagree – particularly about tolling – but have been able to move the needle for each other on other issues. IMTA was part of the HB 1002 team.

"He's a good legislator. He's passionate. Has conviction, and I think most importantly, does what he says he's going to do," Langston reveals.

Langston mentions calls he's received from his counterparts around the nation, wondering how the road funding process came together in Indiana.

"The number that called me and said, 'How were you able to put that together and pull that off? We've been trying to do that a long time.' (Other states) can't get the buy-in from the Legislature. It really is a generational accomplishment," he adds.

### **Home is where the heart is**

Soliday's love of his hometown of Valparaiso and the northwest Indiana region extends beyond relocating back there from Barrington, Illinois, after his United



*Cheers!*

*To Representative*  
**ED SOLIDAY**

---

**GOVERNMENT LEADER  
OF THE YEAR**

*from your  
friends at*



retirement.

Soliday has actively supported numerous charitable and non-profit organizations and local government boards.

Some of the causes dear to Soliday include education, faith and helping disadvantaged children.

For 10 years, he and his wife volunteered with Kids Alive International, a non-profit ministry that rescues orphans and at-risk children throughout the world. He relocated the organization from Chicago to Valparaiso during his tenure as president. Soliday also sits on the Board of Regents of Trinity International University and the board of Emmanuel Hospital Association.

“This is just another example of the fact that Ed brings his leadership skills to every arena. In government, in business, in the faith community, in the non-profit community and education ... those are five major sectors of our world and on every sector he has had an impact,” declares Costas, the Valparaiso mayor.

Costas and others in the Republican Party recognized potential in Soliday to represent the city at the state level, calling his recruitment, “one of the best decisions we’ve ever made.”

“Ed is fearless and if he thinks something



One of Soliday’s focuses has been gathering information and participating in meetings on autonomous vehicles.

is right, he will fight for it regardless of the obstacles in his way. He was a helicopter fighter pilot in Vietnam and he brings those qualities of grit and dedication and courage with him to everything he does.

“As (former Governor) Mitch Daniels used to say, you shouldn’t run for office to be something, but to do something. (Soliday) doesn’t need to be anything, but he saw the need and the opportunity to strengthen the

state and that is what motivated him to take on the role.”

Soliday, however, wasn’t exactly keen on the idea.

“I didn’t (want to run for office). I had left United and we had all kinds of retirement plans,” he divulges.

“It’s a major transition for a business person to come into the Legislature. When you’re a division head, you’re used to saying,

**PINES VILLAGE**  
RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

*We Celebrate Life*

Porter County, Indiana’s only non-profit retirement community. Enriching the lives of older adults since 1983

**CONGRATULATIONS**  
REPRESENTATIVE  
**ED SOLIDAY**  
2017 Government Leader of the Year

Thank you for your distinguished service and commitment to Hoosier families and communities.

VALPARAISO, INDIANA  
WWW.PINESVILLAGE.ORG



Soliday has been involved in numerous non-profit organizations. For 10 years, he and his wife ran Kids Alive International, which gave assistance and rescue to children in need throughout the world.

‘I wish’ and you have to be careful because they’ll make it happen. It’s a whole different world (in legislating).”

But Soliday’s tune has changed over the last decade, in part due to the relationships he’s developed in the Legislature and the benefit that has come to his region.

“Now that I’m in my 12th year, if I get re-elected I’m going to stick around; one, because of responsibility and two, because someone is going to have to build those relationships,” he conveys.

Costas frames Soliday’s work on road funding as a critical local issue, particularly the emphasis on not deferring maintenance for future generations.

“One thing we talk about and Ed believes in: You don’t pass off leadership with your city to the next leaders with deferred maintenance. You pay for it now,” he says. “I believe this legislation is one of the major factors in positioning the state for tremendous success in the future.”

### **Up, up and away**

Soliday learned how to fly when he was young. His brother was dating the daughter of an American Airlines pilot (his brother didn’t have a driver’s license, so Soliday would drive him around), and the pilot offered to teach Soliday to fly.

His parents and others were not excited about the prospect.

“My old track coach said, ‘I’ve watched a lot of guys get into this flying stuff and it’s a heartbreaker,’ ” Soliday says with a laugh.

After demonstrating talent for flight, the pilot encouraged Soliday to borrow money for a commercial pilot’s license and the two formed a charter airplane business. They operated it until Soliday’s junior year of college at Indiana University, when he applied for a job at United Airlines.

Though he planned to someday finish his degree, the job opportunity was too good to pass up.

THE PORTER COUNTY REPUBLICAN PARTY  
IS HONORED TO RECOGNIZE

ED SOLIDAY



AS INDIANA CHAMBER'S GOVERNMENT  
LEADER OF THE YEAR 2017



Soliday takes a ceremonial turn at moving some dirt during a construction project along Interstate 65 in northwest Indiana.

“They offered me a job for more money than both my parents were making,” he recalls.

His pilot business partner told him, “You can always finish an education, but this comes once in a lifetime.” I was 21.”

Soliday temporarily left United after three years to fly attack helicopters in Vietnam. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, two Bronze Stars and the Purple Heart for his service.

He returned to United and eventually retired as a senior 747 captain and spent the last 11 years at the major carrier as vice president of safety, quality assurance and security. He oversaw United’s crisis management during 9/11 (two United planes were hijacked, with one flown into the World Trade Center) and was appointed to the federal Gore Commission on aviation safety and security.

Soliday has also accepted a number of industry awards, including the Bendix Trophy for Aviation Safety and the Collier Trophy for helping reduce fatal aviation accident rates by 83% in 10 years.

### Building the foundation

Soliday has numerous influences, from his corporate life to the political world. But one of his most influential role models was his grandfather.

“We’re a fairly humble beginning family. My granddad, who was an eighth grade graduate, never owned a car. He lived to be 96. He was my exact opposite; rarely said a word, and an excellent craftsman who could build anything,” he recalls. “He was an avid reader. The most humble guy on the earth. Rode the train into the steel mills.”

Soliday chokes up as he recalls a memorable moment when his grandfather was near the end of his life.

“I drove down there (to the nursing home) and he says, ‘Where have you been? I haven’t seen ya.’ I said, ‘Grandpa, I’ve been in Alaska.’ He says, ‘How much they paying you now?’ ‘I don’t know, Grandpa, Mary keeps the books. I think I’m getting about \$125 an hour.’ He said, ‘You know, Eddie? There ain’t anybody alive worth more than \$10.’ ”

Soliday’s parents (his mom was a nurse; his dad a barber) were stern; more so than he was with his two children, he mentions.

“When you’re raised by a Marine ... there are no ex-Marines. There are rules and you keep them or there will be consequences. They definitely tried to keep you humble,” he acknowledges.

With a tongue-in-cheek smile, he adds, “I don’t think they succeeded in keeping me humble, but they did their best.”

### Eye on the horizon

Despite a monumental legislative achievement, Soliday isn’t resting on his laurels.

Gathering information on autonomous vehicles, continued work on refining state codes relating to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and getting support for constructing a second track for the South Shore railroad are top of mind.

“Double-tracking, I didn’t think we would get that on the table. That’s enormous in Indiana,” he says. “I see (double-tracking) as taking Inca gold to Spain. There’s a huge economy up there (in Chicago).”

Soliday also has a “hobby horse” in mind to help get more Hoosiers involved in the legislative process through adding physical space to committee rooms.

“One of the things I hate is seeing people drive three hours to the Statehouse from Evansville or here and sit outside the hearing room,” he declares. “Here’s Grandma, who really feels something, and she’s going to do her part and speak up, and she’s in the hall watching on TV.”

The solution is an “unformed” thought, though. You can bet he’ll keep working on it – and there will be data involved. That’s the Soliday way.