



JERRY TORR AND CARLIN YODER
GOVERNMENT LEADERS OF THE YEAR

Take a casual look at Rep. Jerry Torr and Sen. Carlin Yoder and one might find more differences than similarities.

Torr, a Carmel resident who has represented portions of fast-growing Hamilton County since 1996, is quick to share a hearty laugh. His background includes studying guitar performance, musical composition and related subjects in graduating from the Musicians Institute in Hollywood. Today, he acknowledges trying to find time to “get one of my guitars out” while engaging in the pastime of cooking for a cause.

“I love to cook,” he shares. “I donate dinner parties to charity auctions sometimes. I sold one for \$5,000 once. It helped that we were holding it at the governor’s residence (robust laughter quickly follows).”

Yoder, more reserved, lives in rural Middlebury, part of his Senate district (since 2008) that includes constituents in Elkhart and Kosciusko counties. He and his wife, Jayme, are owners of The Music and Dance Academy (she is the passion behind the effort, the senator confirms). Yoder went to school at Indiana University South Bend and previously worked in education administration before becoming district director for Indiana congressman Marlin Stutzman.

“I chase my kids (ages 18, 11, 10 and 7) basically,” Yoder says in describing his free time. “We did a family canoe and backpacking trip this summer. We try to be outdoors as much as possible.”

But when it comes to the Indiana General Assembly and difficult issues – and there was none more difficult in a long time than right-to-work (RTW) – the duo couldn’t be more identical.

“I never shied away from an issue because I thought it was tough,” offers Torr, who led the way on the controversial Daylight Saving Time (DST) measure in 2005. “I think Sen. Yoder will attest: You first come in and you don’t seem to have that mindset of ‘I have to get re-elected over and over.’ You come here to do something. I’ve always felt that way.”

Yoder: “When you get past the rhetoric and some of the noise that is out there, if you stand strong in what you believe is right for the state of Indiana, we can get things done. This is not a place for people to get comfortable; this is a place for people to come and work hard. Representative Torr has shown that from day one in some of the legislation he has carried. And my goal is to do the same thing, make a difference while you’re here.”

In the beginning

In an interview following the 2005 session and the DST passage (he was honored as co-Government Leader of the Year for that and other achievements), Torr indicated that RTW just might be the next big item to accomplish. He had started working on the issue a year earlier, then joked in an e-mail several months ago that he didn’t realize it would take seven more years to accomplish.

A school teacher from Northern Indiana came to see Torr about RTW in 2004. “I had never heard of the issue, didn’t have a clue what he was talking about,” Torr admits. “I started doing some research, trying to find some studies by some folks who wouldn’t be biased one way or the other.” The research revealed, among other findings, the difference in job growth along the borders of RTW and non-RTW states.

“I came to believe it would be a jobs magnet for Indiana,” Torr adds. “I first talked about it with the Governor between his election (in 2004) and inauguration, which he claimed in February not to remember. But I believe he has a better memory than that (more laughter).”

Yoder came into office in 2008 at a time when Elkhart County had the highest unemployment rate in the state and one of the highest in the nation.

“I ran on the platform of I would do whatever it takes to bring jobs into Elkhart County. This issue of RTW kept coming up,” he notes. “It was an easy one for me. I grabbed it and ran with it, knowing that it would help. I was convinced we were losing jobs because companies weren’t coming into the state of Indiana simply because we were not a RTW state. I did what Rep. Torr did, started looking at numbers and studies, and it became abundantly clear that by becoming a RTW state that jobs would flow into Indiana.”

The Indiana Statehouse was a far quieter place in late August than throughout the tumultuous month of January.



Torr had introduced RTW legislation previously, but there was little serious consideration until 2011. The House Republican caucus voted to move forward on the issue, a committee hearing took place and that led to a 35-day walkout by the Democrats in the House. Nevertheless, several factors made 2012 the year for action, says House Speaker Brian Bosma.

“Coming off a strong pro-business majority in the 2010 election, having dealt with maps and school choice and so many other issues in 2011, having stood firm on the consequences for those who chose to engage in the longest legislative walkout in United States history – the recognition that these things all lined up to make right-to-work a viable policy for enactment in 2012 was critical. Jerry was a stalwart the whole way and not prepared to take a step back at any point. He was just resolved to do what was right for Indiana.”

Solidifying the troops

Despite those elements lining up, some convincing of colleagues was also necessary.

Torr had delivered a PowerPoint presentation over the years to anyone throughout the state who would listen. He also shared it with caucus members.

“We only had one or two persons in the caucus who had philosophical problems with the issue. A lot of people were afraid of the politics of it,” he states. “When thousands of protesters show up, it can start to feel like the whole world is against you.”

Yoder acknowledges a number of meetings with Senate members to go over the numbers and the economic development prospects. Despite a 37-13 super majority for Republicans in the Senate, it was far from an easy process. The legislation eventually passed the Senate 28-22; the tally was 54-44 in the House.

“We were continually preaching that the loudest doesn’t always equate to the majority. During session, you get in your own little world here at the Statehouse,” Yoder reveals. “And when you have thousands of people screaming at you, you kind of think that’s happening across the state. When in reality, it’s not. We kept reminding them, go home, talk to your constituents and you’ll get a different story.”

Uncertain times

Although it’s risky to describe any General Assembly session as typical, January 2012 was far from normal. In the words of Senate President Pro Tem David Long, “We didn’t know what antics were coming; we had to be ready.”



Jerry Torr (top) and Carlin Yoder were called on many times to explain the benefits of right-to-work during legislative hearings.

The two lawmakers share a passion for making a difference during their time in the Indiana General Assembly.



Strong communication between the bill authors – “I always felt we were on the same page,” Yoder reflects – and House/Senate leadership was essential. He calls it a true team effort despite “hearing from Jerry and others: ‘Is that Senate going to come through at the end?’”

The threat of a walkout led to stronger coordination than on most bills, according to Torr. “We wanted as few votes as possible. Taking that bill to conference committee would have been an absolute recipe for disaster. We had to work together so that we had a final product that came out on third reading that could be supported by both houses and without change.”

The original plan was to just move a House bill, but it was quickly decided that a Senate version was necessary to provide additional options. Daily re-evaluation, Yoder confirms, was all part of a “strange month.”

For the Republican leadership, there was no doubt that the right men were leading the way.

Bosma reiterates that in addition to knowledge and passion for the topic, Torr “can calmly explain even an emotional issue when others might respond with accusation and inaccuracies. Jerry methodically works his way through each of the issues.”

Yoder credits Long for his guidance and leadership throughout the process. In turn, Long says he simply tried to remind the first-term senator to “keep a perspective on the criticism that was withering at times. I would tell him to keep his cool, stay focused; to his credit, he did. Messaging was very important.”

Yoder did have frontline experience a year earlier on a school voucher bill that generated a great deal of attention. Long cites that as well as Yoder’s firsthand knowledge of the need to create additional job opportunities in Elkhart County and throughout the state.

“Carlin had to have a combination of vision, an ability to articulate it and strong political courage – and he has an abundance of that.”

Subtle and not so subtle

Just how big was the intimidation that Bosma mentioned and the “withering criticism” noted by Long.

“I don’t know about Sen. Yoder, but the speaker and I couldn’t go anywhere in January without state troopers with us.” Torr relays. “Most of the protesters, if you talked to them individually or in small groups, they were fairly civil. But the union leadership would try to stir them up. There were one or two times I got caught in the hallway where I thought I could slip through without a trooper and I was approached by someone who was a little angry and a little threatening.”

Death threats were unfortunately part of the equation. Yoder was sitting at a downtown restaurant with friends when he got a call from a restricted number that couldn’t be traced. The caller says: ‘I know right where you are sitting, I know who you are sitting with and I’m going to get you.’ Yoder continues, “I’m sitting in a window at a restaurant. I don’t know if scared was the right word, but concerned.

“And the biggest concern is when my friends kicked me out of there because they didn’t want to get shot with me. So I had to walk back to the Statehouse, and for the first time I was looking around. That was a bit disconcerting.

“Also, having protesters in my front yard when I’m not home. I have four kids at home and a wife, and I’m three hours away at the Statehouse. That was really disconcerting. The way the State Police handled it, they stayed in my vicinity the whole time. From that standpoint, I felt pretty safe. But it was a bizarre turn of events.”

Reactions and results

The numbers thus far back up the expectations. Through early October, 83 companies had communicated to the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) that RTW is a factor



Torr meets with colleagues at Hylant Group, while Yoder gets an inside look at West Point Woodworking in Shipshewana with owner Steve Raber.



Yoder and Torr share a lighter moment during a post-session conversation.

in their decision where to locate current projects. Sixty-six of those projects had advanced to the pipeline stage, with 26 of those having accepted the IEDC's offer – bringing more than 3,100 projected new jobs and more than \$414 million in investment to the state.

Bosma terms it precisely the impact anticipated. “Many folks, for obvious reasons, aren't prepared to be on the front page of the paper saying the enactment of right-to-work is the reason for picking Indiana, but privately we've heard it time and time again – and I think it's just the beginning.”

Long remembers the message from other states, particularly Oklahoma, that this “would be a game changer for Indiana. So far it's very gratifying seeing the number of companies that have made inquiries and linked that to right-to-work. It ultimately will be a huge boost for the Indiana economy, build the level of wages and sustain our economy well into the future.”

Regarding the numbers of business prospects, Yoder also uses the term “gratifying” in saying, “We may not get them all, but just the fact that we have that many businesses that never would have looked at Indiana before. ...” He also has been the recipient of a number of positive comments.

“A lot of individuals have come up to me and said, ‘By the way, no matter what the headlines say, we appreciate you going out there and taking a stand.’ A lot of people don't understand RTW, and they're not even trying to, but what they appreciate is they have legislators going there and tackling tough issues.”

“I've even had union members tell me, ‘I may not agree with you on this, but I respect you for going and standing up for what you believe in because that is rare today.’”

Torr lists a few positive occurrences since the signing of the legislation on February 1. On the semi-humorous side, he points to union bus drivers in Northern Indiana saying, ‘Why didn't you include us?’ In addition, when the phone calls began coming in to the IEDC and the Governor's office in the weeks after the legislation was enacted, Gov. Daniels told the

media he believed he had underestimated the impact of RTW.

“That did my heart good,” Torr admits. “(But) it makes me sick to think how many more Hoosiers might be working if we had done this in 2005.”

The state rep adds that the number of potential prospects is not surprising and, “What we don't want to lose sight of is the other important reason we did this – the freedom of the individual workers (to choose whether or not to join a union). That was equally as important and would have been reason by itself if we didn't think it would bring in new jobs.”

Torr talked to a worker at a union company that had renegotiated its contract after the effective date of RTW. In the first few weeks, the employee said there was a “completely new atmosphere at work, employees getting along better and there wasn't the hostility there had been before when folks were being forced to pay dues when they didn't want to.”

On the scoreboard

It's common to ask legislative – and business or community leaders also – where certain accomplishments rank. Both laughter and that shared passion for moving Indiana forward emerged again in the responses of Torr and Yoder.

Torr jokes that Rep. Phyllis Pond, “who has been here 60 or 70 years” (actually since 1978) was concerned about being on the House floor for the vote due to some back issues that had forced her to spend time in the hospital. “Phyllis said she was absolutely going to be here because this was the biggest thing in her career,” he shares. “The school reform (of 2011)

was certainly right up there. We do a lot of tough stuff, but I can't imagine I'll ever be involved with anything that will be more important than that.”

Yoder, in response to the question, says, “I haven't reflected enough on that.”

Torr: You've probably got more time here than I do (indicating bigger issues may yet emerge).”

Yoder: “We'll see. If I keep carrying this stuff, maybe not.”

More laughter precedes clear, concise closing comments.

“I don't worry about that,” Yoder contends. “I'm already considering next year and what more we can do. Time will prove this is a big deal, and I think it already is. I'll reflect when I'm out of the Legislature.”

Torr, in ending the interview, offers, “I've always said anybody can write a bill that will pass the House 99-0. That's not exactly why I think my constituents send me here.”



House Speaker Brian Bosma attaches his signature to the right-to-work bill, ending an eight-year journey for Torr.