



EDITOR'S NOTE: Gubernatorial candidate John Gregg joined the Indiana Chamber of Commerce board of directors in early June for a one-hour conversation regarding our state's future. We present a few of his opening remarks, followed by answers to board member questions. When Eric Holcomb replaced now vice presidential candidate Mike Pence as the Republican candidate for governor, BizVoice® conducted a telephone interview with him in early August.

Indiana Chamber members have the opportunity to hear directly from both candidates in September during one-hour Policy Issue Conference Calls. The Gregg call is set for Sept. 16; Holcomb will participate on Sept. 23. Register at www.indianachamber.com.

Holcomb: Keep the Economic Momentum Going

By Tom Schuman

As our state looks at paying for roads and infrastructure, what is your philosophy on tolling?

Holcomb: "I have a context and a perspective on that because I was involved in the Major Moves plan that pumped almost \$4 billion into Indiana's infrastructure and helped kick start projects that had been delayed for decades. Just as it was then and it should be now, everything should be on the table when it comes to funding infrastructure projects.

"You wouldn't want to start out by taking things off the table, including tolling. We need to look at traditional options and non-traditional options. That's how we ended up with the Major Moves program. Because we said we want to do as much as we can. ... I want to think big this next session as well."

Another area of major emphasis will be expansion of the pre-kindergarten pilot program. What is your perspective?

Holcomb: "I've leaned into the need

for pre-K. We want to absolutely make sure we do it in a responsible way. We've seen the successful pilot programs in the state of Indiana recently. I want to move forward on this as aggressively as we can and still be responsible about it. From my perspective, especially starting with the young students who don't have all the advantages and options that I did when I was growing up and I went to a public school here in Indianapolis. I definitely want to make sure we're focused on those in need and the most vulnerable, and that includes (pursuing) federal funding."

We've talked about two areas that will likely call for major additional expenditures. How do you balance those needs with managing a prudent financial ship for the state?

Holcomb: "Well, balancing the needs and the wants has been the secret to our success over the last 12 years and really separated us from much of the competition. We've passed

honestly balanced budgets; we're not in the game of delaying payments to local governments or local schools. Not in the business of raiding funds, borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. We live within our means, We've got regulations and tax levels that are reasonable and advantageous compared to our competition.

"That's what every General Assembly legislative session is about, making sure you're addressing your needs responsibly. Everyone has pet projects, but if you don't have the basics down, if your economy is not working and growing and dynamic, you can't get to all the things you absolutely need to fund, let alone want to fund."

Why is Indiana having such success attracting tech companies?

Holcomb: "I would say don't just ask me, but the CEOs that are making the decisions that are creating not just the hundreds, but the thousands of new high-tech jobs coming to Indiana – not Austin, Texas; not Boston, Massachusetts; not San Francisco, California; not Chicago. They're choosing to locate in Indiana, a state that has traditionally been known as a manufacturing state, because of those low tax rates, the reasonable regulatory environment. We have the great communities that are offering hungry, world-class university graduates a good opportunity and a good job.

"(Our momentum will increase) if we continue to get the basics right and don't make promises we can't keep, start writing checks we can't cash, start raiding the kitty – if we stick to the successful practices that we've experienced over the last 12 years and we offer good government service that operates at the speed of business."

Education testing and accountability have come under fire in some circles. What are your thoughts regarding these and other education priorities?

Holcomb: "I say everywhere I go, and I mean it, that I want to have the best public



Eric Holcomb, sworn in as lieutenant governor in March, had spent the prior year running for the U.S. Senate seat left open by the retirement of Dan Coats.

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school education system in the country. I received a great education at a public school in Indianapolis and my mother happens to be a retired public school teacher. I know we have so many wonderful schools all over the state. I want to be the best on this front as well. I also, at the same time, want parents and families to have the freedom to choose the schooling experience and environment that best fits their child's needs.

"I know both are possible. The way we are moving Indiana forward is by valuing teacher input – the education experts after all; they're on the front lines. We need to attract more teachers to what I consider to be a very prestigious profession and measure our collective progress. We can't get to the next level unless we are measuring that progress. So, testing is important and over-testing is counter-productive, I get that. Testing accountability is essential if we're going to continue to improve and become, in fact, the best school system in the country, which I know we can be."

Local government reform remains important from the perspective of Indiana Chamber members. Are there changes you can support to make this level of government more effective?

Holcomb: "I'm happy to look at anything that makes us locally, and as a state, more efficient from the taxpayer's perspective. What I have been so proud of, with local government as of late, is how the state has partnered with local communities to transform their place and improve the quality of life.

"When we harness both this energy and the energy of the region, highlighting all Indiana has to offer, we can grow and attract talent to Indiana from anywhere in the world. Programs like the Regional Cities Initiative and Stellar Communities are models at getting everyone at the table and developing a plan and executing it by leveraging that state and local partnership. Therein, I think we will find some ways to lay out some redundancy, improve some efficiency, but it has to be done from a true partner perspective."

Indiana has benefitted for a long time from affordable electricity prices. Those are increasing, partly due to federal policies. What can be done at the state level?

Holcomb: "We must, as a state, I think, be loud and proud when it comes to our 'all-of-the-above' approach to energy delivery.

We need to make sure Indiana is competitive with other states and around the world. Deploying an all of the above approach is critical and that means specifically we must support our coal industry and make sure these jobs are protected.

"We need to continue to be a leader in using some of these innovative forms of electricity production. Whether it's biofuels or wind or solar or gas or coal. We have to continue moving forward in that manner and we're perfectly positioned in the center of the country and resource rich. We need to capitalize on that, not start tying one hand behind our back."



Holcomb joins current governors Mike Pence and Matt Bevin, along with others, at the announcement of plans for a new Interstate 69 bridge connecting Evansville and Henderson, Kentucky. On the campaign trail, Holcomb says he believes Indiana can become a national leader in K-12 education.



they're choosing to live. Fourth, I would focus on making sure we're providing good government at a great value. That's where I will be focused. Other folks seemingly wake up and brush their teeth and talk about divisive social issues and it sounds like a skipping record to me. It's their prerogative. My focus is going to remain on those four areas – how we continue to be laser-focused on building and growing a state that is going to keep our Hoosier momentum going forward."

You worked for a governor (Mitch Daniels) who called for a truce on social issues. We've had instances in the past four years where social issues dominated. Where does Eric Holcomb stand on social issues at the Statehouse?

Holcomb: "I will tell you that I will be focused on four key areas or legs to the chair, if you will. Providing the best public school education in the country while still offering parents and students options. Two, focused on economic development. We've got honestly balanced budgets, low unemployment, a triple A credit rating, healthy reserves, low taxes and reasonable regulations. The next two areas inside that column are workforce development, making sure that we're putting out in the field employees that are ready for the demands of a 21st century occupation and career. And we need to make sure we're maximizing our location in the center of the country, investing in our roads and our bridges and our ports and our rail.

"Third, we'll focus on community development, how you improve your quality of place and that's a big hook when it comes to millennials, where