

FUTURE FOCUS

'Big Ideas' Will Inspire State's Third Century

By Katie Coffin



"This (bicentennial) internship has provided me the unique experience to gain in-depth knowledge about our state. It is not every day that you have the opportunity to meet and learn from the brightest Hoosier minds as they share their passion and vision for a better Indiana."

André Zhang Sonera

"I see this Visioning Project as a way to capture the best ideas for Indiana's future from today's big thinkers across a wide range of economic, social and cultural issues," Lee Hamilton explains. Hamilton is co-chair of the Bicentennial Commission along with former Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman.

Amidst the nostalgia surrounding Indiana's bicentennial, many state thought leaders have also switched gears to envision Indiana's future.

The Bicentennial Visioning Project is the brainchild of former Congressman Lee Hamilton, co-chair of the Bicentennial Commission with former Lt. Governor Becky Skillman.

Hamilton says it would have been a missed opportunity if the celebration of Indiana's vibrant past did not include forward thinking.

"Most of us who live here are very proud of Indiana," Hamilton declares. "We have a marvelous heritage in our state. We think it's important for people to know about that heritage, but we also think the bicentennial should be a launching pad for future thoughts and goals. We want to excite and energize the entire state, both government and private sector, to celebrate our heritage and to think about our future."

A report, expected to be completed in the summer, will showcase ideas that result from a series of "visioning sessions." Topics cover a wide range of subjects pertaining to economic, social and cultural issues.

"Bicentennial visioning adds an important dimension to our observance of

Indiana's bicentennial," adds Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann, who is facilitating the visioning sessions. "While much of the attention will be rightly focused on our journey from 1816 to the present, the Visioning Project will document the 'big ideas' that may very well forge our next 25 or 50 years."

Long-term vision

Establishing a vision for the future began with calling on thought leaders throughout the state to participate in the visioning sessions.

Norm Heikens, enterprise/opinion editor with the *Indianapolis Business Journal*, is the project lead and editor for the final report. Dennis Rosebrough, communications director with the office of the lieutenant governor, is overseeing the project on Ellspermann's behalf. Over the summer, they asked individuals throughout the state to identify big thinkers, with the goal of securing 10 to 12 people for each session.

The visioning sessions begin with brainstorming and scribing all "big ideas" on flipcharts around the room. Rosebrough says that 113 ideas were proposed in one meeting. Participants then identify ideas that should rise to the top. Out of that, the group puts three or four ideas forward as a suggested agenda for its sector.

In addition, there is an online form for the public to submit ideas.

"We call them 'big ideas' as opposed to something the Legislature is going to consider tomorrow," Rosebrough defines. "The lieutenant governor challenges (the thought leaders) to think 25 years out, 50 years out. The natural thing is to look at what I'm going to do next year to solve this issue. We're asking them to look ahead, not at today's constraints."

Interns in action

Two college students are serving as Bicentennial Scholars, working on the Visioning Project.

André Zhang Sonera, a senior at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis' (IUPUI) School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA), is managing the logistics of the visioning sessions. Kevin Lilly, a graduate student at Purdue University, will work with Heikens to take ideas from the visioning sessions and compile them into a book.

Born and raised in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, Sonera moved to Indianapolis in 2012 to pursue a degree at IUPUI, though his first introduction to Indiana was in 2007 as a delegate for the National FFA Organization. Last year, Sonera was an intern for the White

Norm Heikens, a veteran Indianapolis business reporter, will compile the “big ideas” from the visioning sessions into a report with the support of interns from Indiana colleges and universities.



House Office of Scheduling and Advance; this summer, he completed an internship with the city of New York, under the Mayor’s Office of Operations.

Even though Sonera has lived and worked in different places, at the end of each session he says he feels a “sense of belonging and pride of being an ‘honorary’ Hoosier.”

“This (bicentennial) internship has provided me the unique

experience to gain in-depth knowledge about our state,” Sonera shares. “It is not every day that you have the opportunity to meet and learn from the brightest Hoosier minds as they share their passion and vision for a better Indiana. This experience has also helped me develop insight into how the government works at the state level, nurturing my passion for public service and sparking an interest for a career in government.”

Driving positive change

The Bicentennial Visioning Project is a Legacy Project of the Bicentennial Commission. The report will be the product of the visioning sessions, outlining priorities for the state in key areas including infrastructure, education, public safety and agriculture.

“We perceive this as a tool for future leaders,” Rosebrough explains. “No matter what piece of Indiana life – whether it’s a mayor looking at it, a legislator or a college president, our hope is that there will be thought-stimulating ideas or concepts in there.”

Rosebrough estimated the finished product may be a 150-page book with each section presenting three or four big ideas.

“We think (the report) will generate a lot of discussion and ideas for the future of our state and will be an important document not just for the next year or two, but 20 years into the future,” Hamilton shares. “People will want to know what Hoosiers living in the bicentennial thought about the next centennial, and that’s what it’s all about.”

RESOURCES: Lt. Governor Sue Ellspermann, Dennis Rosebrough and André Zhang Sonera, office of Indiana Lt. Governor Sue Ellspermann, at www.in.gov | Lee Hamilton, The Center on Congress at Indiana University, at www.centeroncongress.org

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