



Legislators Have Their Say

A Snapshot of the Short Session

Typically, the Indiana Chamber's series of statewide legislative previews throughout November and December provide an early glimpse of the key issues to be debated beginning in January.

Chamber issue experts remained on that course (see Page 13), for the most part, throughout 14 previews, reaching more than 1,000 business and community leaders. The annual Central Indiana Legislative Preview (CILP), which in 2003 featured legislators addressing more than 160 attendees, took a different course, however. Taking place the day before the traditional Organization Day – which turned into a three-week mini-session on property taxes – the focus was on reassessment and its impacts.

CILP participants included:

- **House Speaker B. Patrick Bauer, South Bend**
- **House Minor Leader Brian Bosma, Indianapolis**
- **Senate Minority Leader Richard Young, Milltown**
- **Sen. Tom Wyss, Fort Wayne, chair of the Transportation & Homeland Security committee**

BizVoice offers a few of their comments, outside of the property tax/reassessment debate that will continue in the regular session, on a variety of issues.

Short session agenda

Bauer: “We hope to have a profitable and productive session through February.”

Young: “The short session was designed originally to handle emergency legislation. It has pretty much turned into just a fast version of the regular session. We will end by at least the middle of March (March 15 is the deadline to adjourn) and the speaker seems to indicate February sounds like a good month to him.”

Nearly \$1 billion budget deficit

Young: “The budget issue is a paramount one. One we clearly have to spend a lot of time on. One we’ll be dealing with this session.”

Bauer: “We have given the governor the power to adjust budgets and fine tune budgets. ... I think that’s not an area where the legislature would have to act.”

Bosma: “The administration needs to turn to its chief

administrators and say, ‘Find X percent in your budget.’ If that means delays in expenditures or reductions in a program, that’s what it’s going to take right now. That’s happened in many other states and to a small degree in Indiana. The alternative would be a general tax increase. I don’t see the political will for that to happen in this short session.”

Young: “The new governor is putting together his overall program, his people. There may be areas his administration feels require legislative action. There might be areas where the governor asks the legislature to take the lead.”

Wyss: Amendments

He identified three constitutional amendments that will be debated. The topics:

- A formal line of succession if both the governor and lieutenant governor are incapacitated
- Bringing consistency to when those elected to constitutional offices assume their duties. Currently, he says, the time periods vary
- Allowing the General Assembly to exempt property, tangible personal and tangible real, in an effort to help create future tax solutions

Wyss also discussed what he anticipates will be a controversial bill regarding contracting services. The legislation would allow only U.S. citizens or those authorized to work in the U.S. to perform specific services. (The O’Bannon administration had awarded a \$15 million contract to a firm based in India to upgrade state computers processing unemployment claims. Gov. Joe Kernan canceled that contract three days after Wyss’ comments).

Young: IEDC

The senator discussed the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, a private-public partnership to guide the state’s economic development efforts beginning in July 2005. Young served on a Legislative Council study committee addressing implementation of the IEDC.

“It offers some innovative opportunities to look at what we’re doing in economic development, assess it and put forth some challenges on how we can do better. The subcommittee was to take it from a legislative concept to a workable document. Part of our legislative agenda will be to take the report from the committee and move it forward.”

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Bauer: International trade

The House speaker convened a study committee in the summer and fall on international trade issues. He described the hearings as “fascinating,” with businesses quick to point out the difficulties they are experiencing.

“We’re being wiped out by this unfair, uneven competition. We’ve been a manufacturing state. I said ‘have been’ because manufacturing is leaving this country. We had tremendous testimony out of the wood industry. In southern Indiana they’re going, going gone.”

Bauer related how Henry Ford had a rule that he wanted every worker to be able to afford the product the company made. “People in China can’t afford the goods they’re making. People in India can’t afford some of the things they’re doing. It goes on down in eastern Europe.

“We need to level the playing field. As a state, we can be lobbyists, provide information, whatever it takes to inform our federal legislature to be for us – U.S. – first.”

Bosma: Job creation

In discussing both property tax reform and the longer-term agenda, he said: “Probably the primary goal of the House Republicans is to limit any impact on businesses. The very positive steps forward that were taken in tax restructuring to create a positive employment atmosphere to create jobs – our number one problem and number two problem in the state – we can’t take steps backward on that. One of our critical issues is the continuing need for positive economic development and job creation in this state.”