

# Sen. Earline Rogers & Rep. Jerry Torr

2005 Government Leaders of the Year

By Tom Schuman





## Sen. Earline Rogers

**S**en. Earline Rogers (D-Gary) spent 38 years in a classroom training students and fellow teachers. The educator role remains in effect today.

Whether maintaining her career-long focus on creating opportunities for young people to learn or representing the interests of her Lake County constituents, Rogers is always ready to speak her mind. The credibility she has established in a 23-year legislative career helps make those messages come through loud and clear.

“I’m an educator by profession. Although I left the classroom (in 1995), I still have the task of trying to educate people,” Rogers says.

“Usually if I get some time to talk to people, even if they don’t agree with me, they’re supportive of my right to take a position.”

Rogers was a co-author and critical player in the 2005 passage of legislation making the Core 40 curriculum a requirement for Indiana high school students. It was the most visible of four important education bills that were enacted this year. The Chamber and its allies had been working on extending the Core 40 curriculum – focused on English/language arts, math and science to allow young people to be more competitive in the global economy – for the last decade.

Rogers’ support of Core 40 was the latest issue in which the senator had the opposite viewpoint of some in her own caucus, party and constituency. Her experience and convictions, however, are strong.

“If our young people are going to be able to compete, not just in Indiana but globally, they have to meet the same standards. My support is grounded in my belief that all children can learn,” she states. “They need to learn in an atmosphere of high expectations. Children are a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we expect the best, we’ll get the best.”

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## Rep. Jerry Torr

**T**he list of those who have tried and failed to bring Daylight Saving Time (DST) to Indiana is a lengthy one. The person most responsible for making it happen earlier this year would have preferred a different, but not quite practical route.

“I would leave our clocks alone and make the rest of the world change,” comments Rep. Jerry Torr (R-Carmel), who authored the DST legislation and guided it through a tumultuous legislative process. “It’s kind of artificially playing with time. I do emphathize with people over the inconvenience of changing clocks.”

Since 47 other states and more than 90 nations were unlikely to switch their long-established ways, Indiana was facing a competitive disadvantage. Torr, along with colleagues Jack Lutz of Anderson and Tiny Adams of Muncie, had introduced DST legislation annually over the last five years.

“The most common question I was asked by constituents – whether here at work or at the grocery store – was, ‘Why can’t we get on board with the rest of the world and follow DST?’” Torr recalls. The costly inconvenience to business and the negative message sent to the rest of the world about Indiana’s image necessitated the change. In addition, there are energy savings and more recreational opportunities now available.

The DST debate never would have started without two events on one night just over a year ago – the election of Mitch Daniels as governor and the establishment of a pro-business majority in the House. Torr says Daniels was the “first governor in my time willing to expend political capital to make it happen.”

### Complicated process

The stars may have been aligned, but the battle was just beginning. Committee testimony, a

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## Sen. Earline Rogers

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Chamber President Kevin Brinegar says Rogers' nearly 40 years of school experience are invaluable.

"She's seen the benefits of a good education and the detriments of not getting a good education. While there were other champions," Brinegar notes, "this certainly wouldn't have been done without Sen. Rogers. She's been unwavering in support of standards and accountability."

### Rounding up all parties

A second piece of 2005 legislation increased the dropout age from 16 to 18. Rogers says that simply reflects changing times. The days when people could leave school, get a job, make a decent wage and take care of a family are quickly disappearing. Other bills clarified the method used to calculate graduation rates and expanded dual enrollment opportunities for high school students.

Many of the positive educational advancements in recent years have been a byproduct of the work of Indiana's Education Roundtable established during the O'Bannon administration. Rogers admits being a skeptic at first, but now praises the work done by the combination of education, business and political leaders.

"When I first went to the Legislature, there was constant bickering between the (education) stakeholders. With the advent of the roundtable, everyone had an opportunity to sit there and understand each other's positions, then try to reach a consensus," she recalls.

"At the onset, I wasn't sure it would work. One of the things I had to learn was to be receptive to the business community being at the table when we were making decisions about education. They are the persons who make use of the education product (the students). It was also an opportunity for the business community to learn about educators' concerns."

At an early roundtable luncheon, Rogers remembers listening to a speaker discussing the achievement gap between white and black students when former Chamber President Chris LaMothe turned to her and said, 'We've got to do something about that.' That encouraging sign has been followed by many others.

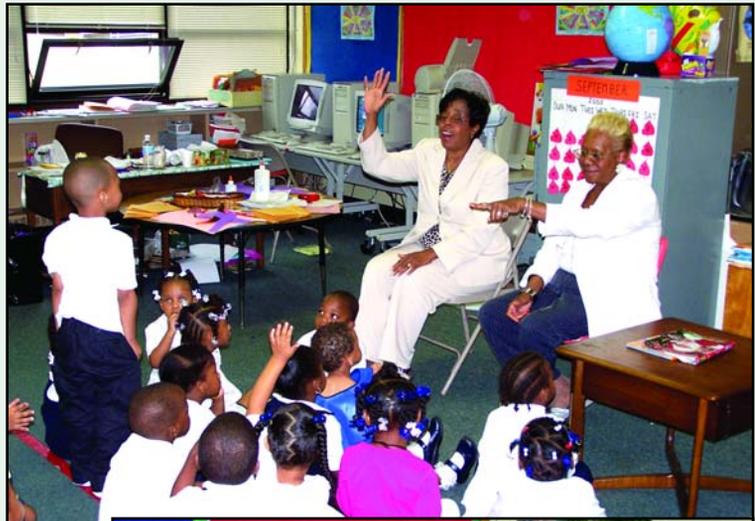
"I think we've passed that point of mutual respect between all stakeholders," she affirms. "We've almost eliminated that tug of war legislators felt when trying to get legislation passed."

### Education concerns

Challenges remain, Rogers warns, both for the roundtable and the Legislature. Among the key issues are recruitment and retention of teachers – "we have to pay attention to what some of the surrounding states are doing; if we're in the ballgame, young people will stay here and teach" – and the education funding formula.

"I thought there needed to be a voice in Indianapolis solely concerned about funding for education," she reflects. "I got to Indianapolis and realized how difficult a job that is."

Progress has been made, but the landscape is still changing, according to Rogers. She senses the mood to remove property



Sen. Earline Rogers returns to the school where she began her teaching career in 1957 to talk with both students and parents about the value of a good education.

taxes as the primary education funding source, as well as the momentum behind the concept of the money following the child. In the end, some may come to the realization that the funding "pot is just not big enough," she states.

Based once again on those years of experience, Rogers says the support services needed in urban schools are different than in other areas. There are not enough counselors, social workers and nurses to deal with some of the problems that are not present in the faster-growing districts. The necessary funding balance, in her opinion, is not quite there yet.

### True trailblazer

Rogers has been a lifelong Gary resident except for her years earning bachelor's and master's degrees at Indiana University. Her first entry into politics in 1978, with the slogan of "kids are people too" was an unsuccessful run for the General Assembly. That sparked her interest, however, leading to a spot on the Gary City Council in 1980, appointment to the House in 1982 following the death of the area's congressional representative

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and a move to the Senate in 1990 after the death of Sen. Carolyn Mosby.

Beginning in 1957, Rogers taught elementary school students for 17 years. After opening the first elementary reading lab in the city of Gary, she became a resource teacher, working with other educators. She retired from teaching in 1995.

Her position as assistant minority leader for her caucus is the highest elected General Assembly position ever for an African-American woman. That follows other "firsts" as senior class president at Roosevelt High School and as president of the Gary City Council.

Early in her legislative career she recalls making what she thought was a compelling speech on an issue. The bill, however, went down to defeat. She asked colleague Dick Mangus if her race or gender or constituency far from the center of the state were factors. He replied that it was simply because she was a Democrat.

"The fact that I'm a minority in so many instances, I just put that behind me and carry myself in a manner in which I don't worry about that," Rogers professes. "If it's three strikes and you're out, I would have been out a long time ago.



**Rogers, as she has done many times during her legislative career, shares her viewpoint with her Senate colleagues.**

more reserved," Young offers. "Our districts are almost completely opposite, but together we're able to bring a lot of balance and an appreciation for the broader dynamics of the state.

"She never hesitates to speak out. Earline has made hundreds of speeches. On education policies, some have been unanimously endorsed by our caucus; some have gone a different direction. But people always appreciate her position."

"The fact that I don't look at those factors, that's how people accept me and accept my ideas. I don't wear my race or sex or party on my sleeve. People accept me for who I am and what I believe."

Sen. Richard Young (D-Milltown) is the minority floor leader. He and Rogers could not be farther apart in terms of geography, areas they represent and style. Yet, they form an effective leadership team for the Senate Democrats.

"Earline is a very tenacious individual, a good counterbalance to myself. I tend to be a little

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## Rep. Jerry Torr

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walkout that left the bill dead on the House floor, extremely close votes after the bill was revived and the unexpected absences of several supporters all contributed to a dramatic process.

Despite the intense media focus, Torr maintains that the issue was – and still is – misunderstood. He continues to receive e-mails and other communications from people who confuse the facts surrounding DST and the separate issue of the differences between the Eastern and Central time zones.

The media, he says, contributed to that confusion at times with inconsistent reporting. The irony of the intense focus on the issue came on the night of final passage, Torr adds, when the media was hovered around him as debate began on Senate Bill 1 – the comprehensive economic development legislation of the session.

“I thought it would be a lot easier (to pass),” Torr contends. “It’s not particularly a partisan issue. The Democratic leadership had come from areas that disfavored DST. I did not expect it to be as difficult as it was. It was frustrating that we couldn’t get the votes to do it (Democratic supporters Adams and James Bottorff were absent due to medical conditions).”

### Patience and persistence

House Speaker Brian Bosma (R-Indianapolis) and Randy Borrer (R-Fort Wayne), chair of the Commerce and Economic Development Committee, agree that Torr was the right person to withstand the challenges and get the job done.

“The key is he just never quit,” Bosma states. “He worked with the governor’s office, my office, members of both caucuses in both chambers. He reached out to like-minded groups and organizations.”

Borrer worked closely with Torr, saying the two typically began the day together and ended it together. The experience – working that closely and that hard on a particular piece of legislation – was something he will never forget.

“Jerry has phenomenal command of the subject matter at hand. He knew it. He was the expert,” Borrer offers. “As we reached obstacles throughout the long journey, Jerry kept the faith. He allowed many others to weight in on the subject. That extended to across the hallway. The bill would not have passed if Jerry had not done that.”

While the switch to DST may help businesses’ bottom line and all Hoosiers, the true bottom line is somewhat less measurable.

“At the end of the day,” Torr claims, “it sends a message to the rest of the world that Indiana is serious about being part of the global economy. Indiana is ready to do business.”

### Political roots

Although involved in a politically active family, Torr never expected to be one elected to office himself. He served as a precinct committeeman in Putnam County while still a teen-ager and worked on successful campaigns such as Bob Orr-John Mutz (for governor/lieutenant governor) in 1980 and Dan Quayle’s initial move to the U.S. Senate.

Involved in the insurance industry for more than 20 years,



**Rep. Jerry Torr balances his legislative duties with his full-time work at FCCI Insurance.**

Torr came to Indianapolis in 1985. He was an independent adjuster for 13 years before joining Monroe Guaranty (now FCCI) two years after first being elected to the House in 1996.

“I never really intended to be a candidate,” Torr says. “I reached a point with having kids and being in a business highly regulated by state government that you see how much effect government can have on your day-to-day life. I said I can’t trust somebody to do the job the way I think it should be done. That continues to motivate me.”

The balance between work and legislative service is a difficult one. The family-friendly schedule of typically no sessions on Fridays helps. Legislative work, however, extends far beyond the Statehouse walls.

“Fortunately I have an employer who understands the benefit of a citizen Legislature and the value of that,” Torr points out. “I’ve made some sacrifices in my career, because it’s hard to be on a management path.”

Bosma recognizes that challenge. Although successful in recruiting small business owners to the General Assembly in the 2004 elections, the speaker admits that it’s “more difficult to find individuals willing to step away from their business to tend to the state’s business.”

### Important issues

Although DST gained the most notoriety, Torr has been a stalwart on a number of important business issues during his nine years in office. A health insurance waiver bill that he had been filing for approximately the same number of years as the DST legislation finally became reality in 2005.

It allows the placement of waivers or riders of coverage for specified health conditions on an individual health policy. Indiana was one of the few states that did not permit these waivers. Torr tried to combine his bill with the Chamber-led essential benefits coverage that would permit small employers to offer more affordable health plans that do not contain all of the state’s 19 benefit mandates.

"If not already, this is going to become the most important issue for us to deal with. There are so many in the Legislature who think it's better to go the other way and have more government control," Torr advises. "I don't think we can totally solve the health insurance problem (at the state level).

"I don't think it will be solved until insurance is separated from employment. People think health care expense is an entitlement," he continues. "If we had similar aspirations with auto insurance, it would pay for gas, oil changes and routine maintenance. The routine should come out of the family budget. There are no real market forces at work here, not the typical supply and demand."

Torr also chaired the Labor & Employment Committee in 2005 after having served as ranking minority member. He has been a strong advocate on a number of important business topics and anticipates tackling another controversial issue in the near future.

"One of the next great challenges we face is whether we make Indiana a Right to Work state. The local economic development people, it's the first question they get asked. It makes a difference to the people outside Indiana who would locate here if we were a Right to Work state. There's very compelling evidence that Right to Work promotes job growth," Torr reports.

The learning curve on Right to Work will likely be extensive. Torr also mentions the need to address project labor agreements on public works contracts – a strategy that prevents non-union contractors from effectively competing for such work.

Chamber President Kevin Brinegar says Torr "is willing to take on the tough issues. He does a good job because he does not take anything too personal. On DST, he stayed above the fray; he stayed focused on the task. Jerry has good political instincts and knows how to work the process."

Borror says Torr's approach of tackling issues that he knows a great deal about should be a lesson for all legislators. "Jerry tries to stay within his realm of expertise. He has great passion for what he's involved in. He's fully invested and fully committed. That's huge for any piece of legislation."

Bosma adds, "Jerry understands the key to a strong economy is strong employers. Not everybody gets that. He's a tireless advocate and supporter of making businesses successful, which makes for good Hoosier families."

## High marks

The most recent legislative session was Torr's first in the majority. The move to eliminate proxy votes in committee – having the legislators who heard the testimony and participated in the debate deciding the fate of the bill – and to open up the process were important steps.

While pleased with the progress, he's still surprised on several fronts.

"One is the lack of knowledge about what's going on as the media focuses on the sexier issues (such as



The Daylight Saving Time debate included the time zone map that was later autographed by colleagues, and a hallway discussion with (center) the Chamber's Brian Bergsma and (right) Rep. Randy Borror.

DST)," Torr laments. "I've been surprised it's as partisan as it is. They tell me it wasn't always that way. You can't place the blame squarely on either side. Both sides are guilty."

On the positive front, he evaluates the last session. "It's hard to give it less than an A or A-. We left a couple of things on the table, but that will give us something to do in January. The last couple of Democrat administrations did a lot to make Indiana a more business-friendly economy. We've made great strides. I'm extremely optimistic."



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## Rogers

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### Gaming and more

Education may be at the forefront, but Rogers has never been hesitant to be the leader on a variety of issues. The opposition to her push for gaming legislation was widespread, including people from her home district. It took a number of years for a bill to be passed. A decade later, Rogers' analysis is clear.

"The gaming industry has been a savior for Northwest Indiana, and it's been extremely important to the whole state. I don't think any of us realized there would be as much revenue generated as there has been. I feel vindicated in terms of how these monies have helped the state. The benchmark 10 years later is that the benefits far outweigh the burdens. That's what public policymaking is all about."

Fast forward to 2005 and a different story unfolds regarding the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA), which sets the stage for comprehensive economic development in that area of the state. Rogers says the newness of the Daniels administration proved to be a plus as the governor didn't realize that legislation of this magnitude typically takes years to enact.

"I probably spent more time in the governor's office – hammering out an agreement – this year than in my 23 years

in Indianapolis," Rogers reports. "This has the potential to be the economic engine for this part of the state and, as the governor says, has implications for the whole state."

Rep. Chet Dobis (D-Merrillville), who has been a House member since 1970, spearheaded the RDA effort. Getting Rogers on board early helped bring the rest of the area delegation together.

"Earline has a sense of leveling the playing field, putting things in perspective when they start to get out of hand," Dobis praises. "We don't agree all the time, but that's part of the legislative process. Earline asks good questions and does her best to mediate. Maybe her teaching background has something to do with that."

Rogers looks back at the past 23 years with a number of fond memories. The list includes phone calls from Donald Trump thanking her for her gaming efforts, the late Peter Jennings recognizing her on his newscast as one of the people who truly understands the city of Gary and seeing her name in an Italian magazine story on her role in raising the minimum age for the death penalty in Indiana.

"It's been a wonderful, wonderful ride. Serving for me has been a very rewarding experience," Rogers concludes.

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