

Daily Herald

Recent editorials published in Indiana newspapers

February 13, 2018

Fairness demands end to emissions tests in NWI

The Indiana Senate unanimously stands with Northwest Indiana on an important matter of regional equity, and the federal government should be taking note.

The state Senate recently approved a resolution demanding that the federal government nix unfair vehicle emissions testing for Lake and Porter county drivers.

Our contingent of federal lawmakers should be listening and pushing for compliance with the Indiana Senate's demands.

Specifically, the resolution asks that Lake and Porter counties be removed from the federal government's Chicago air quality monitoring zone, prompted by occasional poor air quality in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Sen. Rick Niemeyer, R-Lowell, sponsored the resolution, garnering an avalanche of support from the rest of the Senate.

Niemeyer rightly points out that vehicles owned by Northwest Indiana residents contribute just a fraction of the ozone produced in the Region.

Just think of the thousands of cars and trucks that travel daily through our Region via the Interstates versus local traffic.

Meanwhile, Lake and Porter county air quality monitors continue to improve, with the only offending levels remaining in Chicago, Niemeyer argues.

"We're victims of what's happening in the Chicago district, and it's totally unfair and too expensive," state Sen. Frank Mrvan, D-Hammond, said in support of the resolution.

Indiana spends about \$5 million annually for vehicle emissions tests. The federal government contributes an additional \$5 million on Region Clean Air Car Check stations.

Meanwhile, Region drivers spend an unknown amount on vehicle repairs if they are unable to pass emissions tests in the two counties.

It's an obligation not borne by drivers living in other parts of the state.

Fairness must be brought to bear on this issue, and the money tied up in unneeded Northwest Indiana vehicle emissions tests should be funneled to more pressing endeavors.

The federal government should end this unfair and archaic requirement without delay.

Terre Haute Tribune-Star. February 7, 2018

Keep politics out of crash

Tragic deaths on I-70 caused by suspected drunken driver

The tragic highway crash that took the lives of Indianapolis Colts linebacker Edwin Jackson and ride-share driver Jeffrey Monroe should not be politicized.

Unfortunately, politicians quickly seized upon Sunday's deadly collision as fodder for their side in the ongoing immigration debate. The incident has more to do with the scourge of drunken driving, but addressing that problem is far too thorny and complicated. Instead, President Trump and members of Congress illuminated the news that the driver of the pickup truck that rammed into Monroe's car — stopped on the shoulder of Interstate 70 because his passenger, Jackson, had become ill — was a twice-deported illegal immigrant. Indiana State Police said Jackson and Monroe were outside the car, and were struck by a Ford F-150 driven by a 37-year-old Guatemala native, Manuel Orrego-Savala.

The pickup driver had been deported by Immigration Customs Enforcement in 2007 and 2009, the Indianapolis Star reported, but somehow he was back in the U.S. ISP said his blood-alcohol content was nearly three times the legal limit when his truck hit Jackson, 26, and Monroe, 54, just before 4 a.m. Sunday.

ICE told the Star that Orrego-Savala entered the country in 2004, got convicted of a DUI in 2005 in California, and was deported in '07, then again in '09. On Wednesday, he was charged with two counts of leaving the scene of an accident and two counts of drunken driving causing death.

The president wrote on Twitter of the incident that it was "disgraceful that a person illegally in our country killed Colts linebacker Edwin Jackson," adding, "We must get the Dems to get tough on the Border and with illegal immigration. FAST!"

The problems surrounding illegal immigration in this country need careful research, kept in context to all the various issues involved, including the fate of young people in the DACA program. Characterizing the suspect in this horrible crash as the typical undocumented immigrant skews reality. Though more definitive data is needed, separate studies by the National Academy of Sciences in 2015 and the libertarian Cato Institute last year show that illegal immigrants generally commit crimes at lower rates than U.S. natives.

Trump made no mention of changing or cracking down on drunken driving laws, yet alcohol-impaired drivers killed 10,265 Americans in 2015, according to the CDC.

The sad crash that killed Jackson, an upcoming young athlete, and Monroe, an Uber driver, should be handled on its own merits by prosecutors and the criminal justice system in Indianapolis. Likewise, the illegal immigration problem should be dealt with on its own terms, broadly and comprehensively; Sunday's I-70 tragedy should be left out of those discussions.

South Bend Tribune. February 7, 2018

Put the brakes on payday loan bill

Payday lenders across the state may have found a new way to skirt annual interest rate restrictions in a bill winding its way through the Indiana General Assembly.

House Bill 1319, which passed the House last week by a 53-41 vote, would allow payday lenders to charge fees triple what Indiana law currently defines as criminal loan-sharking.

The bill would allow storefront lenders the ability to offer short-term loans — typically about two weeks — of \$605 to \$1,500 with annual percentage rates up to 222 percent.

Under current law, rates of more than 72 percent are considered felony loan-sharking.

Payday loan officials argue the new process would fill a need not currently served through conventional loan channels, helping customers short on cash with poor credit who have nowhere else to turn. The bill also includes some protections that would prohibit loans if the monthly payments exceed 20 percent of the borrower's monthly income.

But opponents say such high-interest loans prey on the very people who can least afford it, trapping those who live paycheck to paycheck in a cycle of borrowing, repaying and re-borrowing.

The Indiana Institute for Working Families is leading opposition to the bill which includes a host of veterans groups, social services agencies and faith communities.

There is a better alternative than HB 1319. Sen. Greg Walker, of Columbus, offered a bill that would cap annualized interest rates on payday loans at 36 percent, something 88 percent of Hoosier voters said in a recent poll they would support. But Walker's bill didn't even get a hearing.

HB 1319 has now been moved to a Senate committee for study.

That's as far as this legislation should go. Lawmakers should stop this bill from advancing any further. They shouldn't make it any easier for the payday lending industry to take advantage of already financially vulnerable Hoosiers.

The (Fort Wayne) Journal Gazette. February 9, 2018

Gerrymandering in action

Redistricting reform didn't make the cut as legislative priorities for either the Indiana House or Senate majority, so it's no surprise Republican leaders omitted any mention of it among accomplishments for the first half of the session. The House failed to advance any measure; Senate Bill 326 falls far short of what's needed to help restore fairness and integrity to the electoral system.

Another half-time measure illustrates just one problem resulting from a rigged redistricting process: At the deadline for scheduled committee reports, 48 percent of Republican-authored bills were still alive; just 5 percent of bills authored by Democrats remained in play. Eighty of the 85 bills filed by Senate Democrats died without being heard in committee, including SB 77, which would have created an independent, nonpartisan redistricting commission.

In short, the legislative aims of representatives elected by thousands of Hoosiers statewide are given no chance to proceed. Democracy is not well served when gerrymandering creates supermajority control, which in turn is used to silence the minority party. Drawing districts to one party's advantage also fuels voter apathy, uncontested elections, incumbent protection and an agenda held hostage by the fringes of one party.

But Senate and House leaders make no apologies for their failure to fix redistricting. Both House bills on the issue, including one introduced by Rep. Jerry Torr, R-Carmel, died in the Elections Committee, where Chairman Milo Smith, R-Columbus, has singlehandedly kept efforts to establish an independent commission from advancing. House Speaker Brian Bosma disingenuously signed on as co-author to Torr's bill, but his appointment of Smith as committee chairman ensured the bill was going nowhere.

Likewise, Senate bills that would have created a redistricting commission also were allowed to die. The surviving SB 326 is a token measure. It sets standards for drawing congressional and legislative districts without addressing the key issue of who is drawing the districts. As long as it is the legislators themselves, voters should have no confidence in the process.

Torr, the Carmel Republican who has long supported redistricting reform, predicted in the first week of the session his bill would go nowhere.

"We'll have a difficult time because we have so many Republicans now who have never served in the minority," the 11-term lawmaker told the Indianapolis Business Journal. "It's a hard sell. And the chairman of the committee doesn't like it."

The Special Interim Committee on Redistricting voted nearly two years ago to recommend establishment of an independent panel to draw maps after the 2020 Census. Twice now, the GOP-controlled legislature has ignored opportunities to do so. Indiana voters, who will return to the polls this year, now have an opportunity to tell lawmakers what they would like.