

This Week

June 15th, 2013

'Affordable'? No, not really

It was a little shocking – but only a little – when the Fort Wayne Community Schools administration announced late last month it was cutting the hours of about 600 part-time employees from 30 hours a week to 25 to avoid having to offer them a health care insurance option.

The move will save the school district about \$10 million a year, according to Kathy Friend, the FWCS chief financial officer.

Now we're learning that the same thing is happening in school systems across the state, affecting thousands of teaching assistants, bus drivers, cafeteria workers and other aides.

The situation is more than a little ironic given that the whole stated purpose of the health care law was to provide health insurance for those not covered and is called the *Affordable* Health Care Act.

Monday

A bad idea to rewrite history

A new state law that will go into effect July 1 should have gotten a lot more discussion and debate than it did. The intentions behind it were good, but its effects may not contribute to the overall public good.

The law creates a mechanism for thousands of Hoosiers who have been arrested or convicted of mostly nonviolent crimes – including such things as drunken driving, drug dealing and forgery – to wipe clean their criminal history if they meet certain conditions. Their criminal records will be expunged – it will be as if they never happened.

The noble purpose of the law is evident. People with felony records can have trouble getting a job. If they can't find employment, there is a danger that they will revert to the sort of behavior that got them in legal trouble in the first place.

Tuesday

More flexibility for education

The next phase of the education reform movement came out of the Indiana General Assembly almost unnoticed earlier this year. A new law, which will be in effect next school year, will allow

individual high schools that earn a top rating in the states A-to-F scale the flexibility to disregard some state rules and design their own classes, schedules and professional programs for top students without approval from the State Board of Education.

Some top schools are already taking advantage of their new options. Carmel Clay and Zionsville high schools, for example, are planning to develop college-level courses for students and retool the school-day schedules for some. The schools don't even have to adhere to the 180-days-a-year of instruction imposed on other schools, and hours in the school day may fluctuate.

Wednesday

Farm bill is one big mess

How many ways can one bill be wrong? The U.S. Senate has pushed the limits with passage of its version of a "farm" bill that will cost nearly \$1 trillion over 10 years. Sadly, both Republican Sen. Dan Coats and Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly voted in favor of it. And why not? The Indiana farming community received \$10.3 billion in subsidies from 1995 to 2012, ranking 11th of the 50 states. That's a lot of pork to protect.

And much of it amounts to corporate welfare. Fully 74 percent of the money went to just 10 percent of the farms. Small, family farms aren't being protected. Giant agribusiness interests are being subsidized.

And even red state conservatives like Coats go along. "It is always easier to cut the other guy's subsidies," notes Cato Institute fellow Michael D. Tanner.

Thursday

An informative dispute on taxes

The most juvenile, least productive parts of the debate over the General Assembly's first override of a Gov. Mike Pence veto are whether it signals a split in the heretofore unified GOP and how much, if any, it weakens the governor's authority. Beyond these considerations, we find a fascinating look into state taxing policy and how "fair" the law should be to communities and individual taxpayers.

The bill the governor vetoed would retroactively implement local income taxes for Jackson and Pulaski counties. The state had authorized the taxes in 1998, to be used for the construction of jails, but failed to continue the tax in later legislative sessions. The counties were still collecting the taxes – they just technically weren't allowed to. This fix was meant to bring legislative intent into line with administrative reality.