

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Construction wage repeal needs review

From acts of Congress to local government ordinances, lawmakers from all levels should be willing to put their codified policies to the test.

In that vein, the Indiana Legislature should push for an empirical review of the General Assembly's 2015 repeal of the common construction wage statute.

Whether the law remains off Indiana's books or put back on, the decision should be made on statistical evidence and hard data, not political ideologies.

In a recent report provided to The Times, the Midwest Economic Policy Institute concluded that following the common wage repeal, Hoosier construction workers earned less than they did before, with no meaningful cost savings for Indiana taxpayers.

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Opponents of the ultimately repealed law, including former Gov. Mike Pence, argued eliminating the county minimum pay rates for public works projects would save the state and local government agencies money without reducing construction workers' paychecks.

Drawing on U.S. Department of Labor statistics for the four quarters before and after the law was repealed, the institute concluded Hoosier construction wages fell by an average of 8.5 percent after the repeal.

The lowest-paid workers saw their paychecks fall by an average of 15 percent, according to the institute.

Construction wages in neighboring Illinois, Michigan and Ohio, meanwhile, grew a combined 2.8 percent.

The institute also reported the repeal didn't contribute to more competition for public works projects, among other findings, and thus didn't lead to measurable savings.

Region conservative voice, Indiana House Rep. Ed Soliday, R-Valparaiso, broke with the Republican majority by opposing the law's repeal in 2015.

It wasn't unusual for Soliday, who gives understandable deference to his labor-rich constituency.

Soliday believes the common construction wage hastens the hiring of local workers who "spend their money locally."

He also questions how effective the repeal has been in light of the recent institute study.

It's important to note the institute study concluded overall union businesses grew their Hoosier market share after the repeal to 91 percent of market value, up from 87 percent.

So the news hasn't been all bad for organized labor.

Now the Legislature owes it to all of us to ensure the repeal is hitting the intended marks promised when it was adopted.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Speak out against putting tolls on freeways

All Indiana residents should contact their state representatives and senators and state their strong opposition to privatizing and turning interstate highways such as I-94 and I-65 into toll roads.

We as taxpayers paid for these roads. They should not be given to a corporation so they can profit from it.

It is time to raise taxes on the corporations and the rich. They are not paying their fair share.

We have already seen what a disaster it was when Mitch Daniels privatized the Indiana toll road. The toll rates skyrocketed. The west point toll was recently raised from 50 cents to \$2.18 because the taxpayer subsidy expired. It is over \$16 round trip from I-65 to Chicago.

Apparently, the politicians have learned nothing. Let these politicians know that if they support this measure, they will be voted out of office. We will

not accept this.
Jon Miller, Ogden Dunes

Thanks for putting opposing views on same page

I would like to thank The Times for showing both sides of the political spectrum on its opinion page.

Friday's edition, for example, had two opposing views on offshore drilling — one from the perspective of the petroleum industry and another from the viewpoint of Earthjustice in Washington. I appreciate being able to read both sides of the story.

As a conservative pro-Trump Republican, I tend to get my news from sources that see the world as I do (Fox News, Wall Street Journal). Those who lean left go to sources such as MSNBC. The opinion page in The Times allows both sides to read and compare opposing views.

Thank you.
Dwayne Brown, Highland

CIVILITY COUNTS FOR LETTERS, COLUMNS: Letters to the editor and columns should be focused on the issues. No name-calling or other meanness allowed. Remember, #CivilityCounts.



Hoosier women need to learn political skills

Government will be healthier and more effective when it better reflects our population. Today we have a paltry number of women serving in Indiana government, but the issues facing them in their daily lives cut deeply.

I have noted many times that far too many Indiana families today struggle for economic stability, yet as our families have been working so hard over the past 30 years for less: Indiana has become more obese and less healthy; Indiana has become a net exporter of degreed talent; Indiana's educational achievements relative to other states (like SAT performance) has declined; Indiana has more people addicted to drugs than ever before; Indiana has more people and children are victims of sexual and domestic violence; women have increasingly less access to ob/gyn doctors and medical care, yet more and more people suffer from STDs and suffer through pregnancies without adequate medical care; women make only 74 cents to every dollar earned by a man for the same job.

Women just get it. The rush to daycare, the struggle to be respected on the job, the fight for

opportunity. These are just some of the reasons why the founders of "Hoosier Women Forward" decided to get more active this year. Protesting and pink hats make a statement, but they only move the cause forward so far. Women in Indiana are primed and ready to set up our game.

With a team of strong women, Liane Groth Hulka, new 5th Congressional Democrat chair and HWF founding chair, began the hard work of organizing and launching a new nonprofit aimed at preparing and propelling Democratic women into leadership roles across the state, now and in the future.

"We want to harness the energy and talent that's out there, all across Indiana, and create a powerful, diverse network of engaged Democratic women," Hulka said. "Our mission is to increase the number and influence of Democratic women in elected and appointed governmental positions at the local, state and federal levels, and in positions of influence in their communities and the private sector."

"Too often, women feel like their voices aren't valued, whether it's in the workplace or when the male-dominated Indiana General Assembly is de-liberating women's issues," she added. "You can look no further than the #metoo movement to see how powerful our voices can be for change. We want to take that energy and those voices and

equip women with the tools they need to excel in leadership positions."

HWF will select a group of 20 to 25 outstanding Democratic women each year through a competitive application process to participate in a nine-month leadership training program.

Although women represent more than 50 percent of the voting public in Indiana, only two of the state's 11-member congressional delegation are women, and neither is a Democrat. Women make up just 20 percent of the 150 seats in the Indiana Legislature.

Women selected for the HWF training program must demonstrate an interest in public policy, political advocacy and advancing Indiana forward with progressive policies and ideas. The nonprofit will strive to ensure that each class has a diverse background of personal and professional life experiences reflecting the economic, geographical, ethnic and cultural diversity in Indiana.

In August the inaugural class of Democratic women leaders will be named. Get ready, Indiana. The pink wave of women leaders is coming, and it will be a very, very good thing.

Christina Hale, a Michigan City native, was the 2016 Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor and a former member of the Indiana House of Representatives. The opinions are the writer's.

When teens elevate Smalltown

The watch announcements had been made. Must-see TV, it was called.

The occasion: A superstar, all-world high school senior basketball player from South Carolina was set to announce his college choice. The basic who, what, where ... in news.

However, this situation was anything but basic.

Zion Williamson, yes THE Zion Williamson — a Paul Bunyanesque figure in a 6-foot-6, 272-pound teenage body — would tell an eager national audience his college choice for the incoming fall freshman class of 2018.

When: between 8 p.m. and 8:15 Eastern time, Saturday, Jan. 20.

Call it reality television — in short-form.

It's 15 minutes of fame for Williamson's hometown of Spartanburg, South Carolina, in sort of an Academy Awards-type atmosphere. And abroad, hey, fame travels, too ... even at last year's basketball Adidas EUROCAMP in Italy, where Williamson wore a white T-shirt with a black-lettered inscription: "Spartanburg Made Me."

Williamson reportedly had narrowed his choices to six schools: Kansas, Clemson, Ken-

tucky, North Carolina, Duke and South Carolina. The well-spoken Williamson saw coaches, assistants and recruiters converge on Spartanburg for month after month. Williamson is ranked as the No. 2 high school senior in the nation, according to the ESPN 100 recruiting list. (Can you imagine the hoopla — no pun intended — if he were the No. 1-ranked player?)

It's truly amazing how teenage athletes who play in undersize, cramped gymnasiums in little towns to medium-size cities garner so much national attention. Spectators, coaches, TV executives, sports media and college administrators alike have waited for Williamson's decision. For a few months, a nondescript municipality can be at the center of the universe.

In Spartanburg, population 38,000, Zion Williamson was the top news story in town on Jan. 20, his mother's birthday, and, coincidentally, it also marked Donald Trump's one-year anniversary in the White House. And ya'll thought the No. 1 topic during the weekend was the federal government shutdown.

One wide-shouldered teenager can do wonders for areas not named Chicago or Los Angeles or New York or Philadelphia or Boston.

Spartanburg is known for producing "Mount Zion," being the summer training camp site

for the NFL's Carolina Panthers and embracing the moniker, "Hub City," because, in the 1800s, seven different train lines sprouted from the town like spokes on a bicycle wheel, and thus the touristic Hub City Railroad Museum.

Note that Williamson, according to ESPN, attracts 1.1 million Instagram followers as well as nearly 100,000 Twitter followers. Even popular rappers and star NFL players wear Williamson's jersey number 12 from his high school team, Spartanburg Day School.

But has anyone asked Williamson about a possible college major? Probably not.

Still, we sure know his vital signs — as in Williamson's statistical chart of 37 points and 13 rebounds per game.

When it came time for the high school/college version of the Oscars, Williamson disappointed five schools and elated a Very Big One when he declared, "I will be joining the brotherhood of Duke University."

Still, it was a magical moment in the spotlight for two sentimental winners — Zion Williamson and, more important, his proud hometown.

Gregory Clay is a Washington columnist and a former editor for McClatchy-Tribune News Service. He wrote this for InsideSources.com. The opinions are the writer's.