



Torchbearer Policy Update

By Caryl Auslander • Mar 27, 2023

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Welcome back! We hope you enjoyed your weekend. Thank you for allowing us to be your trusted source for news at the local, state, and federal levels.

Local, state, and federal highlights in this week's memo include:

- **IPS Will Implement Rebuilding Stronger Overhaul Without New Taxes for Operating Costs — For Now**
- **Biden Signs Braun's COVID Declassification Bill**
- **House Republicans Pass Parents Bill of Rights**
- **Federal Reserve Keeps Up Inflation Fight, Betting Bank Crisis is Over**
- **Senate Advances Iraq War Authorization Repeal as Biden Signals His Support**
- **State Tourism Agency Adds Workforce Needs to its Goals for Promoting Indiana**
- **Many Hoosier Women Never Returned to Work After the Pandemic. Here's Why.**

- **Share the Torchbearer Newsletter with Your Network!**
- **Important Dates**

Let's dive in.

IPS Will Implement Rebuilding Stronger Overhaul Without New Taxes for Operating Costs — For Now



Breaking: Indianapolis Public Schools will implement all of its overhaul known as Rebuilding Stronger without a May referendum for operating expenses, a tax increase the district had touted as key to its plan to provide a quality education to all students.

Go deeper: The overhaul [approved in November](#) reconfigures grades, closes six schools, and expands specialized academic programs in an effort that officials say will create more great schools and prioritize equity. The district [initially indicated](#) that the plan would require two tax increases — a referendum for operating expenses and one for capital expenses.

Yes, but: The plan was temporarily thwarted when the board withdrew its plan to place a [\\$413.6 million referendum](#) for operating expenses on

the May ballot, following significant pushback from the charter school sector. Charter schools [sought more funding](#) from the operating referendum, while IPS said it would only share revenue with charters considered a part of its autonomous Innovation Network.

The bottom line: But in an announcement on Thursday, the district said it will cut costs in central services and operations to implement the entire Rebuilding Stronger plan, which requires grade reconfigurations for elementary and middle schools to begin in 2024-25.

By the numbers: The district did not specify how much it would save. But Superintendent Aleesia Johnson estimated that fully funding investments in academic programs would amount to roughly **\$9 million**.

The operating referendum was meant to fund the expansion of academic programs and offerings such as art and music. It was also meant to fund teacher pay amid a highly competitive hiring environment.

IPS has enough funding to fund the plan temporarily, but not for the long term, the district said in its announcement.

But the district still stressed that it needs a solution for funding by 2026, when the district's current referendum for operating expenses will expire.

What they're saying: In her remarks, Johnson expressed an urgency to implement the plan for high-quality options for all students. "I refuse to ask any student to wait any longer than necessary for Algebra or computer science or art or music. I refuse to keep sending students to schools in buildings that are so overdue for upgrades," Johnson said. "And I refuse to lose the genius and talent of any more of our students to neighboring districts or schools while we wait to make ours excellent."

In 2018, the district [postponed a referendum](#) after criticism from the business sector, then lowered its proposed tax increase, which voters approved on the November ballot.

What's next: The district's [\\$410 million referendum for capital expenses](#) is on the ballot for May. ([Chalkbeat](#))

Biden Signs Braun's COVID Declassification Bill



What's new: President **Joe Biden** on Monday [signed the COVID-19 Origin Act of 2023](#) that directs the federal government to declassify certain information about the origin of the coronavirus, three years after the virus caused a global pandemic that has killed millions of

people worldwide.

Go deeper: The bill, authored by Senators **Mike Braun** of Indiana and **Josh Hawley** of Missouri, both Republicans, requires the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to declassify all information relating to potential links between China's Wuhan Institute of Virology and the origin of the coronavirus.

More details: The declassified information must be released within 90 days of the bill being signed into law, although the language in the bill does not establish a mechanism for enforcement. The information would include the names, symptoms and roles of any researchers who became sick at the Wuhan institute in fall 2019.

What they're saying: "President Biden made the right choice to sign Senator Josh Hawley's and my bill to declassify all intel about the Wuhan lab and the origins of COVID," Braun said in a statement. "The American people deserve more than spin and 'the narrative' - they deserve the facts, and now more are on the way." (IBJ Rundown)

House Republicans Pass Parents Bill of Rights



What's new: House Republicans passed an education bill on Friday that emphasizes parental rights in the classroom, leaning into a hot-button, culture war issue that has gained popularity in GOP politics across the country.

Go deeper: The legislation, [titled the Parents Bill of Rights](#), passed in a 213-208 vote, and it now heads to the Senate for consideration. It is highly unlikely, however, that the Democratic-controlled chamber will take up the measure, with House Democrats dubbing the bill the “Politics over Parents Act.”

The [measure would require schools](#) to publish their curricula publicly, mandate that parents be allowed to meet with their children's teachers and make schools give information to parents when violence occurs on school grounds.

It would also demand that parents receive a list of books and reading materials accessible at the school library and give parents a say when schools are crafting or updating their policies and procedures for student privacy, among other tenets.

The bottom line: The future of the bill is unlikely in the Democrat-controlled Senate. ([The Hill](#))

Federal Reserve Keeps Up Inflation Fight, Betting Bank Crisis is Over



Breaking: The Federal Reserve is sticking with its fight against inflation, confident that a massive government intervention to stabilize the banking system has averted a crisis.

Why it matters: The central bank raised its benchmark interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point Wednesday, signaling that high inflation continues to pose a threat to the economy, as the job market and price increases aren't returning to normal as quickly as policymakers expected. Officials believe the bank turmoil should slow the economy down, too, in the same way that raising interest rates does, though it's too soon to say how much.

What they're saying: "You can think of it as being the equivalent of a rate hike or perhaps more than that," Fed Chair Jerome H. Powell said at the end of the central bank's two-day policy meeting. "Of course, it's not possible to make that assessment today with any precision whatsoever."

Dig deeper: The Fed joined the Treasury Department and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. earlier this month in an extraordinary intervention in the banking system, offering loans on favorable terms to

banks that needed cash and guaranteeing deposits up to any amount at Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank when those institutions failed.

Those moves came as Fed officials were eyeing other economic data warily. Just before the banks collapsed, Powell [told](#) Congress that the Fed might need to raise interest rates more aggressively than planned because the economy was still running too hot.

Yes, but: But the economic picture quickly changed, and borrowing became more difficult as the banking system took a hit. Policymakers considered leaving interest rates unchanged on Wednesday, but they ultimately decided to move forward with a quarter-point hike as they prepare to stop sometime soon.

What's next: Now the question is whether the rate increases over the past year, combined with the banking meltdown, will slow the economy too much — or whether the Fed can bring inflation down to normal levels without causing a deep, painful recession. ([Washington Post](#))

Senate Advances Iraq War Authorization Repeal as Biden Signals His Support



Breaking: The Senate voted Thursday to advance a bill [repealing two Iraq war power acts](#) as lawmakers work to reassert their authority in military intervention abroad. A final vote on the bill is expected early next week.

By the numbers: The 68-27 vote Thursday was largely bipartisan, and the bill has 12 Republican co-sponsors.

What they're saying: The White House said earlier Thursday it supports the measure, which would repeal the 1991 and 2002 authorizations for use of force in Iraq. The move would mark a formal conclusion to the conflicts, and a symbolic reassertion of Congress' ability to declare war. The measures ending the Gulf and Iraq Wars were advanced last week by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Go deeper: Lawmakers have worked without success in recent years to repeal the AUMFs – authorization for use of military force – that gave the US president broad powers to conduct military operations without approval from Congress. The 2002 AUMF has been used by successive presidents for military operations beyond its original scope.

Former President Barack Obama used the 2002 measure to justify airstrikes against Islamic State terrorists in Iraq and Syria. Former

President Donald Trump cited that AUMF when authorizing the strike that took out Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad.

The bottom line: In its statement, the White House said repealing the measure would “have no impact on current US military operations and would support this Administration’s commitment to a strong and comprehensive relationship with our Iraqi partners.” ([CNN](#))

State Tourism Agency Adds Workforce Needs to its Goals for Promoting Indiana



What’s new: A partnership between a state agency known best for tourism and a not-for-profit veterans organization brought more than 400 veterans to Indiana to work in civilian jobs last year. Kyle Marsh was one of them.

The Pendleton native left Indiana in 1995 to enter the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he played baseball and thrived in the disciplined, regimented lifestyle of the armed forces. His military career took him around the world, but by the end of his tenure, he found himself back at West Point without a clear career path. “The only life I ever knew was the Army,” Marsh said.

Go deeper: The program—the Indiana Veterans Initiative, known as INVets—helped Marsh find work at Hamilton County-based seedmaker Beck’s Hybrids, where he applied skills he learned in the Army to his new job as a logistics operations specialist in charge of the company’s trucking division.

Marsh, 53, now lives with his family in Lawrence, and he credits INVets with helping him transition out of the military and into civilian life.

The state’s partnership with the veteran recruiting agency is one of many new programs designed to boost the Hoosier workforce supply by painting Indiana as an attractive quality-of-life destination amid a huge worker shortage.

What’s next: The agency tasked with this growing responsibility is the Indiana Destination Development Corp., a quasi-government entity formed in 2019—in the mold of the Indiana Economic Development Corp.—to replace the Office of Tourism Development.

Since the IDDC formed less than four years ago, Holcomb and Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch have expanded its mission from primarily tourism to include attracting and retaining students and temporary workers who may not be fitting Indiana into their long-term plans.

The bottom line: As a dual-focused entity, the IDDC is unlike other states’ tourism agencies that work primarily to attract casual visitors. It spends just as much time and effort attracting people willing to put down roots and therefore grow the state’s workforce. ([Indianapolis Business Journal](#))

Many Hoosier Women Never Returned to Work After the Pandemic. Here's Why.



What's new: Emily Grimes stopped working earlier this year at an optometrist office in Indianapolis, because there wasn't much of [a career ladder at the company](#) and she didn't make enough to justify paying for fast-rising child care costs.

Why it matters: Grimes' story has long been a familiar one: when the cost of child care is too expensive and the responsibilities pile up at home, it's often the person with the lower salary that leaves the workforce. And with the pay gap still wide between men and women, it falls typically on the woman.

"If my husband made less money, he would have stayed home," she said.

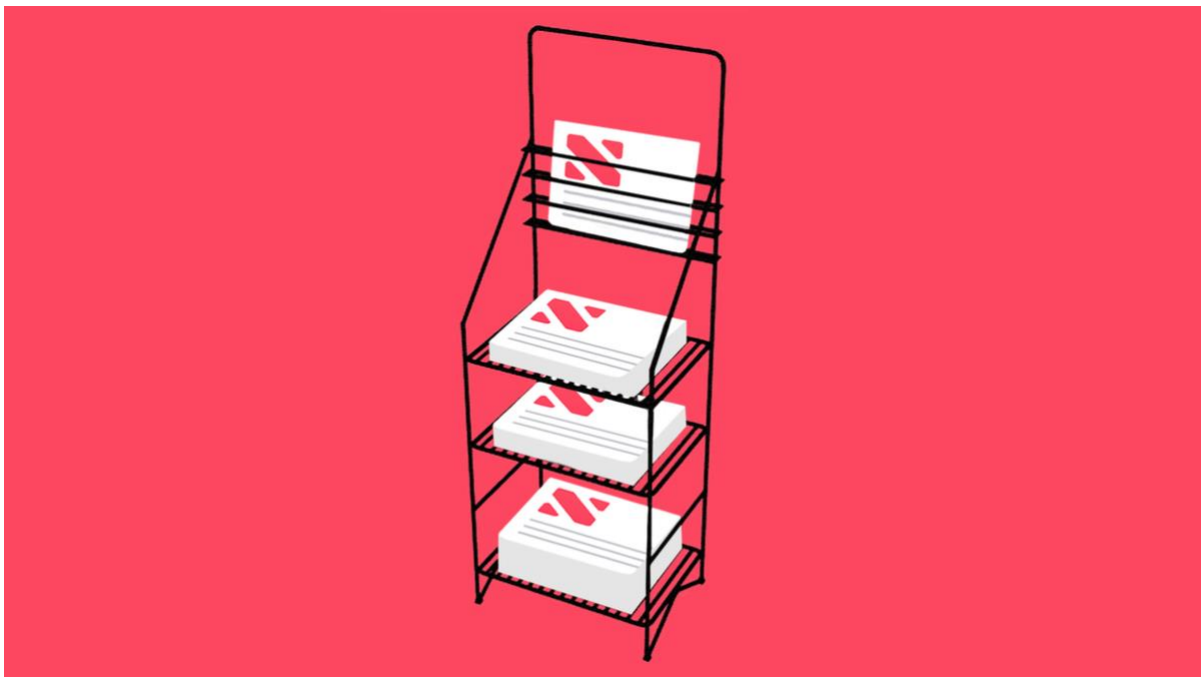
By the numbers: Many Hoosier women who stopped working at the start of the pandemic didn't return the following year, despite more people returning to work overall in Indiana, according to [federal](#)

[data](#). In 2019, 57% of Hoosier women 16 and older were in the workforce, dropping to 54% during the pandemic in 2020 and remaining there in 2021. Overall though, 62% of Hoosiers 16 and older were working in 2019, dropping to 59% in 2020 during the pandemic and ticking up to 60% in 2021.

Child care work fell three times as much on women than on men during the pandemic, according to an estimate from [2021 study by the nonprofit Center for Global Development](#).

The bottom line: But the drop in working women is not just due to the burnout caused by doing chores at home and working a job. It's also the result of workplaces that don't pay women enough to keep up with rising child care costs and employers falling short in making women feel like they belong, according to experts and surveys. ([Indy Star](#))

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Important Dates:



Tuesday, April 11th - House Committee Report Deadline

Thursday, April 13th - Senate Committee Report Deadline

Thursday, April 13th - House 2nd Reading Deadline

Monday, April 17th - Senate 2nd Reading Deadline

Monday, April 17th - House 3rd Reading Deadline

Tuesday, April 18th - Senate 3rd Reading Deadline

Thursday, April 27th - Anticipated Sine Die

[Senate Session Calendar](#)

[House Session Calendar](#)