

## Silly tax cut proposals

We are well into election season, so we are bombarded with talk of slashing taxes. Nearly all of this is election-eering nonsense that won't come to pass.

There's almost nothing new under the sun in the way of tax-and-spending policy, so almost every proposal will come with reams of examples to compare it to and plenty of data on the experiences of other states. One way to do this is to skim through some of the proposals that have been floated in recent weeks.

One proposal that has been making the rounds is to eliminate property taxes for Hoosiers who are over age 65 or have served 10 years in the military. Another proposal would freeze assessments at the purchase price of the home. These come from the Beckwith and Rainwater campaigns. These proposals are likely to be popular, at least in the Hicks household, where this would immediately eliminate property taxes on my home.



**MICHAEL HICKS**

The authors of these proposals didn't make any claims about the purpose. So, I can only speculate why such a cut would be structured. But I can draw some clear conclusions about what it might or might not do to the economy.

There's nothing in that proposal that would grow population, employment, GDP or household incomes. In fact, population growth tends to cluster in high-tax places. In Indiana, the 10 counties with the highest effective property tax rates alone accounted for 27,105 new residents since 2020, a whopping 61.3% of the state's entire population growth. The 10 counties with the lowest effective property tax rates saw only 878 new residents, or less than 2% of the state's growth.

I know many readers will recoil at this challenge to a long-held notion that lower taxes cause growth. However, it is a cold, hard fact that both population and employment growth is positively correlated with tax rates on income and property.

In Indiana, a 1% increase in the average tax rate leads to a 2% increase in population growth. That is simple mathematics.

No one quite says, "That place has higher taxes; I want to move there." Despite what many politicians appear to believe, though, households are sophisticated economic agents. Most families are capable of assessing tax rates and the quality and quantity of local public services. They look for the best fit of home, schools, safety, and traffic they can find. On average, they are moving to higher-tax places.

These are places where families judge themselves better off. If you live in a state where families are moving from low- to high-tax regions, your state is underinvesting in local amenities such as schools, parks, and public safety.

Indiana is such a state, and cutting taxes for elders and veterans would worsen the problem. Here's why.

Indiana's property taxes are budget-based. So, if the legislature excludes a particularly meritorious set of taxpayers — such as economics professors who are also retired soldiers — someone else pays that tax or services get cut.

So, if this tax proposal becomes law, my property taxes will drop by 100%, but my neighbors will all pay more. Probably a lot more.

Statewide, roughly 1 in 5 households would be excluded from property taxes in this scenario. Moreover, the value of housing stock owned by older Hoosiers is higher than that of younger families. So, this proposal could shift a third of property taxes to younger, poorer residents.

I say "could" because some of those properties will be at the property tax caps. These caps make Indiana's property tax rates among the lowest in the nation. So, in some communities, we would expect cuts to other local services. For every dollar lost to these cuts, about 42 cents will be funding for schools, with most of the remainder coming from the budgets of cities and counties.

That would mean less, perhaps much less, available money for fire protection, police, and parks. You know, the types of things families judge a community by when considering whether to relocate there.

And there's the rub on all this.

Tax cuts will be welcomed by us old-timey veterans, but that will do precious little to influence household relocation. Indiana is already an older-than-average state that doesn't charge income tax on military pay or retirement. Our challenge isn't getting people like me to move here. Our challenge is getting young people—our children, grandchildren and their friends — to live here.

A tax cut on seniors and veterans will have two clear effects. It will result in higher taxes on younger families and reduce public spending on schools, parks, police and fire departments. There are other effects as well. If you suppose that action will benefit the state's economy, or encourage more families to move here, I am sorry. You are daft.

Selective cuts in property taxes will also affect housing markets. This will be particularly true of a proposed assessment freeze. Older residents will be disinclined to relocate to lower-cost housing if they pay no property taxes.

California tried a version of this more than 40 years ago, and it has clobbered housing options for young people, strangled public services and helped destroy neighborhoods.

I could go on and on about this proposal, but I stop here to congratulate you. Because, if you made it this far, you've thought more about the effect of this tax proposal than its authors.

I would encourage everyone to ask folks who might support these tax cuts if they are fine making it harder for their kids and grandkids to build a life in Indiana. If they say no, send them this column.

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### Letter to the Editor

#### Local school board elections are important

To the Editor:  
I want to encourage conservative voters to carefully consider their choices for school board members in November. Your informed vote counts more than you think it does.

School board elections are difficult due to their non-partisan nature. This allows the possibility of electing individuals that don't reflect conservative values.

Local media interviews are useful to form a superficial opinion of candidates and their values.

Here are deeper questions I would ask:

- What is your position on gender ideology? Do you believe in genders other than male and female?
- Do you believe a person with XY chromosomes (male) can be female in terms of gender, and a person with XX chromosomes (female) can be male in terms of gender?
- Should conservative teachers be required to affirm gender ideology or to use preferred gender pronouns?
- Should students with XY chromosomes (males) be permitted to use the same restrooms or changing rooms as persons with XX chromosomes (females), or vice versa?
- Should persons with XY chromosomes (males) be permitted to participate in women sports? Should persons with XX chromosomes (females) be permitted to participate in men sports?
- Should a school official be permitted to engage a student in conversation related to social, medical or surgical

transition without parental knowledge and consent? Should knowledge of a student's body dysphoria be concealed from parents by school officials?

• Do public schools have an obligation to allow teachers to use prurient materials containing references and/or representations related to sexual practices and behavior?

• Do school libraries have an obligation to provide prurient materials containing explicit references and/or representations related to sexual practices to students?

• Should teachers be permitted to convey critical theory concepts promoting racial division, hatred towards America and Western culture, and leftist political activism?

• What rights do parents have regarding the education of their children? Does the student belong to the parent or to the state?

• Will you commit to opposing school policies promoting critical theory and gender ideology?

• What is your position on "comprehensive sexual education" which may include instruction and prurient discussion of matters like BDSM, sex toys, pedophilia, pederasty, fetishes and LGBTQ+ practices?

• Will you promote policies that hold administrators and teachers accountable for improvement in ILEARN scores? ENSC grade 3-8 proficiency scores were 23.6% in English, 28.2% in Math, and 16.8% in English and Math for 2022-2023 compared to state proficiency averages of 40.7%, 40.9%, and 30.6% respectively.

• Will you view proposed policies of school administration with healthy skepticism, serving as an advocate for the parents and children?

• Will you resist attempts by the federal government to force wokeness and gender ideology into the schools?

There is reason to be concerned about local school leadership.

For example, an area superintendent promoted gender ideology and the leftist interpretation of Title IX in her previous district.

An ENSC school board member told me some policies are motivated by the desire to avoid litigation by the leftist ACLU rather than principle and student welfare.

Another ENSC school board member considers limitations upon classroom or library materials to comprise book banning.

A community member was informed by an ENSC school board member that he needed to trust education professionals.

Unqualified trust of so-called professionals is a recipe for disaster. Consider that some medical professionals want to mutilate and sterilize children with transient body dysphoria that commonly resolves itself with puberty.

I encourage conservative voters to contact county Republican Party chairpersons for school board candidate recommendations.

A more detailed version of this letter will be posted on my blog, [christiannews-junkie.com](http://christiannews-junkie.com) (no hyphens).

**Robert Sparkman**  
Rome City

## An unsurprisingly uninspiring debate

BY KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ

"I did not have sex with a porn star." Donald Trump's statement in response to an arguably ad hominem attack from Joe Biden during their June 27 debate must have given more than a few of us flashbacks to Bill Clinton — specifically, his "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is" dance as he tried to linguistically sidestep allegations about Monica Lewinsky.

The main differences, though, were that Clinton was the sitting president at the time and that the problem was not the sex, but the abuse of power. Trump has always had notorious baggage when it comes to questions of character, going back to New York Post headlines from his decades in New York.

In the debate, Trump was right to call out Democratic extremism on abortion. But the questions called out both candidates' ignorance on the issue.

"First of all, the Supreme Court just approved the abortion pill. And I agree with their decision to have done that, and I will not block it," Trump said. The Court did no such thing. The justices issued a decision on the abortion-pill case based not on the merits or safety of chemical abortion, which is increasingly becoming the default method, but on whether the plaintiffs had standing for the case. It in no way indicated approval of chemical abortion.

Trump's words in support of abortion pills were callous. Prescribing abortion pills is an abandonment of pregnant girls and women.

Trump also said that during the half-century life of Roe, "everybody" wanted abortion to return to the states. That's not true. The California Democratic

governor has been advocating for the expansion of abortion in states other than his own because that's what his party is about. And the pro-lifers who have been on the front lines of providing hope to scared women who feel like abortion is their only option — they wouldn't be included in Trump's "everybody." I daresay the vast majority of them never popped a champagne bottle because states can now choose if they are going to allow abortion or not.

I want the end of abortion in America. I am not content that New York will double down on its status as the abortion capital of the country. I want women to be free from all the coercions and pain of abortion. Women deserve better than abortion. In the debate, it sure sounded — not for the first time — like Trump still doesn't get the heart of the pro-life movement.

And Trump quoted Ronald Reagan. Someone should have assigned him to read Reagan's "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation," his 1983 essay for *The Human Life Review*. In it, Reagan (then the sitting president) wrote: "Abortion concerns not just the unborn child, it concerns every one of us. ... The English poet John Donne wrote: '... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'"

Needless to say, there was no Donne in the first 2024 presidential debate.

Reagan continued: "Abraham Lincoln recognized that we could not survive as a free land when some men could decide that others were not fit to be free and should therefore be slaves. Likewise, we cannot survive as a free nation when some

men decide that others are not fit to live and should be abandoned to abortion or infanticide."

So much for Trump's states'-rights-fest.

There are electoral realities, but there is also truth and justice. "Follow the science," we were told not long ago. In the case of abortions, sonograms have made reality crystal clear. But politicians of both parties choose their own delusions to justify not having the courage to speak for the voiceless unborn.

I've not said much about Biden's performance, perhaps because criticizing him feels like a form of elder abuse. Over the decades of his career, he has taken about every position on abortion there is. On debate night, he said he was not for late-term abortions. That is a lie.

And so here we are — needing to take this debate as a reality check. Teaching true history, not ideological readings of it, will help. Virtue education can encourage men and women of character to examine their consciences in their daily routines and amid world-changing events, and all things in between. We can raise children who appreciate civic life and public service as noble work — the service of humanity.

Many of us were not surprised at how uninspiring the Biden-Trump debate was. Still, we were sad. What we do with that sadness will show the character of people and institutions alike. Character is not a relic of the past — unless we surrender the best of us.

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