

End of Year Interview Recap

Interviews: 25

When: December 14, 15, 16 & 20

Banning Tik Tok

Q (Rafael Sanchez/WRTV): Some states are already banning Tik Tok due to the Chinese connection. Fellow states like Alabama, Utah, South Dakota, Maryland, Texas... Will there be any kind of rule not to allow state services or state use of Tik Tok because of the concern of security issues when it comes to that service?

A (Governor Holcomb): You're the first to ask me, but it's already happened. Our IOT, the department that Tracy Barnes oversees and looks at our complete statewide system, has already banned Tik Tok from being used in our state system and on our state devices. He doesn't just look at one app or one piece of software – he looks globally. And we're constantly checking our system and making sure the integrity is intact. And we have made the decision in the past to not allow that to be used on our state system. So we're already in that group of states that does not allow them on our state system. And, we'll continue to test the system because there are 10's and 1000's of people around the world that seek to do ill or gain from systems that aren't this hard to secure. And one could be a state, one could be a municipality, one could be nonprofits who just believe that the security of their entity "It won't happen to me." Well, unfortunately, there's enough ill will out there that just goes looking for vulnerable areas, and as a state, we are constantly on the lookout for these potential invasions.

Public School Funding

Q (Tom Davies/AP): Are schools going to be able to get as big of a funding increase as last time?

A (Governor Holcomb): I'll reserve judgment till I see the actual revenue forecast this and in April, but I can say, and believe wholeheartedly, in a funding increase for our public schools. And it will hopefully continue to address some of my priorities, those being teacher pay. I said a number of years ago I had some goals in terms of the minimum salary those teachers who are just for one year with experience, and then the average and for that, and the average for career teachers. So yes, and then also making sure that we're appropriately funding programs that are going to put our high school students on the pathway to success. And whether that be enlisting in the military, or seeking employment, or going on to higher education themselves.

COP27

Q (Garrett Bergquist/WISH): You were the only state governor at COP 27 This year, what role do you see the state government playing in the combating climate crisis particularly as we're going into this budget session?

A (Governor Holcomb): Yeah, for a state like Indiana that's the number one ranked advanced manufacturing state in America for that matter – per capita – this is critically important to us, our energy portfolio, and knowing that the market usually has the final say, and the market is who's spinning out innovations that are going to change the world. We just saw the federal government announced a real kind of breakthrough - initial breakthrough - in terms of nuclear fusion, as opposed to fission. But we're right now, here today, working with Purdue and Duke, one of our big utilities here in the state of Indiana on small modular reactors. We're working on stretches of the highway that would charge trucks and batteries in the EV market. We're doing some incredibly innovative things in terms of cement and concrete manufacturing. We're looking at hydrogen as an alternative source. We have the largest solar farm 1.3 gigawatts in America. We're ranked number fourth in terms of renewable energy sources under construction for that capacity. And so, it's an incredibly exciting time as we move into the future and the sources that businesses and residents will come to, not just expect, but demand in terms of reliability, affordability, and sustainability. And a state like Indiana has a very pragmatic approach to realizing those innovations and turning them into action. And I'm proud to not just be a part of it, but to carry the Indiana flag anywhere where folks want to talk about really practical, pragmatic advances that are being made in terms of transportation. This was a place you know, this COP27, I had the place to myself and was able to brag about what Indiana industry is already doing in terms of agriculture, in terms of construction, and distribution, the actual grid itself. We just need to do a whole lot more of it.

Online Gaming/Lottery

Q (Casey Smith/ICC): I know the lottery isn't a part of your agenda, but do you support online gaming and the move toward online gaming?

A (Governor Holcomb): I'm not emotionally gripped by to or not to, to be or not to be. And I'm watching and we'll work with the legislature to make sure these steps are taken. That they're responsible and don't have adverse effects on the current labeling.

Gubernatorial Election

Q (Dan Carden/NWI Times): Well in that vein, Senator Mike Braun is seemingly going to be playing on two chess boards for the next two years. Should he resign his post in the Senate since he's probably not going to be very useful to Hoosiers?

A (Governor Holcomb): Your words, not mine. I think he has to assess what his capacity is. And so, to each their own, and including their circumstance, including their schedule, including their commitments, and I just know for me what I've been through these before. I've - you know, it's not my first rodeo. It's not my first budget, and as governor or as a staff member who was working on one, and I know that for me, I have to be fully committed as the governor of the state and it will just require me to have that single allegiance. And so, it works for me, but for others, I'm not I'm not trying to say it can't be done. I understand when officeholders seek

another office, how they may have to play on two chess boards but for me for right now. I can't commit to that and won't.

Q (Abdul/Indy Politics): You made a decision not to get in the governor's race, not to do any sort of endorsements. Any thoughts reason why or just focusing on other things right now?

A (Governor Holcomb): Purely to focus on other things right now. I mean, this is really early. People are out right now, a few of them are out listening to communities, rightfully so. I mean, it's two years out - 23 months to be exact. And then they'll, I'm assuming, compile their plans just like I did. But they're earning it and I have a job, not as a candidate, to focus on making sure in this fourth quarter if you look at it, you know, we're Hoosiers, we like sports and we view a lot of things in terms of a sports analogy, and we're in the fourth quarter - the last two years is the fourth quarter, and it happens to be the most important quarter to finish and follow through. And so this budget, there's nothing more important to me and if for some reason that interferes with whatever would come next for me, including campaigning for someone or helping someone then, you know, so be it. And I'll gladly live with that. But by the way, folks should just know the candidates that are out running for whatever office, the most important thing is for them to connect with the actual voters. I'm one, but the voters and it turned out okay for me and I didn't have the endorsements of my predecessor, so it forced me to really not just rest on that, but to get out and build it in 92 different counties.

Teacher Salaries

Q (Kristen Eskow/Fox 59): Do you think Indiana can get to that \$60,000 average salary?

A (Governor Holcomb): Well, this will be discussed over this session. This budget session will be my last, so I'm trying to take us from the low 50's up to as close or not to 60 before I leave and that's this two year period. So, in our budget there will be a reflection of increased dollars to public education, specifically K through 12. One thing to note is the last couple of budget sessions, the superintendents, various school corporations came to us and said if you give us an increase that we need, we will make sure it gets to our teachers. And they had done that. All but four schools in the state of Indiana passed on salary increases this last year. And so, I'd like it to be 100%, but only four didn't. So again, school corporations I think are noticing that 40,000 minimum for a first-year teacher, you know, 17 said no, we want it to be 50. And hopefully that kind of friendly competition because schools want more students. Hopefully that helps carry the day as well.

Revenue Forecast

Q (Brandon Smith/IPB): Let's talk about something we just learned a couple of hours ago, revenue forecasts came out. So, \$1.2 billion over the biennium in new revenue projected sounds like a lot of money, but the folks upstairs were preaching caution in budgeting. Do we need to be cautious in how we wrote this budget?

A (Governor Holcomb): Every year we should, especially in these kind of choppy, turbulent times with so many factors washing upon our shore, including some national factors, global bankers. I mean, we built our budget off of 18 billion something a couple years ago - our OMB guys. This revenue forecast is a little rosier than what we were anticipating, but 300 million more to fill this out, and 700 million more, and about 400 million more is 23, 24, 25. But I mean we have some challenges, we all have priorities. Mine bring with them some new expenditures, public health. If we follow up on this, we'll try to persuade on the recommendations from the Public Health Commission. Will I think there's broad support for some increases in public education? Are we pushing for K through 12 and post secondary? So that's a fiscal add. I would like to do another round of READI so kind of READI 2.0 or READI repeat, whatever you want to call it. Different regions have different labels for it. I just came back from the IDEA conference, and they're all kind of chomping at the bit and I said we'll have to see. This is before I had time to digest the revenue actual numbers, but we will come at some level. And then much like two years ago, I mean, the READI Round One, started at about 140 million, and then ended up again after the more important revenue forecast in April, mid April, we were able to grow that to 500 million. And so, I suspect at the very outset we'll be in one place and then we'll see if we need to scale up or down but we'll submit on first week of January - we'll roll our agenda on the fourth - so probably the fourth or fifth will submit our budget and it'll be an honestly balanced budget. And then we will have a conversation about priorities. Both sides, the Senate House and the administration.

LEAP District

Q (Dave Bangert/Journal & Courier): On development, where do you stand on the whole question of water from Tippecanoe County and piping it over to the LEAP two counties over? Is it something that should be done, could be done, will be done?

A (Governor Holcomb): Well, IEDC is running point, obviously, on water energy with a partner in those affected - as a partner with those affected. And when you think about the state of Indiana, one thing that really jumps off the page, not just for Indiana but for Michigan for Indiana for Illinois, for that matter, is our access to 22% of the world's freshwater Lake Michigan. That's a huge asset, especially when companies are looking at where to go. And so when you compare states that have been on a run in - Arizona is for one - and if we're trying to compete with Arizona, and Texas, and Florida, and Tennessee, which we are, we have to check water and energy access and cost. And so our approach has been with LEAP, and will continue to be, to make sure that we're partnering with the local folks who are affected... be it Tippecanoe County, be it Boone County, but we won't do anything that's irresponsible, but we will press forward on ways to grow our economy so that more Purdue students can stay close to Purdue and Indiana.

Political Future

Q (Kaitlin Lange/State Affairs): Speaking of campaigns, are you considering a senate run?

A (Governor Holcomb): Not right now. Not going to let anything interfere with my focus, and my focus right now is the budget session that's upon us. I haven't ruled anything out or in, and I've told multiple people from different walks of life that have expressed an interest or asked me to think about something, literally told 100% of them the same thing so that if one talks to the other they will get the same response. Like that's what he told me is, if you need an answer now, I'm not your guy. And that's what I'll continue to tell people, and I mean it.

Public Health

Q (Brett Stover/Journal Gazette): Speaking of, as you mentioned, you know, COVID, RSV, the flu, all of that - can you foresee any time in the future where you are the state would want to step back in do any kind of restrictions or is that really all in the rearview mirror?

A (Governor Holcomb): I think that's in the rearview mirror, the wheels would really have to come off. I mean, we'd stay obviously closely, in contact daily with hospitals all around the state of Indiana. So, we're monitoring systems - a practice that the Department of Health is in, and we're in a much different place. It's still to be taken seriously you know, you go from a pandemic to endemic and there'll be ebbs and flows, but we know how to approach this. We have the resources, and we track that every day. So, you know, the wheels aren't close to coming off, but it is affecting schools, it is affecting businesses - you got to treat it as serious as it is.

Q (Dirk Rowley/WANE): How do you tackle getting people healthier? How do you make the case to the legislature I think more than maybe anyone else about that investment in public health?

A (Governor Holcomb): How do you make the case and how do we become persuasive, ultimately, is I think the most important thing, and that's why we took a very deep dive - very thorough - we haven't done this, you know, I'd say forever, but we've been operating the same kind of with the same infrastructure, and approach, and structure governance funding for about the last 100 plus years. And so, we've got around the whole state Dr. Monroe, Dr. Box, we had folks from county commissioners, and mayors, we had a local and state hospitals - everyone that's concerned, every stakeholder that is concerned about our health, not just indicators and rankings, but from a compassionate and competitive perspective. How are we going to improve? And so, they did the deep dive, and they did the hard work, and they're meeting right now with legislators and leaders and members who are not reluctant to look at the facts. They want to have the knowledge to make an informed decision about how to go forward.

READI

Q (Peter Blanchard/IBJ): You've said you want to increase funding for the READI grant program. How much has been allocated at this point? Is it at the full 500 million and what do you foresee in that you recommend?

A (Governor Holcomb): Yeah, it's not just because we go through a process. I'm hopeful that it will be reflective of the last regional cities approach, where it takes time - these the total number of projects - take time to score and not just prioritize from a local perspective, but then approve. But we're, I think, we're the total potential 10 billion that could be leveraged. We're approaching about halfway there. You know, not very long after we announced it, so we're on track for these projects to be realized. And it encourages me because there were a number of projects that \$500 million in state investment that got leveraged with \$10 billion on the sidelines. There were a number of worthy projects that weren't funded in that 500 million. So, we got to see everything that wasn't funded too that we could have scored as that's the next best project, and the next best project. So we know there are a long list of projects out there that I would have liked to if we would have had a billion instead of 500 million, we could have put it to work. And so, I need to look at the revenue forecast right now. But we'll certainly be seeking a READI 2.0 or READI repeat or READI round two, whatever you want to call it.

Q (Peter Blanchard/IBJ): And would you be using state funding for it?

A (Governor Holcomb): Yes

Marijuana

Q (Anne Marie Tiernon/WTTHR): Legalizing marijuana is something that people believe would bring jobs and would bring money revenue to the state of Indiana. Where do you stand on legalizing marijuana at this point?

A (Governor Holcomb): I'm one that doesn't like to pick and choose - won't do that as long as I'm here - which laws to follow and not, and marijuana is still, federally speaking, on federal books illegal. There is a practice from states, and the federal government for that matter, to look the other way on this issue. I don't know of any other issue quite frankly, where it's against the law, and yet, we say well it can be done if you use cash and the banks can accept it and we'll just not prosecute. This is a very dangerous slippery slope when you decide what laws and what laws not to prosecute or enforce. And so, for me, if I'm agnostic, if I'm willing to listen to the facts, certainly, it would generate revenue. By the way, there's two sides to the ledger - it also generates other things that may be adverse to society. But let's have the medical research conducted the real medical research. Years ago, I had an agreement from Purdue University to do the agricultural research, and Indiana University to do the medical research. These are two globally renowned institutions. And I offered the federal government: these two universities in my home state will produce the research to tell us if, in fact, medicinally it's advantageous and

recreationally, if it's. What are the counterbalances and what are the pros and the cons? And no one took us up on that offer and the law four years later has still not changed. And so up until the law changes, and I think that we should be doing research in the meantime, ongoing simultaneously but until the federal government changes the law, I don't think states should be kind of ditching Law and Order approach to this or any other issue

Abortion Ban

Q (Adam Wren/POLITICO): You know, one recent poll found that 56.7% of Hoosiers think that abortion should be legal in all cases. Do you think that you and the legislature are a little insulated from the broader public sentiment on abortion?

A (Governor Holcomb): No, we're not living under a rock. I've seen polling on this for decades. I think that first of all, probably the only poll that really matters is on election day. And those very same legislators, who were very transparent during the special session about their positions, we had felt like a countless number of amendments that went up or down but debated, transparent, open, they were overwhelmingly reelected, and not only that, but added to the ranks. So new people who were campaigning on that, but what I think that says it's not insulation. I think, again, I've seen lots of polling. I tend to believe what I pay for, because it's been right. And I haven't dug through as you obviously have that hope in your site. So, I'm not disputing its accuracy. But I would say this is like a lot of other issues, where the narrative gets blurred when you try to or when you assume that a voter is a one voter, one issue voter.

Don't Say Gay Bill

Q (Arika Herron/Indy Star): I heard this morning that lawmakers are planning to file a "don't say gay bill" similar to Florida's we can't talk about gender identity, sexual education in classrooms. How do you feel about that? Is that on your agenda?

A (Governor Holcomb): Not on my agenda. I'd have to see the language that would restrict free speech, but I really need to see it because you're probably talking about in schools or something, but I'm assuming that it's not on my agenda, but I'll work with the legislature and whenever they dive into

Governorship Legacy

Q (Jack Sells/Statehouse File): So there's portraits of the governor's around here and out in the other room. In two years when yours is coming up, what do you think your legacy will be?

A (Governor Holcomb): I don't think in terms of what do I need to do for my legacy, but I do think in terms of what do we want the state to be known for? And I think if there were, if I was to kind of personalize it, the way that you asked the question, I would say that during this eight-year period, we as a state didn't shy away from challenges - that we figured out ways to

overcome whatever challenges got in our way and prove it. And that could be in terms of how we get smarter, how we get healthier, how we grow economically, how we address the various global transitions that are occurring. And then, the more kind of bricks and mortar part of the legacy which typically people tend to think about, like what's different now, physically, so there's a long to do list that I carry with me every day and it could be finishing I-69, which we've been talking about since you know, 69 was built from Evansville or from Indianapolis to Fort Wayne.

CHIPS/Semiconductors

Q (Rob Burgess/Rob Burgess Show): I wanted to know a little bit more about your trip to Taiwan in August. I know that's been a source of rising tensions between China and the US in our supply of semiconductors comes from there. And I also know that around that same time the chips act, it also went into effect and our own Senator Young obviously was very involved in that. What did you hear? What did you see there? Why was that important to you?

A (Governor Holcomb): Well, you're not part of the solution, if you don't show up. And I always say if you're not at the table, you're probably on the menu. I'd like to, to the extent that we can control our own destiny, which requires you to be present with folks who are trying to solve the problem, this problem was over dependence on a certain source and then not being onshore. This is after discussions with various sectors in the economy, auto included, defense. And so, we were in contact with multiple parts of that sector. And whether it be suppliers, or manufacturers or packagers, or testers, or we wanted to make sure that we can build this ecosystem that we got in understanding that hundreds of billions of dollars would be seeking a home, whether it be sky water or intel, or you fill in the blank and video or you know, you name it. They're seeking places to grow. And for our state to have Purdue University, Notre Dame Indiana University, Rose Hulman, Ivy Tech, Vincennes University, from the high schools that are really leaning into STEM and really harnessing those talents at an early age. It was, you know, it would have been malpractice for me not to show up to try to partner with the people who are trying to solve this issue globally.

Economic Development

Q (Gerry Dick/IIB): One of the big deals was Intel \$20 million 20,000 jobs that actually went to Ohio. There was a lot of talk around Indiana's ability to provide the workforce. The talent pipeline was an issue. Are you concerned about the talent pipeline when it comes to going after these big deals?

A (Governor Holcomb): Every deal we do, I'm mindful of it - concerned is to put it mildly. Because we have to be able to supply the company with the fuel they need to be able to grow and that's talent, and that's their workforce. And so, you know, we're blessed in the state of Indiana with Purdue, with Rose Holman, with Notre Dame, with IU. We got 30 privates and all our public, Ivy Tech and Vincennes University. And so how we build these curriculums, the curriculum that they need, to be able to skill up their workforce, the Nimble states in America

will be the winners. And we have proven time after time and these deals and there will be more coming, that we can, in fact, compete with the one investment that was made in Ohio. We're having multiple announcements, and I like our strategy to be able to look at doing the manufacturing doing the packaging, doing the testing, and recycling when it comes to batteries, the whole lifecycle of the product as we onshore or reshore a lot of these products, products that are going to continue to make sure that we keep the future of mobility rooted here in the state of Indiana.

Budget

Q (Steve Garbacz/The News Sun): For two years the state has just been flush with cash that it's almost never given back to people. So, certainly, you know, there's a lot of needs, we've identified some of those, inflation's an issue too. So, I wanted to get your thoughts on where you see some of the priorities and if you could direct the upcoming two year budget, where do you think are some areas that Indiana should really be spending and investing?

A (Governor Holcomb): Yeah, I mean, that's, that's what we do, you know, cruising into every budget session every January where we have to prioritize and address our challenges and where we seek to try to invest to grow and for sure. It may have been COVID a couple of years ago, but inflation has certainly taken a big bite out of the apple as well, so we'll have to budget for that we'll have to pass another honestly balanced budget. I think there's unanimous agreement on that. So, you start there. We'll get a revenue forecast tomorrow around mid-day, that'll help us inform the final budget that and agenda that we put forward, and I'll do that on January 4, and then we'll get another budget or a revenue forecast in mid-April, which will be key going down that last final sprint as it was the last budget session. Where, to your point, we were, you know, increasing funding and say for example, the READI program that started much lower initially but grew to 500 million and really grew at the very end when we knew we had the dollars to to invest and so it will be very similar. We'll start out as an administration. Look, looking at some key areas to true up one would be inflation.

2023 Plans

Q (Kathy Tretter): What are you planning for 2023?

A (Governor Holcomb): Well, we're excited. I mean, the state of Indiana has had our share of challenges, but certainly we've been growing. We were one of the states that in America, according to the momentum index that's done every year, we were the only state in the Midwest to be above the national average in terms of population growth, employment growth and capital investment growth. And we had a record booming year of 22 plus billion in capital investment. And that's important because it means opportunity for you know, Hoosiers to get better jobs and higher wages and speaks to that providing upward mobility opportunity for Hoosiers and then it allows us obviously to fund all those other priorities that we as a state feel are important. And so, we've got some big plans for public education, both early childhood K

through 12, K through eight really, and then nine through 12, Post-Secondary, adult education, workforce development programs. And making sure that we can fill all those jobs that are coming to our state. Then we've got some lofty goals about how to improve our public health. Indicators and working with local communities, all local kind of the 92 different local health departments, how the state can complement local efforts. And so that will require us structurally to have buy-in and alignment but then hopefully with that would come some funding to help at the street level help local communities improve on their health indicators because that affects our - health is wealth by the way - but that also improves our workforce.

Fun Questions

Q (Dan Carden/NWI Times): Are you going to dye him (Henry) green for Christmas?

A (Governor Holcomb): No, I'm not. He's not going viral in that respect, I'll tell you that!

Q (Dave Bangert/Journal & Courier): So, Mitch Daniels, leaving office next two weeks from now won't be really gone. Is there room for him in your administration? I mean, if he's even looking for even for insurance?

A (Governor Holcomb): I can't afford him. There's always room in the end for Mitch, whether it's paid or not.