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Gov. Daniels' goal: Let residents vote on mass transit plan

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Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels said he'll be trying to check some things off his to-do list that he has sought in earlier legislative sessions, including criminal justice and local government reforms. / Michael Conroy / Associated Press

Written by Mary Beth Schneider

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News Mitch Daniels

Gov. Mitch Daniels said today he backs giving more money to victims of the state fair tragedy; a statewide smoking ban and allowing Marion and Hamilton County residents to vote on whether to support a mass transit plan.

But those and other items on his agenda for his final year in office could be endangered by the top priority he and fellow Republicans have laid out: Making Indiana the 23rd state in the nation with so-called "right to work" laws on the books.

Unions call those laws "right to work for less." They would bar companies and unions from negotiating a contract that requires non-members to pay fees for representation.

Daniels said he agrees with the Indiana Chamber of Commerce that Indiana needs to join the 22 states with that

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law in order to draw in businesses that won't locate in states that don't have it. Democrats agree with labor unions who argue that it is no panacea, since high unemployment is in some states that have this on the books, and that it allows for free-loaders, since unions must represent all workers, including non-members.

The governor announced his long-expected support for "right to work" laws on Thursday.

Today, in a speech before the Kiwanis Club of Indianapolis at the Skyline Club, he laid out the rest of his agenda.

It included:

>>Seeking additional compensation for victims of the stage collapse at the state fair that killed seven and injured more than 40 others. Daniels said he did not support changing the state law that limits the total damages to only \$5 million, but said this is a special circumstance that deserves special consideration. He said he did not know how much each should get nor the formula for divvying up any new money.

>>Enacting a statewide smoking ban, possibly before the Super Bowl on Feb. 5. Daniels said the public supports this and it is time to deliver. He was willing to consider some exceptions, but did not go into details.

>>Approving a referendum for Marion and Hamilton County voters, to let them decide whether to raise taxes to pay for a mass transit program. Daniels said he was not weighing in on the merits of the plan nor the taxes, but said voters should decide this one for themselves.

>>Passing the local government reforms that he has failed to get in previous sessions. Daniels said he hopes at least to get a law banning nepotism in local government and letting counties decide whether to have a single executive, who would replace commissions, and whether to merge townships and eliminate township boards.

>>Addressing internet sales taxes. While some have said this must be decided at the federal level, Daniels wants the state to examine the inequity of Indiana businesses having to collect sales taxes that remote sellers do not.

>>Examining ways to make higher education more affordable. This, Daniels said, includes cutting the number of credit hours students need to graduate in some fields.

>>Passing anti-human trafficking legislation before the Super Bowl. Daniels had attended a morning news conference to support this legislation, which would crack down particularly on anyone who forces a child to commit a sexual act and on forced prostitution.

>>Cleaning up antiquated laws to eliminate things no longer needed or to modernize them.

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The session begins Jan. 4, and must end by March 14 — not a lot of time, but for Daniels, who is entering his final term as governor, it's all the time he has.

Call Star reporter Mary Beth Schneider at (317) 444-2772.

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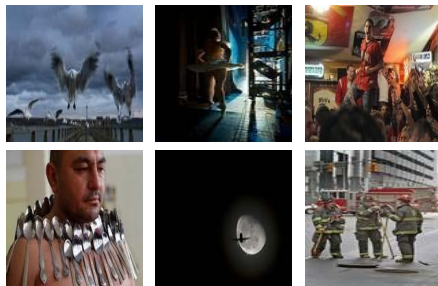


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