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Unigov—maintain, complete or dissolve it?

Jan. 1, 1970, marked the effective date of Indiana's largest hostile takeover.

Over 38 days in 1969, "management" and the "board of directors" met and approved the takeover. More than 1,100 employees were affected.

Without approval of the "shareholders," 312,299 people became new Indianapolis residents and 106,784 new voters were eligible to elect the Indianapolis mayor. Indianapolis became 320 square miles larger.

The Unified Government Act of 1969 (Unigov) allowed the city of Indianapolis to combine the statutory agencies of its municipal government with those of Marion County, creating a partially unified city-county government.

In a corporate merger or takeover, the acquiring board of directors must demonstrate to its shareholders that the combined entity will increase shareholder value by providing for greater revenue growth than either entity could have realized independently or by increasing efficiencies that will result in reduced expenses and greater profits.

By growing revenue and eliminating redundant costs in management capacity, the CEO and management team ensures the continued profitable growth of the combined enterprise with many happy shareholders in tow.

In the early stages of Unigov, man-



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agement efficiencies and cost reductions could be found. The combined city-county purchasing department saved more than \$80,000 in the first year. The newly created Personnel Department reduced labor turnover rates 10 percent to 25 percent and eliminated 235 employees, saving more than \$2 million.

Seventy-three routes for the collection of trash were reduced to 56. A centralized Finance Division realized an increase in the collection of fees from \$136,543 in 1969 to \$234,264 in 1970.

Nearly 30 years later, we, as "shareholders," must ask whether city-county government is more efficient. Have we continued to realize substantial gains from this hostile takeover?

The basic Unigov structure has not changed since 1970. Within the executive branch, Mayor Steve Goldsmith has reorganized city departments in an effort to better meet the needs of our city. However, the statutory and constitutional divisions between the city and county that were not addressed in Unigov remain.

Indianapolis-Marion County still has 57 independent taxing authorities with 63 different property tax rates, nine township governments, 11 school systems, 11 fire departments and 24 police agencies. The excluded cities of Lawrence, Beech Grove and Speedway continue to have their own municipal agencies and officeholders.

In 1966, then-Mayor Richard Lugar advocated the consolidation of the 11 school districts in Marion County. Would a combined Marion County school district provide greater educa-

tional opportunities for students, better citizens and workers, and lower educational costs?

Could a countywide math and science magnet school, with the resources to employ the latest technology and the ability to attract the most capable educators, provide all of our children with a superior educational environment?

New York's citywide math, science and art magnet programs are among the best in the nation. If we can beat New York on the basketball court, we can surely beat them in the classroom.

To consolidate police and fire services, the Unigov legislation dictates that the City-County Council conduct public hearings and find that such consolidation is in the public interest and that adequate and reasonable protection can be provided. With the exception of a poorly planned effort in 1972 to consolidate police services, no public evidence can be found to show that the City-County Council has evaluated either of these options since that time. The existence of 24 police departments and 11 fire departments should encourage a fresh analysis of our police and fire services.

For political expedience in 1968, the Unigov legislation made no attempt to address the constitutionally required county and township governments.

The Marion County prosecutor has always been a countywide prosecutor, delivering services without regard to municipal boundaries within the county.

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In 1998, we should question why we have nine township trustees, nine township assessors, and numerous township constables in Marion County.

These offices could easily be combined to provide countywide services, comprehensive planning and administration. Combined offices could better address the needs of the entire community without being limited by an artificial line that marks the end of their jurisdiction.

Since township offices are elected separately by the voters, one must also question why we elect a Township Advisory Board to oversee the officials we elected.

Most perplexing in this web of sup-

posed unified government is our taxing system. What CFO could efficiently manage this Byzantine revenue structure? How can revenue and costs be adequately monitored, underperforming assets and programs improved or eliminated, and efficiencies identified and replicated?

Should Unigov be dissolved? Are the assets and ingenuity of one entity being subordinated to the needs of the other? Eli Lilly and Co. recognized that its medical devices division could be more successful independent of it. General Motors Corp. and AT&T Corp. reached the same conclusions and achieved the same results with Raytheon and Lucent, respectively.

Should we continue partially unified government, complete the takeover, or

unwind it? Unfortunately, we, the "shareholders," cannot answer any of these questions because "management" has not analyzed the merits and demerits of Unigov.

We should have a "shareholders" meeting for "management" to explain the results of the hostile takeover. Then, we will have the information necessary to analyze "management's" and the "board of directors'" decision.

Like the shareholders of Lilly, GM and AT&T, Marion County "shareholders" then can make an informed decision either to maintain the status quo, to complete the takeover or to unwind it. •

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