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## It's way past time to complete Unigov

The property-tax disaster in Marion County and around Indiana is composed of two dependent parts: the manner in which property is assessed and the government infrastructure that establishes tax rates or levies and whose operations are funded in large measure by property-tax assessments.



**BRIAN  
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*Commentary*

The state has improved the manner in which property is assessed. Unfortunately, the state has not done an adequate job of training assessors in all 92 counties.

In Indianapolis, the challenge of accurately assessing property is compounded by a Byzantine governmental structure that has not been significantly altered since Unigov's creation in 1969.

In the early stages of Unigov, management efficiencies and cost reductions could be found. But Indianapolis/Marion County still has 62 governmental units, 90 taxing districts, 11 school corporations, 9 township governments, 6 fire departments, nearly 20 police agencies, several municipal corporations such as the Marion County Library, IndyGo and the Capital Improvement Board, and the excluded cities of Lawrence, Beech Grove and Speedway, which have their own munic-

ipal agencies and officeholders.

Thanks to the sedulous efforts of Mayor Bart Peterson, advances have been made in unifying local government, realizing operational efficiencies and financial benefits. The creation of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department is expected to save \$9 million annually. The merger of the Indianapolis, Washington Township and Warren Township fire departments is expected to save \$9 million annually.

Government consolidation and efficiency do not need additional lubrication. The governor's recently appointed "blue ribbon" commission would do well to review House Bill 1568 and "Invest in Indianapolis Phase II." House Bill 1568 was the third piece of legislation Mayor Peterson put forth to allow for local government consolidation. With some modifications, this legislation could serve as the basis for comprehensive local government reform in the 2008 session of the General Assembly. Little rationale exists for the current governmental structure in Indianapolis or in the rest of Indiana. Governmental structures and policies from 1851 do not fully address current socioeconomic realities.

"Invest in Indianapolis Phase II" is an undertaking by the Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce to assist local government by focusing on the fiscal crisis that is driven in large part by social problems in Marion County. The chamber's research offers a number of

operational, financial and legislative recommendations for improving local fiscal governance and transparency.

In 1966, Richard Lugar advocated the consolidation of the 11 school districts in Marion County. Would a combined Marion County school district provide greater educational opportunities for students, better citizens and workers, and lower educational costs? Further, would a single school district undertake the multiple capital projects under way in Marion County, or would an enlightened administrator carefully evaluate systemwide infrastructure and leverage it effectively? Roughly half of property taxes pay for education-related expenses.

Finally, nine township trustees, nine township assessors and numerous constables in Marion County could easily be combined to provide countywide services, comprehensive planning and administration. 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.

Local government reform has been evaluated numerous times by credible organizations comprising well-intentioned and well-informed citizens. Let's hope the governor takes note and the members of the General Assembly are listening. •

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