

The Definition of Insanity

I'm not sure where I heard it first but it is a common cliché, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting a different result". It comes to mind often as I debate issues and ideas within city government.

If there is any message from the voters of Terre Haute that one might glean from the last three city elections, it is that the voters want change. They have thrown out three mayors in a row and almost completely changed the members of the city council. Apparently, they didn't like the way things were going and the decisions being made.

The message I got, loud and clear, was that the citizens desired to see new ideas, new approaches to solving our problems, new initiative in dealing with all the obstacles in reaching our potential as a community. If there is a problem, say animal control, don't just hire more government workers to deal with it; try new and different approaches that are more effective and efficient. If there is a possible new business opportunity, don't just give them a break and charge the rest of us for that break; find an incentive that helps them and all of us. If there is a need identified, don't just expand an existing, inefficient bureaucracy; find an innovative solution that meets that need and keeps the taxpayers in mind.

So far, in the first sixty-some days of this new city council and administration, it appears that the status quo is as firmly entrenched as ever. Nothing appears to have changed. As good an example as could be shown is the issue of expanding city bus service into the county.

A need has been identified, that of people needing rides from outlying areas into the city. Whether this need actually exists is debatable, but for our purposes let's assume that it does, however nebulous it might be. Since it is a matter of citizens in the county needing this supposed service, I would assume that the county would handle it. I would be assuming incorrectly. To fill this need, I would assume that the last thing one might consider would be to expand a service that is so inefficient that it currently spends \$12.59 for every \$1.00 it takes in. I would again be making an incorrect assumption. I would think a city council that considers itself fiscally responsible would never contemplate spending over \$18.50 of your money and charge \$1.50 for the service. I would be wrong for the third time.

So what's going on here? Many might say that if someone lives far afield in the county, they should just move into the city if there is a problem with transportation. Others might say if this need actually exists, wouldn't some sharp entrepreneur fill the need at a profit? At the very least, many think, shouldn't the county, not the city, find the least costly (to the taxpayers) method of addressing the need?

Well, what's going on here has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with dealing with any supposed transportation problems. What is going on here is all about justifying employment of bus drivers, support staff, transportation planners, preventing a reduction in government employment, and the political power that goes along with it. What is going on here has everything to do with money (other people's local, state, and federal money) and the power that goes along with it. Citing some supposed "need" is simply a means to an end, that end being control of your money.

It's way past time to heed the message of the voters and change the way we do things in local government, city and county. Meeting the challenges facing us as a community requires leadership, good management,

and above all, an abiding sense of obligation to the taxpayers and the burden they bear. The new mayor and this city council possess all this ability in abundance. I urge them to reject the old way of dealing with these issues and break new ground in finding the solutions. We must if we are to achieve real opportunity for a prosperous future. The alternative is too crazy to contemplate.