



Quality of life study: Live longer, prosper elsewhere

Study: Quality of life subpar in NWI, Hoosier state

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INDIANAPOLIS | Northwest Indiana and the Hoosier state as a whole rank near the bottom third of the nation in a new measure of quality of life.

The nonprofit American Human Development project took United Nations methods for comparing the status of countries and used them to size up the states and individual congressional districts. Life expectancy, educational attainment and income data were used to take the pulse of the populace.

"It's an imperfect measure, but it does tell a lot about a big population group (such as a congressional district)," said Kristen Lewis, the study's co-author. "It's a way to start a conversation about how people are doing."

Northwest Indiana's 1st Congressional District, which covers all of Lake, Jasper, Newton and Benton counties and all but the northeast corner of Porter County, placed 285th out of the 436 congressional districts.

The report found region residents live nearly two years shorter than the national average, earn \$343 less a year and are nearly a third less likely to have a college degree. Put another way, Northwest Indiana offers a standard of life below what a majority of the nation had attained by 2000.

"It doesn't surprise me in the least," said Meg Haller, executive director of the Northwest Indiana Quality of Life Council.

The council uses similar data to produce an annual report on the societal well-being of Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties. Haller was surprised, however, to learn the new study suggests Northwest Indiana falls largely in line with the rest of the state.

Indiana ranks 33rd among states and Washington, D.C., compared with 14th for Illinois.

The study put Hoosier life expectancy at 76.9 years -- about six months better than Northwest Indiana but a year below the national average. Meanwhile, region residents earn about \$500 more than the median annual Indiana income of \$26,442.

"To me that says two things," Haller said. "One is we're not as extreme as we think we are. And, two, a lot of this must have to do with state policies, because if it was local differences that were causing disparities you would see it in these numbers."

On that front, Hoosiers have a choice this November. They can give Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels another four years to continue his efforts to improve the quality of life in Indiana or

replace him with Democrat Jill Long Thompson.

"This is just the latest statistic to come out to show that Indiana is not going in the right direction," Long Thompson spokesman Jason Tomcsi said of Indiana's 33rd place ranking. "We saw the largest unemployment jump in the nation last month. The job situation is crucial to quality of life."

Daniels spokeswoman Jane Jankowski said "the governor has made job creation his highest priority," and he plans to build on the 65,000 job commitments and \$15 billion in investment Indiana has secured since 2005. Daniels also has encouraged healthier living through his INShape Indiana program, and he pushed for a new health insurance program that has enrolled more than 18,000 low-income adults.

"With these programs and others, Governor Daniels wants to help Hoosiers live longer, better quality lives, collectively bring down health care costs and make Indiana more attractive to businesses," Jankowski said.

Tomcsi said Long Thompson's plans to seek health insurance pooling options for small business, invest in education and target job-creation incentives to struggling communities would do more to boost Indiana's collective well-being.