

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 27, 2009

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## **Southwestern Indiana forums focus on local government reform**

*Evansville and Jasper workshops to provide information, encourage conversations in full-day sessions*

EVANSVILLE, Ind.—Southwestern Indiana residents can learn about, discuss and help forge approaches to Indiana's local government reform initiatives in a pair of March workshops coming to Vanderburgh and Dubois counties, titled "Speaking locally: Southwestern Indiana discusses the structure of local government."

In 2007, the Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform, a bi-partisan panel appointed by Gov. Mitch Daniels, delivered 27 recommendations for redesigning local government in Indiana. The recommendations addressed a range of issues, from school consolidation and the structure of county governments to library services and the method for funding child welfare services. Some of the recommendations have been implemented or are under consideration at various levels of government, including the Indiana General Assembly.

On March 9 in Jasper and March 10 in Evansville, citizens will hear details and a variety of perspectives on these reform measures, as well as a historical perspective on local government in Indiana. They'll also have opportunities to engage in conversations with elected officials, office holders and advocates on all sides of the issues. In light of these workshops, MySmartgov, an organization advocating streamlined government, cancelled a Feb. 25 meeting in Evansville and is instead encouraging interested citizens to attend one or both of these events.

The full-day sessions are open to the public as part of four 2009 regional workshops developed by the Indiana Humanities Council and the Bowen Center for Public Affairs at Ball State University. There is no charge to attend the events; however, there will be a \$10 charge for lunch each day, and reservations are required. See attachment for details.

"Our goal is to expose citizens to information, background and points of view that will help them engage in the process of local government reform," said Linda Bennett, University of Southern Indiana provost and vice president of academic affairs. "These are vital conversations, with a lot at stake, and citizens need the opportunity to raise questions, discuss concerns and make their voices heard."

While the Jasper and Evansville workshops will be similar in structure, they will vary in content. The Jasper workshop will take a broad look at the historic and current perspectives of local government reform; in Evansville, discussions will focus on existing Vanderburgh County reform efforts.

Both days will begin with 8:30 a.m. (EST in Jasper and CST in Evansville) registration and feature morning, lunch and afternoon sessions, with content ranging from presentations, question-and-answer forums, small-group meetings and panel discussions. Each workshop will end at 3 p.m.

In Jasper, Indiana Chief Justice Randall Shepard, who co-chaired the Local Government Reform Commission with former Gov. Joe Kernan, will open the day with a discussion of the Commission and its recommendations. Gov. Kernan will offer a similar presentation at the Evansville session. At both workshops, Tony Wolfe, Gibson County Council President and past president of the Indiana County Council Association, will discuss why the existing local government structure should remain an option for communities that believe the checks and balances between state and local government should remain in place. Other speakers at one or both of the sessions will include leading Indiana historian Dr. James Madison and former Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson.

“As the Indiana General Assembly considers the various proposals from the Kernan-Shepard report, it is important for the general public to be well-educated on the issues related to local government reform,” said Steve Schaefer, vice president of public policy for the Chamber of Commerce of Southwest Indiana. “This forum will provide an interactive opportunity for citizens to hear both sides of the debate and develop an informed opinion on the issues being presented.”

“The area of government reform is new to citizens of Indiana and the rural areas of southern Indiana,” said Nancy Eckerle, executive director of the Jasper Chamber of Commerce. “This workshop is an attempt to educate the residents and provide information to them so they can gain more knowledge of the topic.”

The schedule and other details for each workshop are attached, along with additional information about the 2009 Regional Workshops. Local speakers are still being confirmed and will be publicized as details become available.

### **About the 2009 regional workshops**

The Jasper and Evansville workshops are being presented through a program offered by the Bowen Center for Public Affairs and the Indiana Humanities Council. Regions from across the state applied to host community workshops to discuss issues vital to their regions. Applications focused on one of four key areas: Green Agenda/Sustainability; Community/Economic Development; Arts and Culture as a Community Development Strategy; or Local Government Reform.

The Jasper and Evansville workshops are part one of the 2009 regional workshops. Other workshops will be held in Elkhart, Greensburg and Madison County.

Also participating in the workshops will be Bowen Center for Public Affairs Co-directors Sally Jo Vasicko and Ray Scheele and Indiana Humanities Council President Keira Amstutz.

After the workshops, the Bowen Center for Public Affairs will continue to help participating regions with access to resources and provide ongoing consultation. Several organizations already have joined the Bowen Center and Humanities Council in offering statewide expertise and resources:

- Indiana Chamber of Commerce
- Association of Indiana Counties
- Indiana Association of Cities and Towns
- Inside Indiana Business with Gerry Dick

Local partners for the Evansville and Jasper workshops include:

- Growth Alliance of Greater Evansville (GAGE)
- Chamber of Commerce of Southwest Indiana
- Leadership Evansville

- League of Women Voters of Southwest Indiana
- Evansville Courier and Press
- WNIN NPR Public TV and Radio
- Dubois County Daily Herald
- Jasper Chamber of Commerce
- Dubois County Area Development Corporation
- Grow Southwest Indiana

**About the Indiana Humanities Council**

The Indiana Humanities Council celebrates, encourages and facilitates the thinking that leads to innovation and action. As a convener, leader and partner, the Council supports the sharing of ideas, promotes the public humanities and engages Indiana's community of minds to examine and improve the human condition. Learn more at [www.indianahumanities.org](http://www.indianahumanities.org).

**About the Bowen Center for Public Affairs**

The Bowen Center for Public Affairs at Ball State University advances the ideals of civic literacy, community involvement, and public service exemplified by the career of Dr. Otis R. Bowen. The center leads the way in Indiana toward an energized citizenry and vital community life.

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ATTACHMENT:

**Speaking locally: Southwestern Indiana discusses the structure of local government**

**What:** Full-day public workshop on local government reform

**When:** March 9, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m., EST

**Where:** Lecture Hall in new classroom building, Vincennes University Jasper Campus, 850 College Avenue, Jasper

**Schedule:**

- 8:30 a.m.: Registration
- 9:00 a.m.: Welcome, introduction: Alan Johnson, dean of Vincennes University Jasper Campus  
History of Local Government: Dr. James Madison, Indiana University
- 9:45 a.m.: Perspectives on local government reform: Chief Justice Randall Shepard and Tony Wolfe, president of the Gibson County Council and past president of the Indiana County Council Association
- 11:15 a.m.: Case Study—Local Government Reform in Practice: Bart Peterson, Bowen Center for Public Affairs fellow and former mayor of Indianapolis
- Noon: Lunch/Services provided by local government panel discussion: Local township, city, county, town and school officials
- 1:30 p.m.: Roundtable breakout sessions: Imagining the future of local government from multiple perspectives
- 2:30 p.m.: Breakout session reports/wrap-up

**RSVP:** Required. Please register by **March 6** by contacting the Jasper Chamber of Commerce at 812.482.6866 or [chamber@jasperin.org](mailto:chamber@jasperin.org).

**Speaking locally: Southwestern Indiana discusses the structure of local government**

**What:** Full-day public workshop on local government reform

**When:** March 10, 8:30 a.m. – 3 p.m., CST

**Where:** Carter Hall, University of Southern Indiana, 8600 University Boulevard, Evansville

**Schedule:**

- 8:30 a.m.: Registration
- 9:00 a.m.: Welcome, introduction, history of government reform in Vanderburgh County: Mizell Stewart III, editor of the Evansville Courier & Press  
History of Local Government: Dr. James Madison, Indiana University
- 9:45 a.m.: Perspectives on local government reform: former Gov. Joe Kernan and Tony Wolfe, president of the Gibson County Council and past president of the Indiana County Council Association
- 11:30 a.m.: Lunch/Services provided by local government panel discussion: Local township, city and county officials
- 1:30 p.m.: Roundtable breakout sessions: Imagining the future of local government from multiple perspectives
- 2:30 p.m.: Breakout session reports/wrap-up

**RSVP:** Required. Please register by **March 6** by calling 812.464.1989 or 800.467.8600, faxing 812.465.7061, or e-mailing [extserv@usi.edu](mailto:extserv@usi.edu).