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FRIDAY, MAY 29, 2015

Hoping gay rights go away

Posted By David Hoppe on Fri, May 29, 2015 at 2:00 PM

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It'll go away.

Most children know this feeling. It usually comes on the heels of a major howler, a mess so big there's no hiding it but, hey, maybe no one will notice...

This appears to be the prevailing attitude of the Indiana Republican legislators who control something called the Legislative Council. The Legislative Council determines what issues to study over the summer in preparation for next year's legislative session. The formation of summer study committees can be a useful way of diving more deeply into business left over from the previous session.

Surely you remember what happened during the previous session of our state legislature? Four letters should suffice: RFRA.

But when Republicans decided which issues to study this summer, the mess created by the RFRA was not on the list.

Nothing to see here!



These, of course, are the same Republicans who went into the past legislative session thinking they were going to send a message to the rest of America. They wanted everyone to know that just because some judge said it was OK to let gays get married, that didn't make it right.

So Indiana passed a religious freedom law, allowing people to discriminate against gays as a matter of conscience.

Imagine their surprise when, instead of being embraced by a grateful nation, our Republicans' message was received like a slap in the face. Even the Republican mayor of Indianapolis seemed stricken by his colleagues' self-absorption. It had taken years, he said, to make the state's capitol a welcoming destination. Now conventions were threatening to go elsewhere.

Given all this, you'd think Republicans would want to use the summer for a little reflection. At the very least they might devote themselves to a study of What's Happening 101.

Better still, they might set about doing what virtually everyone — from the state's business leaders to Indiana's branch of the American Civil Liberties Union — is calling for and include LGBT people under the state's civil rights code.

Right now civil rights protections are afforded LGBT people in Indiana cities and towns that choose to pass nondiscrimination ordinances. That's fine if you live in Indianapolis or Ft. Wayne. Otherwise, you're out of luck.

Democrats wanted gay rights to be a summer study subject. They see that the only way to

clean up the RFRA mess is to cancel the damage by passing civil rights legislation protecting LGBT people on a statewide basis in 2016.

This should be easy. But as long as Indiana is effectively a one-party state, it's going to be hard. Too many Republicans still believe that LGBT people do not qualify as common citizens, entitled to the same protections as the rest of us. For these Republicans, serving gays is not a public obligation, but an altruistic act of generosity.

As long as Republicans felt they only needed to talk to themselves, this wasn't a problem. Then everybody else heard what they were saying and...kablooy.

That's why this summer they'll close their eyes and hope it goes away.

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