THE JOURNAL GAZETTE

PERSPECTIVE

EDITORIAL

SUV buys leave leaders' motives under scrutiny

Indiana lawmakers say the next two-year state budget will be tight due to ballooning Medicaid costs and other spending priorities. But that hasn't stopped Lt. Gov. Micah Beckwith and Secretary of State Diego Morales from using state funds to buy luxuriously appointed SUVs.

Morales drives a taxpayer-funded $90,000 GMC Yukon Denali he purchased last summer. Beckwith arrives at the Statehouse in a 2025 Chevy Tahoe High Country. The High Country is the top trim level of the SUV, costing taxpayers a bit less than $88,000.

Those untoward expenditures have brought new scrutiny from lawmakers, including a bill authored by Rep. Mitch Gore, an Indianapolis Democrat. His House Enrolled Act 1518, signed by Gov. Mike Braun Thursday, requires state entities to purchase non-luxury vehicles.



Beckwith



Morales

"You can't run on a platform of reining in government spending, wanting those cuts in Indiana being all about cutting property taxes and, as a result, public services, and ask people to do more with less, then also go and get yourself an SUV that's worth one and a half times the average Hoosier's salary," Gore told The Journal Gazette on Wednesday. "It's obscene."

Gore first noticed the Denali in the Statehouse parking lot last summer. He didn't know whose it was at first, but it irked him so much, he authored HEA 1518.

"I was up front with my friends in the majority about it," he said, referring to Republican legislators. "I told them the bill stems from a pet peeve: A couple of people out there have really nice SUVs, and they agreed that it was (expletive)."

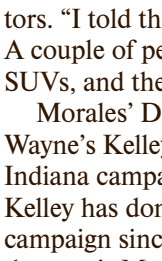
Morales' Denali was purchased from Fort Wayne's Kelley Automotive Group. According to Indiana campaign finance records, owner Tom Kelley has donated $65,000 to Morales' political campaign since October 2022. Kelley also sits on the state's Motor Vehicle Advisory Board, which advises Morales on matters related to the regulation of state auto dealers.

Kelley wasn't available for comment.

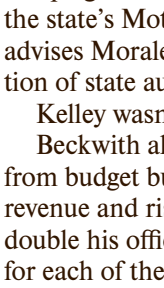
Beckwith also raised eyebrows for big requests from budget builders trying to navigate falling revenue and rising expenses. He asked to nearly double his office's budget to around $9.5 million for each of the next two years – mostly to support faith-based initiatives, the Indianapolis Star reported – even though Braun called on department heads to identify 5% in savings across state agencies.

The cost of the SUVs is small potatoes compared to a state budget that annually spends $51 billion. The issue for Beckwith and Morales, however, is their purchases could lead Hoosiers to believe they are more interested in enriching themselves than using office resources for the benefit of everyday Hoosiers.

"Is this really being a good steward of the state's resources, because we're in a situation in which we're not providing funding for lots of things that are of good social benefit?" asked Abe Schwab, director of graduate studies and a professor of philosophy at Purdue University Fort Wayne. "These purchases hint that they're not looking out for residents."



Schwab



Long Thompson

Indiana needs a stricter ethics policy and better management provisions, former Congresswoman Jill Long Thompson said, and voters need to press lawmakers for such assurances. She said Statehouse leaders should assign lawmakers to investigate reforms.

A good policy would minimize conflicts of interest and require public reporting of any potential conflicts, said Long Thompson, who taught ethics at Indiana University from 2015 to 2020. That policy should also include an enforcement mechanism independent of the General Assembly.

Ethics are essential to democracy. Without them, governments cannot build the trust necessary for people to work together on solutions to the challenges facing the state and nation. Morales and Beckwith are not setting a good example. In fact, their questionable expenditures are undermining confidence that they're working for the benefit of Hoosiers and not themselves.



Journal Gazette file photos

Elizabeth Lee plays the cello in the pedestrian walkway off Wayne Street during the 2022 Art This Way annual Art Crawl fundraiser. The event supports funding public art downtown.



Julia Meek works on a mural for Lutheran Life Villages along Pearl Street in 2022.

Art for OUR sake

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NANCY STEWART

Arts and creativity make us stronger – as individuals, families, communities and as a state. They are a backbone of innovation, prosperity, and thriving people and places.



Nancy Stewart is past chair of the Indiana Arts Commission and chair of Fort Wayne's Public Art Commission.

Arts and creativity are an economic engine in Indiana. They provide people with the foundation for creativity, equipping an innovative workforce, generating new ideas in every field and keeping Indiana globally competitive.

Arts and creativity strengthen economic health by creating jobs in multiple industries, driving tourism and providing opportunities for young people.

In Indiana the arts mean busi-

Art, Page 12A



The "Pillars of Hope and Justice" monument at Ewing and Main streets, recognizing a 1963 appearance in Fort Wayne by Martin Luther King Jr., is part of the city's Public Art Trail SoundWalk.

Lessons of the past

Holocaust remembrance vital part of better future

MEIR BARGERON AND MICHAEL THEISE

Yom HaShoah, also known Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, is a solemn occasion to honor the 6 million Jewish lives lost through systematic murder, and to reflect on the enduring impact of the Nazi era.

As the number of survivors grows fewer with each passing year, the urgency of preserving their stories becomes critical. In a time of rising antisemitism and historical distortion, Yom HaShoah serves as a powerful reminder that remembrance is not just an act of mourning but also a call to vigilance and action.





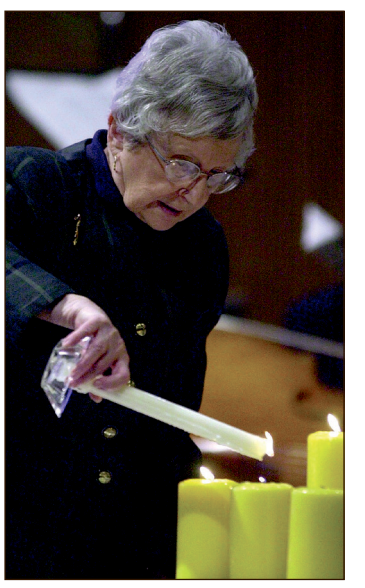
Rabbi **Meir Bargeron**. left, is rabbi and spiritual leader of Fort Wayne's Congregation Achduth Vesholom. **Michael Theise** is executive director of the Jewish Federation of Fort Wayne.

We believe very strongly that to ensure that nothing like the Holocaust can ever happen again, it is essential to keep the experiences and recollections of survivors alive by providing education and bringing awareness to important questions of our current age.

We must also strive always to be a tolerant community, willing to help those in need. Our efforts are to preserve memories, find beauty in humankind and educate throughout our larger community.

Recent examples of these

Lessons, Page 12A



Journal Gazette files

During a 2003 Yom HaShoah remembrance service at Congregation Achduth Vesholom in Fort Wayne, Holocaust survivor Vera Honig lights a candle.