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SPOTLIGHT

GUEST COMMENTARY: Defining good government

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The Ethics Cycle



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Everyone wants good government. I think that means effective, efficient and



Effective Government. We want our roads free of potholes, snow removed promptly, parks maintained, water and sewer delivered on demand, and of course, reliable garbage collection. Sometimes people don't appreciate how important local government is to their quality of life.

Efficient Government. Of course, we want all these services and more provided at the lowest possible cost. No one likes taxes, but we need to remind ourselves that quality service requires adequate financial resources. By and large, Northwest Indiana residents are getting a good product for a reasonable price.

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Ethical Government. Many times, this third leg of good government gets overlooked — except when some sort of scandal reaches media attention. But ethics are an essential element of quality government all the time. Where does Northwest Indiana stand on this vital component of good government?

The 23 local governments that have joined the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission (SEAC) have taken important first steps. They have approved SEAC's Code of Shared Ethics and Values. They have provided employees for SEAC to prepare as ethics trainers and have scheduled employee ethics training.

But this is only the beginning. To complete the circle that results in full ethical government, public employees need a reporting procedure along with whistleblower protection.

Many communities rely on their human resources department to provide this oversight. A few of our communities have gone further, creating an independent group of citizens to review complaints and recommend appropriate corrective action.

These steps are good, but thorough investigation, followed by appropriate action, is best done by a professional, independent, full-time staff.

SEAC has suggested that the state legislature create strong whistleblower protection for local public employees and grant counties the option to create county-wide inspectors general. To-date, the legislators we have talked to have not been convinced that such an action is needed. We urge voters to express their support for this idea.

The graphic accompanying this column, created by former SEAC Commissioner Julie McElmurry, demonstrates how a complete commitment to ethical government would work.

Northwest Indiana is not there yet, but SEAC is committed to working to complete the circle.

Michigan City

All of us at SEAC are proud to welcome Michigan City as our newest member. Mayor Angie Nelson Deutch and the City Council have indicated their strong support for ethics in government. We look forward to their active participation.

Calvin Bellamy, a lifelong resident of Northwest Indiana, has been an active SEAC commissioner for over 20 years.