

## 2014 Public Eye Staff Picks

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### BEST GROUP STOPPING POLITICIANS FROM DOING STUPID THINGS

One of the reasons City Council ultimately kept the Cincinnati streetcar project going was **Believe in Cincinnati**. The scrappy group, formed within a month of the November election, quickly put together an impressive coalition of residents and businesses that local officials simply could not ignore. The group gained a lot of traction after hundreds of members showed up at a town hall meeting then council chambers to show their support for the streetcar project. After that, it's no surprise Vice Mayor David Mann, Councilman Kevin Flynn and Councilman P.G. Sittenfeld felt the need to switch to "yes" votes to save the project. [believeincincy.com](#).

### BEST NEGLECTED ISSUE

Even though 2013 focused largely on the streetcar project and parking plan, there's another bigger issue facing Cincinnati: **poverty**. In the past year, the Children's Defense Fund of Ohio ranked Cincinnati No. 2 for child poverty after U.S. Census Bureau data revealed more than half of the city's children live in poverty. Ouch. Yet the issue seems to get very little mention from local officials, who would seemingly prefer to wrangle about the budget, pension, streetcar and parking.

### BEST ATTEMPT AT MASKING ANOTHER URBAN SPRAWL PROJECT

Looking at the **Eastern Corridor**, it's pretty obvious that it's another lame attempt by county and state officials to expand the local highway system that divided the city and obliterated neighborhoods on the West Side. But never fear! In the most obvious focus-grouped attempt to build support from progressives, local leaders attached a half-

assed rail line (called Oasis) to the project. It doesn't seem like many people are falling for it, though; Cincinnatians for Progress, which strongly supports the streetcar project, says the Eastern Corridor is a bad idea. [cincy4progress.org](http://cincy4progress.org).

#### BEST ISSUE PEOPLE ONLY ACT LIKE THEY CARE ABOUT

Let's be real here: No one really cares that much about what the city plans to do with its **parking meters**, lots and garages. Seriously, guys. We all know there are much more important issues (see: poverty). Of course, that hasn't stopped the public, local leaders and media outlets from obsessing over the issue — first when former Mayor Mark Mallory's administration suggested privatization and then when Mayor John Cranley proposed a plan to hike rates and hours. The issue deserves some attention, but nonstop coverage for months on end is definitely overdoing it. It's time to make a decision and move on.

#### BEST ENDORSEMENT OF A CANDIDATE DESPITE COMPLETELY DISAGREEING WITH HIM ON MAJOR ELECTION ISSUES

It's hard to imagine a scenario in which *The Cincinnati Enquirer* doesn't regret its endorsement of John Cranley. Even though *The Enquirer* supported the parking privatization plan and the streetcar project, even when its end seemed near, the newspaper endorsed the one mayoral candidate who stood in opposition to *The Enquirer* — and opponent Roxanne Qualls — on the two big election issues. The bizarre endorsement got stranger after Cranley won the election and *The Enquirer* ran multiple editorials asking the mayor to break his two major election promises.

#### BEST REASON TO GET OUT THE VOTE

Whether one supports him or not, it's pretty clear **Mayor John Cranley's** electoral victory in 2013 was largely driven by low voter turnout. The situation later inspired some streetcar supporters to admit they didn't vote because they didn't think Cranley would really try to cancel the streetcar project. Well, he did. And if anything is to be learned here, it's that voting is really important — even in city elections that can seem trivial and difficult to follow.

#### BEST REASON TO STOP WATCHING CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

Councilman **Christopher Smitherman** is known to say something offensive and ignorant every once in a while. Just listen to him try to freak people out about the city's crime rate and how hooligans apparently dominate our streets, sell drugs and shoot people. Even though some of Smitherman's concerns about public safety are legitimate, there's surely a better way to get the message out than scaremongering. Either way, Smitherman's rants and attitude surely aren't helping CitiCable's ratings or public attendance at council meetings. [cincinnati-oh.gov/citicable](http://cincinnati-oh.gov/citicable).

#### BEST LOCAL POLITICIANS ACTUALLY TRYING TO DO SOMETHING POSITIVE

Even though Cincinnati can seem pretty slow-moving at times, some local officials actually try to shine a positive light on the city. Council Members **P.G. Sittenfeld**, **Chris Seelbach** and **Yvette Simpson** shine that positive attention brightly by actually trying to enact policies that help people, including greater collaboration between the city and schools, more job training programs and more job and education opportunities for the city's youth. It's a great reminder that electing younger, savvier people to local office can do a lot to help an often-stagnant city government.

#### BEST REPUBLICAN-STYLE OBSTRUCTIONISM

Republicans on the **Hamilton County Board of Commissioners** whipped up their best impression of anti-Obamacare Republicans on the national level when they decided to block a federally mandated, \$3.2 billion, 15-20 year sewer project until the city repeals its “responsible bidder” law. For those not into jargon, all responsible bidder does is force Metropolitan Sewer District contractors to pay for extra job training programs. Yeah, so criminal. Maybe county commissioners should focus on finally fixing the chronically broken stadium fund instead of ruining job opportunities for a city mired in poverty. [hamiltoncountyohio.gov](http://hamiltoncountyohio.gov).



Photo: Jesse Fox

#### BEST IMMORTAL ISSUE

If Cincinnati learned anything in 2013, it's that seemingly nothing kills the **Cincinnati streetcar** — not even a new mayor and City Council majority. Even though the local election cycle largely focused on the streetcar project and anti-streetcar candidates actually won, pro-streetcar forces rallied and successfully kept the project on track after two reviews showed it would cost nearly as much money to cancel the project than to complete it. The issue, of course, won't end there. Even as tracks are laid down and people inevitably begin to ride the streetcar, expect politicians and talk show hosts to continue whining about it until the reality — the project won't bankrupt the city and might actually help bring in more revenue — fully sinks in. [cincinnati-oh.gov/streetcar](http://cincinnati-oh.gov/streetcar).

#### BEST CONSERVATIVE GROUP THAT DOESN'T REALIZE IT'S COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT

A couple weeks before City Council decided to continue the streetcar project, the **Coalition Opposed to Additional Spending and Taxes (COAST)** held a “Christmas party” in which it bashed a piñata that looked like a streetcar. In retrospect, the event is a wonderful example of how irrelevant conservative groups like COAST are in today's local political landscape. Of course, the turn of events should come as little surprise, considering COAST's Twitter feed is often filled with ludicrous ramblings about how the streetcar is like 9/11 and repulsive jabs at a reporter after news broke that he died. Do whatever you want, fellas. No one is listening anymore. @gocoast; [coast-usa.blogspot.com](http://coast-usa.blogspot.com).

#### BEST MUSICAL TV ANCHOR

After a video went viral, everyone knows Local 12 weatherman **Bob Herzog** as one of the most musical TV anchors in the country. It makes sense; Herzog's parody of a song from the Disney movie *Frozen* not only served a nice message — get off the snowy, icy streets, people! — but it also provided a welcome break from the sensationalist news items featured on TV news stations around the nation.

#### BEST DEVELOPMENT IN OUR SCHOOLS

Cincinnati Public Schools have turned into a local treasure in the past few years with the school district's nationally recognized development of **CPS Community Learning Centers**. The model essentially turns schools into hubs of community resources, typically including more medical services, tutoring and college preparation to make up for the lack of resources in impoverished households and neighborhoods. So far, it's going so well that New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio says he wants to take the model to the biggest city in the country. [cincinnati.clc.org](http://cincinnati.clc.org).

#### BEST REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Republicans often claim they oppose the redistribution of wealth, but that's not actually true. They just want the redistribution of wealth to go upward, toward the very wealthy. **Ohio Republicans** showed their real tendencies last year when they passed a state budget that cuts income taxes across the board, which disproportionately benefits the top 1 percent, and hiked the sales tax, which disproportionately hits the bottom 20 percent. [ohiogop.org](http://ohiogop.org).

#### BEST ATTEMPT AT BLOCKING WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Republicans also used the state budget to impose new restrictions on abortion clinics and effectively defund organizations that provide abortions, like **Planned Parenthood**. With abortion clinics rapidly closing across the state, the Cincinnati area now faces the very real possibility that it could become the largest metropolitan area in the country without an abortion clinic. [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org).

#### BEST FAILED ATTEMPT TO KEEP SEX OUT OF SCHOOLS

Before the state budget passed, the phrase "**gateway sexual activity**" temporarily entered our political discourse after Republican legislators in the Ohio House tried to impose restrictions on comprehensive sex education in public schools. But the proposed budget amendment was quickly dropped after national media outlets picked up the story and mocked Republicans' prudishness. It's unclear if Republicans plan to reintroduce legislation regarding sex education again anytime soon, but they probably want to look at some actual research and use less ridiculous phrasing next time the issue comes to the House floor.

#### BEST BIGGEST POLITICAL SURPRISE

When *CityBeat* participated in the City Council candidates forum last October, we didn't expect any surprises. Leave it to **Mike Moroski** to exceed our expectations. Moroski, who didn't win the election but remains active in local politics, was one of the few candidates with fresh, substantive ideas for fixing problems such as crime, poverty and jobs. It was a welcome change from the repetitive, vague rhetoric about the streetcar, parking plan and budget most council victors trumpeted throughout the campaign trail. Good luck in 2017, Moroski. [mikemoroski.com](http://mikemoroski.com).

#### BEST EXCUSE TO STOP SUPPORTING THE BENGALS

Love them or hate them, it's easy to understand why some people believe the **Cincinnati Bengals** are run by a bunch of greedy losers. Even though the Bengals' stadium has turned into a financial sinkhole for Hamilton County, the franchise that once managed a decades' worth of nearly unmatched futility wants the county to fork over another \$10 million for a modernized scoreboard. Unfortunately, it seems the county is required to oblige because of terms set in the old stadium lease in the 1990s. At least they have A.J. Green now and can actually win games (in the regular season). [bengals.com](http://bengals.com).

#### BEST ATTEMPTS TO DIRTY UP ELECTIONS

Ohio Republicans have gotten really good at that whole election rigging thing in the past few years, passing numerous law that reduce early voting periods, restrict counties' abilities to reach out to voters and impose new burdens on minor political parties that could threaten them in elections. Unfortunately, the ongoing backlash to such **voter suppression** efforts doesn't seem to be slowing down Republican efforts. Most recently, Secretary of State Jon Husted decided to do away with early voting on Sundays as well.

#### BEST TOTAL LACK OF RESPECT FOR A DYING HUMAN BEING

Even the loss of human life can't get conservatives to stop hating on gay people. After a federal court ruled that Ohio must recognize **same-sex marriages** from other states on death certificates, state officials decided to appeal the ruling — even though one of the two married men who originally raised the issue is now dead. Cold. Fortunately, it doesn't seem like the world is letting conservative ideals about marriage hold everyone down; following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to repeal the federal Defense of Marriage Act, courts hand out pro-LGBT decisions on what seems like a weekly basis. Information and petitions available at [marriageequalityohio.org](http://marriageequalityohio.org).

#### BEST PERSON WE HOPE REPLACES JOHN KASICH AS GOVERNOR

**Ed FitzGerald** came out as a rising star in Ohio politics last year with his announced bid as the Democratic candidate for governor. The news could not have come at a better time. With the state economy stagnating and Gov. John Kasich's budget cutting taxes in favor of the wealthy and restricting access to women's health services, Ohio clearly needs a more progressive-minded leader to undo at least some of the damage inflicted by the Republicans currently in charge. [edfitzgeraldforohio.com](http://edfitzgeraldforohio.com).

#### BEST PEOPLE WHO PRACTICALLY WRITE STORIES THE MEDIA SHOULD GIVE MORE ATTENTION TO

**Policy Matters Ohio** releases the best, most readable policy reports in the state, practically writing reporters' stories for them with interesting facts and comparisons. Sure, the group leans left. But real data and numbers always back Policy Matters' analyses. And hey, they can't help it if reality keeps a liberal bias. [policymatters.org](http://policymatters.org).

#### BEST VICTORY FOR THE WEALTHY

After years of bullying the Anna Louise Inn in court, **Western & Southern** finally triumphed over the Inn and got owner Cincinnati Union Bethel to agree to move. Nevermind that the Anna Louise Inn opened at its Lytle Park location in 1909. Nevermind that the Inn provides services to struggling women who need help the most. Western & Southern wanted the property to mold the neighborhood into its business-minded vision, and obviously the financial giant's needs trump what everyone else wants. [cinunionbethel.org](http://cinunionbethel.org).

#### BEST REFUSAL TO ADAPT TO THE MODERN WORLD

Following former **Hamilton County Sheriff Simon Leis'** leave, the new sheriff, Democrat Jim Neil, released a blistering audit that found the agency was "largely frozen in time" during Republican Leis' rule. As one example, the Oct. 15 audit found the sheriff's office still uses what it calls "The Book," a single, massive paper-based trove of financial data and other information, over modern technologies, such as computer spreadsheets. Leis already acted like an old prude with his policies against art and pornography, so the fact his dinosaur act applied to technology comes as little surprise. But it sure feels good knowing Leis is gone and the new sheriff can work to improve the situation. [hcsso.org](http://hcsso.org).

#### BEST REASON TO TEMPORARILY REGRET BEING A LIBERAL

When **Obamacare's** online marketplaces opened at [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov), the website was by all measures a complete disaster. It was riddled with glitches and errors, and almost no one could sign up. Since then, President Barack Obama's administration managed to get its shit together and fix the website. But the fixes only came after the media and conservatives spent months mocking liberals for providing yet another example of something the government can't do without serious problems. To this day, [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov) isn't keeping up with the federal government's demographic and total enrollment projections — a problem many experts blame on the initial errors. [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov).

#### BEST ATTEMPT TO REFUSE FREE MONEY FROM THE FEDS

Despite Gov. John Kasich's pleas to take up the federally funded **Medicaid expansion**, Republican legislators simply refused. The Ohio GOP's refusal came despite reports from the Health Policy Institute of Ohio that found the Medicaid expansion would actually save the state money while simultaneously providing insurance to hundreds of thousands of Ohioans. In a strangely forceful act for a Republican, Kasich got the Medicaid expansion in the end, but only because he bypassed the legislature through a little-known legislative panel called the Controlling Board. [medicaid.gov](http://medicaid.gov).

#### BEST SHOW OF BIPARTISANSHIP THAT'S REALLY QUITE DUMB

Mayor John Cranley reached a little too far across the aisle when he appointed Councilman Charlie Winburn to head the **Budget and Finance Committee**, the most powerful committee on City Council. So far, Winburn's "leadership" has been made up of faux scandals and other cries for help. In December, Winburn tried to make a meme out of a scandal he called "saltgate" when he discovered a large "secret" stash of road salt. (It turns out the city administration bought the salt for later use when it was cheap, which ended up looking like a very good idea after the city ran out of road salt during the unusually brutal winter.) Then in February, Winburn tried to call out the city administration for "secretly" decertifying a flood levy around the Lunken Airport, which forced nearby residents to buy flood insurance. (It turns out Winburn in 2010 actually voted for the city map that enabled the decertification — a vote he now claims he forgot about.) Maybe it's time to focus on budget issues, Charlie.

#### BEST REASON TO NOT GIVE UP ON LOCAL MEDIA (NO. 1)

***The Cincinnati Business Courier*** did an excellent job covering the streetcar project and local politics last year by actually bringing the facts and asking tough questions instead of carelessly buying talking points from Mayor John Cranley and other truth-troubled local officials. It's a welcome breakaway from other media outlets that tend to focus on pandering to suburban audiences at the cost of legitimate reporting and substantive news. Our only request to *The Business Courier*: Please stop stealing our reporters and editors. [bizjournals.com/cincinnati](http://bizjournals.com/cincinnati).

#### BEST REASON TO NOT GIVE UP ON LOCAL MEDIA (no. 2)

Transit-focused blog **UrbanCincy** proved a great resource for local news in the past year, with storytelling charts and in-depth reporting shining light on issues that otherwise go ignored in local media. Its transit and infrastructure experts write with depth on issues difficult for non-beat writers to regularly cover. The best part is *UrbanCincy* provides all its content for free on its slick website, showing once again that good reporting doesn't need paywalls. [urbancincy.com](http://urbancincy.com).

#### BEST LAST-MINUTE SAVE

If it wasn't for the Haile Foundation's **Eric Avner**, Cincinnati might have lost the streetcar project. But Avner managed to guarantee \$9 million to cover the streetcar's operating costs over the next 10 years, providing Councilman Kevin Flynn the political cover necessary to go back to supporting the streetcar project. With Flynn's support, council obtained the six votes necessary to overrule the mayor's veto threats and restart the project. [haileusb.org](http://haileusb.org).

#### BEST MILLIONTH REASON TO STOP LISTENING TO TALK RADIO

It's legitimate to wonder whether talk radio hosts actually believe the words that come out of their mouths, considering they often defy reason and even facts. But local talk radio hosts outdid themselves in the past year when they continued their vitriolic rhetoric against the streetcar project even after it became clear that canceling the transit project would cost tens of millions of dollars. Even worse, the same talk radio hosts often get council members, including **Amy Murray** and **Christopher Smitherman**, to join them in bashing the twice voter-approved project.

#### BEST NEGLECTED LOCAL TREASURE

Despite clear guidelines set by a trust and courts, the University of Cincinnati and its lessees seem ready to do everything in their power to resist renovations at the **Emery Theatre**. The latest problems occurred when UC and its subsidiaries evicted the Requiem Project, the group in charge of renovations, with little explanation. The battle to save a local treasure — one of the few theaters considered "acoustically pure" — now appears stalled in court, even though UC asked the city to take the theater off the university's hands so it could avoid the ongoing controversy. [emerytheatre.com](http://emerytheatre.com).

#### BEST REASON TO CONTINUE DESPISING THE TEA PARTY

In the continuation of its anti-tax crusade, the tea party last year decided to target **Kentucky's library system**. At the heart of the issue is whether the library can unilaterally raise taxes to fund services, which supporters say is possible because of a state law that gives extra powers to "special taxing districts" like the library. If the tea party succeeds, nearly two-thirds of Kentucky's public libraries would need to make cuts — a prospect that only the anti-government tea party seemingly desires.

#### BEST REASON NOT TO BUY A BIKE

Cincinnati leaders hope to get a **bike-share program** installed in Over-the-Rhine and downtown this summer. The program would offer a variety of stations where residents can rent out bicycles and make quick trips around the city. With the idea already successful in other cities, there's little reason to doubt the concept. It would surely provide another affordable mobility option for anyone who wants to make a quick stop at the grocery store or one of Over-the-Rhine's amazing restaurants without paying for expensive, limited parking. [cincinnati-oh.gov/bikes](http://cincinnati-oh.gov/bikes).

#### BEST REDHEADED RETURN

After 14 years as co-anchor of the Fox 19 morning news, **Sheila Gray** left the station — and the city — after her contract expired to be a special correspondent in Dayton for Sinclair Broadcasting. But good news for Gray fans: She's back in the Queen City and on as early as ever. Catch Gray mornings starting at 4:30 a.m. as co-anchor of *Good Morning Cincinnati* on WKRC with John Lomax. And for a double-dose of the feisty redhead, turn to WSTR at 7 a.m. to see her say good morning to Cincinnati again with Bob Herzog. [local12.com](http://local12.com).

#### BEST ATTEMPT AT MASKING DISDAIN FOR POOR PEOPLE

Opponents of the **permanent supportive housing project** in Avondale insist they don't hate the poor or the homeless. Of course, their claims are often followed up with comments about how they don't want "those people" in the neighborhood because taking them in would supposedly increase crime. Nevermind that a study in Columbus found areas with permanent supportive housing facilities see the same or lower crime increases as demographically comparable areas; critics of the Avondale facility have a not-in-my-backyard attitude to perpetuate.