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BODY:

Carl Brizzi may be Marion County's top prosecutor, but he's personally handled few cases at trial in his six years in office.

However, he'll be back inside a courtroom with two deputies next week. You probably won't be surprised to learn it's one of the highest-profile cases from last year: the near-fatal wounding of Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department officer Jason Fishburn.

Shots hit Fishburn in the head and on his protective vest July 10 as he was chasing homicide suspect Brian Reese on Indianapolis' Eastside.

Brizzi says he's following up on a promise.

"When I was in the hospital with Jason and his family," Brizzi said, "I told his dad I would try the case."

Veteran homicide prosecutors Denise Robinson and Mark Hollingsworth will join Brizzi at the prosecution table March 16. The trio will try to win convictions against Reese, 37, on counts of attempted murder, resisting law enforcement and a handgun charge.

The last time Brizzi tried a case, prosecutors won a conviction in December 2005 against Ty Evans for trying to kill a police informant who was wearing a wiretap. During Brizzi's closing argument, Evans jumped from his seat and angrily denied that had he attempted to strangle the informant.

"I'm always nervous for a trial, but we've worked hard on it," Brizzi said of the Reese case.

This time, the courtroom will have plenty of familiarity. Judge Lisa Borges was Brizzi's chief of staff through 2006.

But Brizzi noted that Borges once was his superior back when he was a lowly deputy prosecutor. Other sitting judges also have worked in leadership positions at the prosecutor's office earlier in their careers.

Liberated from influence

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City-County Council member Ed Coleman found last week that it's lonely being a party of one.

After he switched from the Republican Party to the Libertarians last month, the GOP leadership stripped him of his council committee positions Monday. Coleman had said he thought the Republicans were playing the same power games to suppress dissenting views that they used to criticize Democrats when that party controlled the council.

Barbara Malone replaced Coleman on the Rules and Public Policy Committee, and Ryan Vaughn took his place on the Economic Development Committee.

Coleman and the Libertarians were outraged.

"The committee rules aren't set up in a way to recognize three parties," said Tim Maguire, the county Libertarian chairman. "But we're here to stay, and they better get used to it."

Coleman said the changes were proof of the partisan politics that led him to leave the party in the first place.

Others seemed amused that he didn't expect retribution.

Bob Cockrum, the council president, said he knew Coleman was unhappy. But Cockrum said he needed to ensure GOP control of those committees. With Coleman's vote in the air, he could swing the majority and effectively control the committee.

"When you stray, you have to take the results," Cockrum told the Republican caucus. "It's a no-win situation. People who helped him campaign feel betrayed, too."

Other Republicans asked Cockrum whether Coleman would vote with the Democrats.

"I called (Minority Leader) Joanne (Sanders)," Cockrum said. "She said, 'He's not my minority.' "

Clock-watchers in the House

House Republicans want Democrats to see the handwriting on the wall. Literally.

Last week, they positioned a projector outside the Republican entrance to the House chamber, shining onto a Statehouse wall a giant countdown clock, ticking down the minutes to the session's end on April 29.

That, said House Minority Leader Brian Bosma, R-Indianapolis, is how long the House Democrats have to allow a second required vote on a constitutional amendment to permanently cap property taxes.

Those caps, which limit a homeowner's bill to 1 percent of assessed valuation -- with rental property capped at 2 percent and business property at 3 percent -- are already the law in Indiana. The proposed amendment was passed last year by the House and Senate, but it must be voted on once more to clear the way for voters to have the final say.

The Senate already took its second vote earlier this year.

Bosma said the clock, which is also ticking away on the House Republican Web site, is like the clock in a basketball game, and that time is running out.

"It must be acted on this session," Bosma insisted. Except -- once that clock ticks down to zero, guess what happens?

Nothing.

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The legislature has until the end of the 2010 session to give its final stamp of approval to the amendment. And no matter what happens in this session, the earliest voters could give the final OK is November 2010.

House Speaker B. Patrick Bauer, D-South Bend, has said the state should wait and see the impact of the tax caps before enshrining them in the state constitution.

Bosma, though, said homeowners need certainty, and that delaying only gives time for a legal challenge to the varying tax caps that could derail them.

"It must be done now," he said.

Compiled from reports by Star reporters Jon Murray, Brendan O'Shaughnessy and Mary Beth Schneider.

The office of state Sen. Brent Steele, R-Bedford, sent out a photo Friday, the day after Miss America Katie Stam visited the Statehouse. The photo accompanied a news release noting Steele co-sponsored a resolution to honor Stam, a Hoosier. But soon afterward, his staff sent a second picture, saying the wrong one was sent out the first time. Can you tell which is which?

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