

*"It really has been a wonderful example of different people from all different situations taking the gifts they have and pooling them."*

Indiana first lady Judy O'Bannon

# Eastern European orphan gets a 2nd chance at life

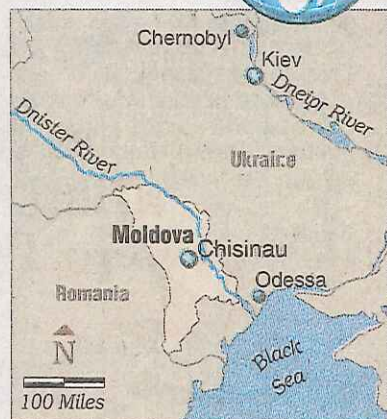


Staff Photo / Rob Goebel

**Overseas guest:** Natalia Vasilita was born in Moldova with a hole in her heart and intestinal abnormalities. She caught first lady Judy O'Bannon's eye when O'Bannon visited Moldova with physicians from Fort Wayne's Parkview Hospital. When O'Bannon spoke at the dedication of the St. Vincent children's hospital, someone asked whether any Moldovan children needed life-saving surgery. She immediately thought of Natalia.

## Poverty rate high in Natalia's homeland

Indiana first lady Judy O'Bannon helped bring 4-year-old Natalia Vasilita to Indianapolis for surgery to correct her heart defect. Doctors were unable to perform the operation in Natalia's homeland, Moldova, a small, poor country in Eastern Europe.



### Moldova at a glance:

**Population:** 4.4 million  
**Population below poverty line:** 75% (1999 est.)

**Government type:** Republic

Source: CIA: *The World Factbook*

Staff Map / John Bigelow

## Judy O'Bannon, doctors from Fort Wayne and Indianapolis collaborate to save 4-year-old.

By Celeste Williams  
STAFF WRITER

Natalia was deathly blue. From her fingertips to her toes, she was blue from a lack of oxygen caused by a hole in her heart.

Yet the sickness the color represented never reached the 4-year-old's spirit. She loved life even when she could barely walk and her shallow breaths could not blow out a candle. And she loves it still, after surgery has given her belly laughs and pink toes.

Three weeks ago, Natalia Vasilita was flown from her home—an orphanage in the Eastern European country of Moldova—to St. Vincent Hospital in Indianapolis to have her heart repaired.

Natalia is one of 25 foreign children flown in each year by St. Vincent from countries where delicate surgery they need is not possible. Through its Children's International Heart Program, hospital officials work with charitable organizations to locate children and arrange the trips, said Sister Sharon Richardt, who directs the St. Vincent charity care program.

Since the program started last year with a \$750,000 budget, about two dozen children have



**Dr. Minodora Dragneva, who came to Indiana with Natalia, said the girl needs an adoptive family as well as medical care.**

come from Mongolia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Honduras and Moldova for surgery. Natalia was an unusual case, in part because of the intercession of Judy O'Bannon, wife of Gov. Frank O'Bannon.

Also, Richardt said, most cases that are accepted by the hospital can be corrected in one operation. Natalia is scheduled for more surgery this week at St. Vincent to correct another birth defect. After that, she'll go back to Moldova, but likely will return for still more surgery.

V. Simon Abraham, the pediatric cardiovascular surgeon who performed Natalia's operation along with Sanjay Parikh, said while successful surgery is satisfying, "the reality is, thousands,

See ORPHAN Page 7

## INDIANA'S FISCAL CRISIS

# Budget being mishandled, study says

■ Analysis of spending suggests legislature and O'Bannon have relied on 'gimmicks,' not restraint.

By Kevin Corcoran  
STAFF WRITER



The liberal think tank, which studied states' strategies, says Gov. Frank

O'Bannon (above) and the legislature have done little to remedy Indiana's problems.

Gov. Frank O'Bannon has repeatedly blamed the state's poor financial condition on an ailing economy.

"We've been fortunate in the past decade to be able to say 'yes' to a lot of projects that benefited our state," O'Bannon said Monday. "But we're on a different course in different economic times now."

Yet there's more to the story than he is letting on, according to a new national study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal, Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

Years of outsized state spending under O'Bannon and a politically divided legislature—including a series of tax cuts that weren't properly planned for—laid the groundwork for the current budgetary despair.

"If a budget is a fiscal roadmap," the budget center concluded, "Indi-

ana appears to have charted a course directly toward a financial crisis.

"Other than delaying and adjusting a previous tax cut that had ballooned in cost, the 2001 General Assembly took no actions to remedy the state's long-range fiscal problems."

Instead of slowing spending this year to keep in line with decreased revenue, O'Bannon proposed using gambling revenue to temporarily shore up the budget in hopes the downturn would be short. Lawmakers went along and tossed in a variety of their own budgeting "gim-

See BUDGET Page 5

# Revenue falls again; O'Bannon makes cuts

By Kevin Corcoran  
STAFF WRITER

Amid further revenue losses, Gov. Frank O'Bannon on Monday unveiled new plans to save at least \$2 million through a "strategic freeze" in state hiring and cutting expenses for employee travel by half.

Flanked by state budget analysts, O'Bannon also reiterated the administration's 2-month-old policy of approving only necessary state construction, which could mean delaying as much as \$167 million worth of projects.

The governor announced these minor cuts after reporting tax collections in August fell \$41.3 million short of projections. The August revenue shortfall—coupled with July's \$83.2 million shortfall—offers the clearest indication yet the economy won't recover in time to spare the O'Bannon administration from making far tougher choices in coming months.

The August revenue shortfall means that one of every \$15 the state had counted on collecting in sales, income and other taxes failed to flow into state coffers.

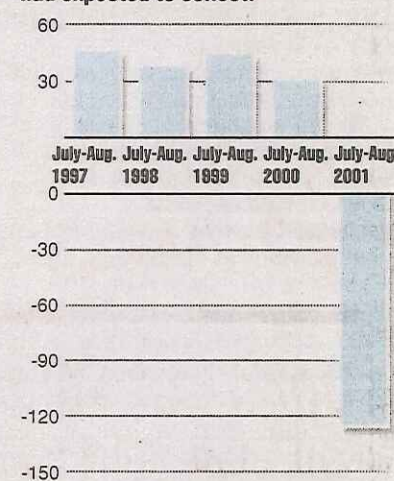
Collections of all major taxes fell short, putting the state a total of \$124.5 million behind what it had expected to collect in the first two months of the budget year. That money would be more than enough to cover the cost of full-day kindergarten for a year.

State revenue collections also are running nearly 4 percent behind the same two-month period last year. In 2000, Indiana collected about \$1.30 billion during July and August; this year, the state col-

## State revenue takes a tumble

Total tax collections for each July and August over the past five years have been declining. The state used to take in more money than projected but now collects far less than expected.

Differences in what actually was collected vs. what officials had expected to collect:



Source: State Budget Agency

Staff Graphic / John Bigelow

lected \$1.25 billion over that same period.

In all, O'Bannon said, tax collections have failed to meet expectations in nine of the past 14 months. And each missed revenue goal only worsens the state's nearly \$600 million budget deficit.

"There's little reason to think we're going to recover any time soon," O'Bannon said.

Contact Kevin Corcoran at 1-317-615-2384 or via e-mail at kevin.corcoran@indystar.com

# ORPHAN

Continued from Page 1

probably hundreds of thousands of children are in need" around the world who will not get access to care.

Moldova, a country of 4.4 million people, is located between Romania and Ukraine. It suffers from the sicknesses of years of war and cold war. In many ways, the country typifies problems that have plagued Eastern Europe in the decade after the fall of the Soviet Union: poverty and ethnic and economic strife.

Taken by her parents to the orphanage when she was 2, Natalia could only be made comfortable by physicians there. Their antiquated medical system could neither repair her heart nor correct the defects in her intestine. Her parents both have since died.

Natalia came to Indianapolis in the arms of the orphanage's pediatrician, Dr. Minodora Dragneva.

Dragneva, impressed with the U.S. medical system, said Natalia was the beneficiary of a conver-

gence of hearts, wallets, medicine and good will. And O'Bannon.

The governor's wife visited the orphanage in April with physicians from Fort Wayne's Parkview Hospital. The doctors assist clinics and orphanages there with medical expertise, equipment and medicines. O'Bannon said the experience was still fresh when she gave a speech at the May opening of St. Vincent's children's hospital.

After the speech, someone asked O'Bannon if there were any Moldovan children in need of surgery. O'Bannon said she immediately thought of Natalia.

O'Bannon and the Fort Wayne doctors took a second trip to Moldova in June, where Natalia was examined. Soon, doctors from St. Vincent, Fort Wayne and Moldova concurred on what the child's problems were and that only surgery that could be done in America could correct them.

That was the first hurdle. The red tape was a tangle. "For many of these children, the surgery they need is not complicated," said St. Vincent's, Richardt. "Getting them



**"She awes and amazes people," Indiana first lady Judy O'Bannon said of little Natalia Vasilita. "I am awed and amazed."**

here is complicated."

O'Bannon said the level of cooperation in Indiana, though, was remarkable. The hospitals, known for competition, worked together as never before, she said. "It really has been a wonderful example of different people from all different situations taking the gifts they have and pooling them for a cause."

A week after the Aug. 24 heart surgery, the bright-eyed girl with a cap of short, blonde hair toddles around in her new sneakers and twirls around in a red frock, thrilled to be the center of attention.

Natalia and her doctor are staying at the home of Victor Kubik, the

Indianapolis head of LifeNets International, a charitable organization. Kubik, himself originally from Ukraine, which borders Moldova, had helped O'Bannon with the connections to the orphanage.

Dragneva, who affectionately calls her young charge by the nickname Natasha, said the child should eventually be adopted. "Children really need to have a family," she said through an interpreter. "Right now, the main question is Natasha's health. But we will be fighting for her future, too."

After St. Vincent surgeons fixed Natalia's heart, restoring blood flow, she quickly recovered. She left the hospital after just four days.

"She awes and amazes people," Judy O'Bannon said of the child. "I am awed and amazed."

As is Natalia. When the child awoke from surgery, she gazed at her hands and feet.

"My fingers are pink!" she said. "My toes are pink!"

Contact Celeste Williams at 1-317-444-6367 or via e-mail at celeste.williams@indystar.com

The girl told investigators Bittner came into her room



**of car b  
shop wit**

Every day of the week, The consumers. And by reaching readers every week, we do in central Indiana.

**Who do you want to r  
We'll show you how.**

Company	Change	Company	Change	Company	Change	Company	Change	Company	Change	Company	Change	Company	Change	Company	Change
3M	2.44	52	0.12	19	0.12	36	0.08	59	0.08	76	0.08	93	0.08	110	0.08
3M	2.44	53	0.12	20	0.12	37	0.08	60	0.08	77	0.08	94	0.08	111	0.08
3M	2.44	54	0.12	21	0.12	38	0.08	61	0.08	78	0.08	95	0.08	112	0.08
3M	2.44	55	0.12	22	0.12	39	0.08	62	0.08	79	0.08	96	0.08	113	0.08
3M	2.44	56	0.12	23	0.12	40	0.08	63	0.08	80	0.08	97	0.08	114	0.08
3M	2.44	57	0.12	24	0.12	41	0.08	64	0.08	81	0.08	98	0.08	115	0.08
3M	2.44	58	0.12	25	0.12	42	0.08	65	0.08	82	0.08	99	0.08	116	0.08
3M	2.44	59	0.12	26	0.12	43	0.08	66	0.08	83	0.08	100	0.08	117	0.08
3M	2.44	60	0.12	27	0.12	44	0.08	67	0.08	84	0.08	101	0.08	118	0.08
3M	2.44	61	0.12	28	0.12	45	0.08	68	0.08	85	0.08	102	0.08	119	0.08
3M	2.44	62	0.12	29	0.12	46	0.08	69	0.08	86	0.08	103	0.08	120	0.08
3M	2.44	63	0.12	30	0.12	47	0.08	70	0.08	87	0.08	104	0.08	121	0.08
3M	2.44	64	0.12	31	0.12	48	0.08	71	0.08	88	0.08	105	0.08	122	0.08
3M	2.44	65	0.12	32	0.12	49	0.08	72	0.08	89	0.08	106	0.08	123	0.08
3M	2.44	66	0.12	33	0.12	50	0.08	73	0.08	90	0.08	107	0.08	124	0.08
3M	2.44	67	0.12	34	0.12	51	0.08	74	0.08	91	0.08	108	0.08	125	0.08
3M	2.44	68	0.12	35	0.12	52	0.08	75	0.08	92	0.08	109	0.08	126	0.08
3M	2.44	69	0.12	36	0.12	53	0.08	76	0.08	93	0.08	110	0.08	127	0.08
3M	2.44	70	0.12	37	0.12	54	0.08	77	0.08	94	0.08	111	0.08	128	0.08
3M	2.44	71	0.12	38	0.12	55	0.08	78	0.08	95	0.08	112	0.08	129	0.08
3M	2.44	72	0.12	39	0.12	56	0.08	79	0.08	96	0.08	113	0.08	130	0.08
3M	2.44	73	0.12	40	0.12	57	0.08	80	0.08	97	0.08	114	0.08	131	0.08
3M	2.44	74	0.12	41	0.12	58	0.08	81	0.08	98	0.08	115	0.08	132	0.08
3M	2.44	75	0.12	42	0.12	59	0.08	82	0.08	99	0.08	116	0.08	133	0.08
3M	2.44	76	0.12	43	0.12	60	0.08	83	0.08	100	0.08	117	0.08	134	0.08
3M	2.44	77	0.12	44	0.12	61	0.08	84	0.08	101	0.08	118	0.08	135	0.08
3M	2.44	78	0.12	45	0.12	62	0.08	85	0.08	102	0.08	119	0.08	136	0.08
3M	2.44	79	0.12	46	0.12	63	0.08	86	0.08	103	0.08	120	0.08	137	0.08
3M	2.44	80	0.12	47	0.12	64	0.08	87	0.08	104	0.08	121	0.08	138	0.08
3M	2.44	81	0.12	48	0.12	65	0.08	88	0.08	105	0.08	122	0.08	139	0.08
3M	2.44	82	0.12	49	0.12	66	0.08	89	0.08	106	0.08	123	0.08	140	0.08
3M	2.44	83	0.12	50	0.12	67	0.08	90	0.08	107	0.08	124	0.08	141	0.08
3M	2.44	84	0.12	51	0.12	68	0.08	91	0.08	108	0.08	125	0.08	142	0.08
3M	2.44	85	0.12	52	0.12	69	0.08	92	0.08	109	0.08	126	0.08	143	0.08
3M	2.44	86	0.12	53	0.12	70	0.08	93	0.08	110	0.08	127	0.08	144	0.08
3M	2.44	87	0.12	54	0.12	71	0.08	94	0.08	111	0.08	128	0.08	145	0.08
3M	2.44	88	0.12	55	0.12	72	0.08	95	0.08	112	0.08	129	0.08	146	0.08
3M	2.44	89	0.12	56	0.12	73	0.08	96	0.08	113	0.08	130	0.08	147	0.08
3M	2.44	90	0.12	57	0.12	74	0.08	97	0.08	114	0.08	131	0.08	148	0.08
3M	2.44	91	0.12	58	0.12	75	0.08	98	0.08	115	0.08	132	0.08	149	0.08
3M	2.44	92	0.12	59	0.12	76	0.08	99	0.08	116	0.08	133	0.08	150	0.08
3M	2.44	93	0.12	60	0.12	77	0.08	100	0.08	117	0.08	134	0.08	151	0.08
3M	2.44	94	0.12	61	0.12	78	0.08	101	0.08	118	0.08	135	0.08	152	0.08
3M	2.44	95	0.12	62	0.12	79	0.08	102	0.08	119	0.08	136	0.08	153	0.08
3M	2.44	96	0.12	63	0.12	80	0.08	103	0.08	120	0.08	137	0.08	154	0.08
3M	2.44	97	0.12	64	0.12	81	0.08	104	0.08	121	0.08	138	0.08	155	0.08
3M	2.44	98	0.12	65	0.12	82	0.08	105	0.08	122	0.08	139	0.08	156	0.08
3M	2.44	99	0.12	66	0.12	83	0.08	106	0.08	123	0.08	140	0.08	157	0.08
3M	2.44	100	0.12	67	0.12	84	0.08	107	0.08	124	0.08	141	0.08	158	0.08
3M	2.44	101	0.12	68	0.12	85	0.08	108	0.08	125	0.08	142	0.08	159	0.08
3M	2.44	102	0.12	69	0.12	86	0.08	109	0.08	126	0.08	143	0.08	160	0.08
3M	2.44	103	0.12	70	0.12	87	0.08	110	0.08	127	0.08	144	0.08	161	0.08
3M	2.44	104	0.12	71	0.12	88	0.08	111	0.08	128	0.08	145	0.08	162	0.08
3M	2.44	105	0.12	72	0.12	89	0.08	112	0.08	129	0.08	146	0.08	163	0.08
3M	2.44	106	0.12	73	0.12	90	0.08	113	0.08	130	0.08	147	0.08	164	0.08
3M	2.44	107	0.12	74	0.12	91	0.08	114	0.08	131	0.08	148	0.08	165	0.08
3M	2.44	108	0.12	75	0.12	92	0.08	115	0.08	132	0.08	149	0.08	166	0.08
3M	2.44	109	0.12	76	0.12	93	0.08	116	0.08	133	0.08	150	0.08	167	0.08
3M	2.44	110	0.12	77	0.12	94	0.08	117	0.08	134	0.08	151	0.08	168	0.08
3M	2.44	111	0.12	78	0.12	95	0.08	118	0.08	135	0.08	152	0.08	169	0.08
3M	2.44	112	0.12	79	0.12	96	0.08	119	0.08	136	0.08	153	0.08	170	0.08
3M	2.44	113	0.12	80	0.12	97	0.08	120	0.08	137	0.08	154	0.08	171	0.08
3M	2.44	114	0.12	81	0.12	98	0.08	121	0.08	138	0.08	155	0.08	172	0.08
3M	2.44	115	0.12	82	0.12	99	0.08	122	0.08	139	0.08	156	0.08	173	0.08
3M	2.44	116	0.12	83	0.12	100	0.08	123	0.08	140	0.08	157	0.08	174	0.08
3M	2.44	117	0.12	84	0.12	101	0.08	124	0.08	141	0.08	158	0.08	175	0.08
3M	2.44	118	0.12	85	0.12	102	0.08	125	0.08	142	0.08	159	0.08	176	0.08
3M	2.44	119	0.12	86	0.12	103	0.08	126	0.08	143	0.08	160	0.08	177	0.08
3M	2.44	120	0.12	87	0.12	104	0.08	127	0.08	144	0.08	161	0.08	178	0.08
3M	2.44	121	0.12	88	0.12	105	0.08	128	0.08	145	0.08	162	0.08	179	0.08
3M	2.44	122	0.12	89	0.12	106	0.08	129	0.08	146	0.08	163	0.08	180	0.08
3M	2.44	123	0.12	90	0.12	107	0.08	130	0.08	147	0.08	164	0.08	181	0.08
3M	2.44	124	0.12	91	0.12	108	0.08	131	0.08	148	0.08	165	0.08	182	0.08
3M	2.44	125	0.12	92	0.12	109	0.08	132	0.08	149	0.08	166	0.08	183	0.08
3M	2.44	126	0.12	93	0.12	110	0.08	133	0.08	150	0.08	167	0.08	184	0.08
3M	2.44	127	0.12	94											