

Commissioners express concerns to Senate candidate



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Rick Outman addresses county commissioners concerns at the regular April 17 meeting. Outman is seeking the Republican nomination for State Senator. (Herald photo – Horvath)

By Rosemary Horvath Herald Staff Writer

In what may have been his first campaign promise, Rick Outman agreed to deliver Gratiot County Chairman George Bailey's concerns to the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Last week, the former state representative from Montcalm County updated county commissioners on state legislative matters. Outman is currently the district liaison for State

Senator Judy Emmons and is hoping to succeed her in November.

If he wins the Republican nomination in August, he'll face Democratic opposition during the election.

Chairman Bailey brought up the proposed 16-mile limited access freeway between St. Johns and Ithaca that probably won't be built anytime soon. But that shouldn't stop MDOT, Bailey said, from improving the Buchanan Road access by building an overpass like the one on M-57.

Bailey and other county leaders also have pressed House Speaker Tom Leonard R-DeWitt who represents the southern half of Gratiot County in District 93.

Completion of the ZFS soybean processing plant in Ithaca will generate a high volume of truck traffic.

The Ithaca highway exit "is a terrible exit," Bailey claimed, because the design is too tight for semis to navigate.

"We anticipate a lot of business," because of ZFS, he said.

Outman reported local units of government will share \$175 million more than expected for road repair.

And there has been a major shift by ending driver responsibility fees.

He called the fees, established in 2003, a "money grab" when the state budget needed to plug a hole.

Some 348,000 drivers incurred a debt of \$637 million as of this year that "we will never be able to collect," he said.

An unintended consequence is the number of eligible workers with terminated driver licenses.

This comes at a time Michigan has "more jobs than we have people," Outman added. "We are trying to get people back to work."

More money has been allocated for per pupil funding and to boost funding for career technical programs and skilled trades.

A school safety program named OK2Say is getting an extra boost as well.

"We did a poor job of rolling it out," Outman reflected when back in 2014

when in office he helped establish the program in Michigan.

Governor Rick Snyder has recommended rolling it out with a big push. Students can confidentially email, text or telephone messages to trained technicians at Michigan State Police to report tips on potential harm or criminal activities.

Fulton Schools has the program and Commissioner Tim Lambrecht said an OK2SAY poster hangs in his classroom at Ithaca High School.

Outman said suicide tips have been consistently high statewide.

Commissioner Rusty Bongard expressed opposition for allowing corporations like Nestle extract Michigan waters at no charge.

The Nestle Corporation will pump 576,000 gallons of water from its well in Osceola County near Ewart for its Ice Mountain brand.

“That’s a lot of water. That’s a lot of money,” Bongard told Outman. “Why isn’t the state collecting fees to fix the roads? Whose water is it in the first place?”

He believes the water should not be given away.

While Outman took in commissioner comments, he couldn’t refrain from expressing his own views regarding standards for septic systems.

State Representative James Lower who represents southern half of Gratiot County has sponsored bills to improve inspections and maintenance of septic systems.

A goal is to have failed systems identified quicker.

Chairman Bailey raised the issue as a member of a septic system study committee organized by the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department.

“There are 44,000 septic systems in the three counties (Montcalm, Gratiot, Clinton) and at least a third of them are failing,” Bailey said.

“We are not trying to design a new system” and the aim is not to burden any property owner but Bailey said there is a need to find and correct the failed systems.

“Human E.coli is in our rivers, streams and watersheds. We don’t need to make a code stringent on homeowners. The health department will help property owners mitigate the problem.”

Outman has an excavating business based in Six Lakes. Speaking for himself, he said he opposes a statewide ordinance and has talked with Lower about the legislation.

“The only thing a statewide code will do is increase the cost of our septic systems,” he said. “Septic systems are designed to last 20 years if properly installed.”

He takes exception to statewide standards because “soil types and water tables vary so much” across the state.

Michigan is the only state that doesn’t set standards.