

Townships get road role in Fessler bills

State Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, wants to hold public hearings this summer, during the election campaign, on a three-bill package aimed at getting more money for roads.

"There's a crying need for road improvements," said Fessler. "It's immediate. Not 10 years down the road. Not five. Now. There's an economic boom."

As chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, Fessler hopes to report the bills to the Senate floor during a special session that begins Sept. 9.

It contains a four-year program aimed at stimulating local funding for roads.

TARGETS ARE counties with

more than 600,000 population, which for the foreseeable future means Wayne, Oakland and Macomb.

Their particular emphasis is Oakland, where the Road Commission points \$700 million in road improvements that need to be made in the next 10-15 years to accommodate a high-technology and office-building boom.

Oakland officials are brainstorming many means of raising new revenue because Road Commission revenues from the state gasoline and weight taxes are considered inadequate.

A controversial part of the package could be Fessler's effort to give a greater role in road policy and funding to townships. Those units had their road powers stripped and given to county road commissions

during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

FESSLER'S BILLS would:

• Allow "lead agencies" to require developers to dedicate land and pay fees to completion of road improvements required by their developments. A key section defines townships as "lead agencies," along with counties, cities and villages.

The fee idea is one used in Pennsylvania and other states where huge developments near freeway interchanges have had major impact on traffic. In part, it was prompted by the Chrysler Corp. decision to delay a major Oakland County project because of inadequate roads and sewers.

• The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) would be required to match each \$1 raised by a local agency with \$2 the first year, \$1.50 the second, \$1 the third, and 50 cents the fourth.

"It encourages local units to pass their funding immediately," Fessler said.

• The State Transportation Commission, a six-member panel overseeing MDOT, is authorized to float bonds to raise its matching grants.

THE DEFINITION of road improvements is broad: "Construction, repair, or widening of roads, streets or bridges; construction of acceleration, deceleration and turning lanes; construction or extension of drainage facilities; installation of lighting; and installation of traffic signs or signals."

Fessler, in his first Senate term, chairs the committee. Other members are Republicans Doug Grice of Troy and Kirby Holmes of Utica and Democrats Michael O'Brien of Detroit and James Barela of Bay City.

Owen praises House session

College tuitions, liability insurance reform and crime protection were among the chief accomplishments in the state House of Representatives' January-July session, according to House Speaker Gary Owen, D-Ypsilanti.

"Since January, the Legislature has addressed some major issues — head on," Owen said.

Owen praised the House for passing Gov. James J. Blanchard's college tuition investment plan. Under it, parents would be able to invest lump sums, at interest, when their children are young. When their youngsters reach college age, they would be assured the fund would cover four years of tuition, expected to cost \$20,000, at a Michigan public college.

"This program is unique in the nation, making Michigan a leader in combating the high cost of higher education," Owen said.

THE BLANCHARD bill, sponsored by Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton, was passed by the House in May but is stalled in the Senate.

Senate Majority Leader John Engler, R-Mt. Pleasant, said of the tuition program, "We like the idea. We're trying to make it into a plan."

"The House passed (only) the idea," Engler went on. "We're trying to make sure that after parents have invested for 18 years, they can be sure there's something at the end of the rainbow."

Engler said the Republican-controlled Senate asked State Treasurer Robert Bowman some technical questions about how the tuition plan would work — including, "will tuition in fact be guaranteed?" — but

Bowman has yet to produce answers.

"Some he said he won't be able to answer until we've passed the program," Engler said. "I think he ought to answer them before we pass the program."

OWEN CITED liability insurance reform, which passed both houses, as a major accomplishment. One bill in the package caps so-called "pain and suffering" jury verdicts at \$225,000 in some cases.

"In the spirit of compromise, the House and Senate agreed to legislation aimed at controlling a growing and nagging situation for the medical profession, local governments and other public and private interests," Owen said, predicting a "positive impact" on the problem.

Owen, a critic of the insurance industry, noted that House Majority Floor Leader Lewis Dodak, D-Flint, will hold hearings this summer on a bill to require commercial liability insurance companies to return "excess" profits to customers.

ON THE CRIME prevention package, Owen said, "Early in the session, a series of crime prevention and child protection bills were introduced. A number of them have moved through the House and into the Senate."

"These bills will provide needed safeguards to make our neighborhoods and streets safer, protect our children and older citizens, and take those who prey on the innocent out of circulation so that they can prey no more."

"At the same time, we have acted positively to provide sufficient prison space to make sure that convicted criminals are off the streets."

GOP honors area judges

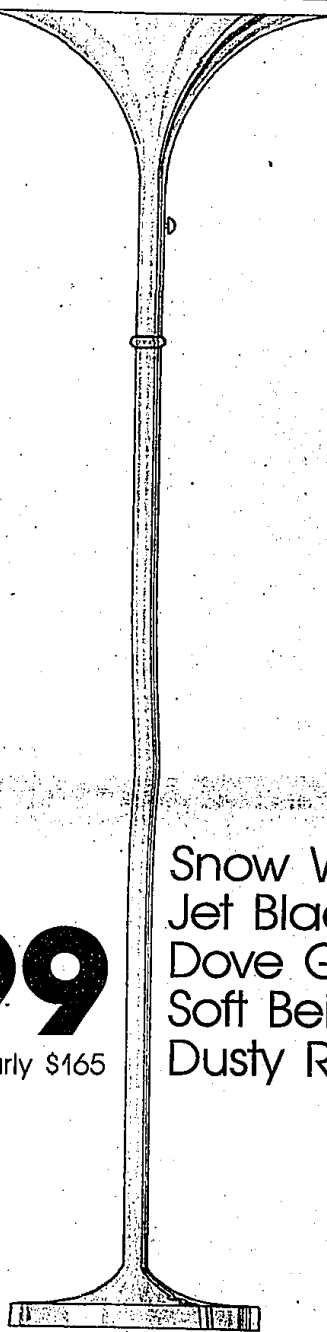
Oakland County Republicans will hold their third annual "Salute to Justice," a cocktail-hors d'oeuvres event honoring judges, Tuesday, according to GOP Chairman Joe Knollenberg.

It runs 6-8:30 p.m. in Roma's of Bloomfield, 210 S. Telegraph. Tickets at \$50 per person may be reserved by calling Republican headquarters in Pontiac at 338-1133.

Knollenberg said the event is "designed to spotlight the excellent relationship between the Republican Committee of Oakland County and the legal community." Guests will be state Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, Oakland Circuit Court, Oakland Probate Court and local District Court judges.

Chairmen of the salute are attorneys Frank Mamet of West Bloomfield and Patrick Hackett of Bloomfield Hills.

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Kent Lake claims 2 on weekend

Kent Lake, one of Michigan's most heavily patrolled inland waterways, was the scene of two drownings over the Fourth of July weekend.

Oakland County Sheriff's marine division officers Tuesday recovered the body of a 25-year-old man who went down about 4 p.m. Sunday in eight feet of water.

He was identified as Gene Douglas Peyton, 25, of Westland.

IN THE OTHER incident, Vernon S. Mahin, 41, of Royal Oak, died Saturday when his 1968 car went off old Grand River Road into a channel connecting two portions of the lake. The Sheriff's Department said that while his body was recovered quickly from the wreckage, Mahin was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital.

In Sunday's incident, Peyton and a companion were in a rented boat on the east side of the lake, between Maple Beach and the Mitten Bay dock, when the companion went for a swim, according to Kensington Metropark Superintendent Richard J. Shafer. Metropark rules prohibit swimming anywhere except at a designated beach.

When the swimmer got into trouble, Peyton dove in to help. The first he was rescued by park lifeguards, Shafer said, but Peyton went down when their boat drifted away in the wind.

"IN SIX MINUTES, we had eight lifeguards on the scene, diving," Shafer said. They were joined by divers from the Oakland Sheriff's Department and later by divers from Livingston County.

Although the area has no deep holes, divers were unable to locate the body for almost two days because the bottom is muddy and the stirred-up water murky, a sheriff's spokesman said.

Funeral services for Peyton will be at 11 a.m. Friday in Taylor. Shafer said the last drowning occurred about five years ago when a swimmer at a beach suffered an epileptic seizure and went down unnoticed.