

**Horton's**

# **Michigan Notebook**

## ***Political & Social Commentary***

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### **Impressions of Gov. Snyder's recent State of the State Address**

**By Steve Horton**

Gov. Rick Snyder spent much of his final State of the State Address reviewing the past seven years, listing what he considers the accomplishments of his administration.

With less than a year left in office, his legacy—the perception of his place in history—would be an understandable preoccupation. Given that many pundits and political wags have already pronounced that his governorship will be forever associated with the Flint Water Crisis, his reputation scarred by that tragic sequence of events and the negligence of officials in state government, including a few officials on his staff, it's also understandable he would want to balance the scales in what's likely a final appearance before a large, public audience.

Whether this was his underlying motion, or merely conjecture on my part...well, who knows?

My wife and I attended the event, as we have for nearly all of his previous seven speeches. Along with other members of the media, we watched the proceedings in the House Appropriations Committee Room on a large TV screen and afterwards asked Rep. Hank Vaupel and Sen. Joe Hune—the lawmakers who represent the Fowlerville area



Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder gave his final State of the State Address this past Tuesday evening.

in the legislature—for their reactions and assessments.

Making this annual trek to the State Capitol and observing the pomp-and-circumstance that accompanies this governmental pageantry is a nice change-of-pace from the usual fare of covering local

government, school activities, and assorted community events. Also, I find it a good reminder to myself (by having to produce a news story about the speech) and to any interested readers of the ‘Fowlerville News & Views’ that state government—what’s proposed and what’s done—matters greatly.

Health care, a social safety net, taxes, environmental oversight, financial regulations, road repairs, school aid, revenue sharing for local municipalities—each and all, and much more impact “we the people” in some form or another. According, we ought to pay closer attention; better acquaint ourselves to what’s going on and its implications. As a newspaperman I try. But it’s not part of my regular beat and, like many others, I find the minutia of legislating—all of the details, the legalese, the committee hearings, and progression of steps taken from introducing a bill until the actual vote—less than engaging.

There are exceptions, of course. The ‘Right to Work’ legislation of a few years back and the recent attempt to change No-fault Auto Insurance are two examples of issues that grab the headlines, and focus people’s attention on what’s happening in Lansing. But those peaks of interest and intensity are usually interspersed by flat stretches of disinterest.

**COMPARED TO PREVIOUS STATE-OF-THE-STATES,** the mood in the Appropriations Room seemed subdued, even anti-climactic—both during the speech and afterwards when the legislators and other state officials came into the room to be interviewed.

Why’s that? Well, first of all, I think it’s fair to say that Snyder isn’t a great orator, able to stir the audience with his voice and imagery, so no one was expecting him to go out with a bang.

Secondly, there wasn’t a recent controversial decision or event—like ‘Right to Work’ or Flint—stirring the passions and inspiring a media frenzy and political posturing. While a trip down memory lane might evoke a feeling of nostalgia, it also enhances the sense that Gov. Snyder is a lame duck. Finally, as far as the plans and priorities he outlined for the upcoming months—given at the tail end of his address—as Senator Hune said in his comments, “nothing earth-shaking or groundbreaking was proposed.”

That’s not to say what was proposed by the governor is of little importance. More money for schools, accelerated funding for roads, a focus on developing talent, continued emphasis of career training and connecting that training to both current and future jobs, supporting the auto industry in its development of driverless vehicles, starting construction on the Gordie Howe Bridge between Detroit and Ontario, stopping Asian Carp and other invasive species from entering the Great Lakes, replacing aging lead-contaminated water pipes, and providing high-speed broadband to rural residents—each of which was mentioned in the speech—suggest an ambitious agenda in the upcoming weeks and that Gov. Snyder’s motto of “Relentless Positive Energy”—of solving problems with real-life solutions—will be in full force up to and including his last day in office.

No resting on any laurels for the governor, if laurels are what await him.

But how much cooperation he gets from the legislature on these matters, and in particular what degree of support he will receive from the more conservative wing of the Republican Party, remains to be seen.

And then there's the media. Will they pay much attention to his announcements, giving him the necessary megaphone for reaching and rallying the public to his cause? Well, that may be problematic as well.

After all, it's an election year and a new crop of officials will soon be taking center stage, the legislators have their own priorities apart from his, and the media is often chasing after the latest sensational story.

**WHILE I SAID THAT GOV. SNYDER IS NO GREAT ORATOR**, in fairness his speech did have a couple of high points and finished with a note of hopefulness that, I'd say, bordered on eloquence.

He talked briefly about fiscally-responsible government; about not spending money or cutting taxes for "short-term benefit and leave the bill for the kids to pay." It was a not-so-veiled reference to recent calls by GOP lawmakers to further cut the state income tax as well as to hike the personal exemption beyond a fiscally-prudent amount—both of which are politically popular with the Republican base and helps burnish their political credentials, but (in Snyder's opinion) threaten to blow a hole in future budgets, and undo all the progress of the past seven years.

He also called for more civility, stating "I believe the greatest threat to the future of our nation is ourselves. In the current

environment of people fighting with one another, whether it be partisanship, whether it be ideology or other issues, if we can't get along with ourselves, how can we be great?

"Who are we fighting?" he asked, then answered, "Ourselves." And added "That's not right. Fighting does have a role; on the beaches of Normandy, not the beaches of Lake Michigan."

As for the hopefulness? Well, his final comment went like this:

"Succeeding generations of leadership and citizens need to stay the course and continue the work we have started. Each and every succeeding year can be better for decades to come if we continue the path we've created through the partnerships we've made over the last few years. It will require certain things though; it will require us to solve real problems with real solutions rather than forcing partisan or ideological solutions on one another. It will require us to act with Relentless Positive Action and not spend time assigning blame or worrying about credit. It will require leaders to act more like a family, than politicians. Lets' make our positive progress of the last few years continue for the next few decades."

A cynic would say "Good luck with that." The optimist would reply "Amen to that." As for my own impression? Well, if we listen to the "better angels of our nature" rather than the voices of discord, then perhaps. But life, or in this case government and governance, is generally a combination of both.