

# Island Residents Talk Transportation, Breakwall With Stupak

By Karen Gould

Winter transportation needs and progress on the proposed breakwall were local issues Mackinac Island residents addressed with U.S. Congressman Bart Stupak during a town hall meeting, Friday, April 21. Area residents filled the seats of the Community Hall on Market Street, asking questions about the national scene and ending the meeting seeking help from the congressman with winter boat transportation.

Congressman Stupak told Islanders during the hour-long meeting that he likes to keep up with what his constituents are thinking, and one way to do that has been to schedule town hall meetings throughout his district, which includes 30.5 counties that blanket 44 percent of the state's land. The remaining 56 percent of the state is covered by 14 other congressmen. Traveling with him were his

wife, Laurie, who is a Mackinac Island State Park commissioner, his district manager, Tom Baldini of Marquette, and his executive assistant, Anne Brewster-Stanski of Washington, D.C.

Island residents took advantage of the face-to-face meeting with the congressman to address the issue of a winter boat. Winter transportation became a concern this winter when warmer temperatures hampered the formation of an ice bridge between Mackinac Island and St. Ignace and bad weather limited air travel for several days at a time.

Alderman Frank Blosswick raised the issue and Mayor Margaret Doud supported his concern.

Congressman Stupak noted it also is a concern shared by Beaver Island residents, who now pay \$100 for a round trip air ticket, while Mackinac Islanders pay \$42.

"For four months out of the year,

we need some help," said Mr. Blosswick, who noted that some islands had subsidized boat transportation.

"When the last boat stops (for the season), commerce ends. The only thing we have here is tourism," explained Mr. Blosswick.

He said he thought winter tourism would improve with available boat service because the Island offers quality cross country ski trails, but tourists need assured transportation to and from the Island that is not subject to weather conditions.

"I'm talking about sustaining this community in the wintertime," he added. Congressman Stupak said the issue has been discussed by the Michigan Department of Transportation, including the use of a catamaran like the one being used in Muskegon. He also said talk of using a hover craft has been

addressed, though the weather and ice conditions continue to be a factor.

Regarding the breakwall for the Island, Congressman Stupak said that more money has been added to the budget and a feasibility study has been requested for 2007. He said the concern was to keep the funding in place because if a project is not underway, the funding tends to be moved to other projects. A breakwall extension would protect the harbor from southeast winds.

Congressman Stupak told residents that final language has been agreed on and he expects the bill that would send the retiring Coast Guard Cutter *Mackinaw* to Cheboygan to become a museum will pass the U.S. House of Representatives. He introduced bill HR 1448 in March 2005. The cutter is set to retire this June. He also said he was working to get a small cutter out of the New York area to replace the *Acacia* that is retiring in Charlevoix. This would help keep ice breaking capabilities available in northern Michigan, he said.

On the national level, he spoke briefly on immigration, gas prices, and the war in Iraq. He also focused on "cherry picking" practices of companies, who have been known to choose only the most profitable areas to provide Internet service and leave the rest unserved. Current law does not require a company to install Internet access throughout a community. He explained that proposed legislation, which he expects will become law, would turn questionable practices over to the Federal Communications Commission, which would have the authority to issue a \$500,000 fine to providers who are discriminating with cable service.

First elected to office in 1992, the seven-term congressman is up for re-election November 2. He sits on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which is considered an exclusive committee. An exclusive committee allows members to only serve on that committee. About 66 percent of all proposed legislation passes through this committee, he said.

# Wind Energy Explored at Mackinaw City

\*Continued from page 1

lose them."

Initially, Mackinaw Power owned the turbines in the village and had a three-year agreement with Consumers Power to buy the turbines' energy. Later, the wind farm was sold to Grand Rapids-based Crystal Flash Energy, and last year Crystal Flash renewed the power-purchase agreement. Consumers will buy power from Mackinaw City's turbines for the next 25 years.

The public is likely to see a great deal more wind towers popping up across the state. In an effort to increase high-tech jobs in Michigan, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and provide cheap, non-polluting power to the state, Governor Jennifer Granholm recently directed Peter Lark, chairman of the Michigan Public Service Commission, to create a comprehensive energy plan for Michigan. The plan includes a push to increase alternative energy production, which would lead to more wind, solar, and geothermal power in the electrical grid, Mr. Vander Veen said.

In a press release dated Thursday, April 6, she said, "Michigan has the capability to

become America's alternative energy development epicenter, and that offers a tremendous opportunity to diversify our economy."

Mr. Lark's report, due at the end of the year, will cover a wide variety of factors related to power production in Michigan. It will cover legislative changes needed to implement Governor Granholm's new power policies and include a "renewable energy portfolio," and include a plan detailing how the state will encourage the production and use of alternative energy sources in Michigan. This plan will require that a certain percentage of the state's power come from renewable energy sources, she said. The precise amount has not been released.

One large-scale project is already underway downstate. Noble Environmental Power, a Connecticut-based company, has begun a wind farm in Huron County. According to Julie Harker-Leigh, director of community outreach for Noble, the company plans to begin erecting its 32-turbine wind farm by June. It will generate enough electricity to power 16,000 homes. In the long run, Noble hopes to expand the 32

turbine wind farm to 250, she added. The project will use a ridge that runs across 35,000 acres of farmland.

Noble pays farmers for the necessary easements, she said, and they will receive a percentage of the profits from the wind farm when it is fully operational.

Wind power may not become dominant in Michigan, Ms. Harker-Leigh said, but, "Everything we do reduces emissions from traditional sources, which are linked to asthma and other health problems." Currently, she said, 57 percent of the state's power comes from imported coal.

The Green Generation program graduated from a pilot program to a full-fledged operation September 29, 2005. By March, 1,300 customers had signed up, but the company still needs more alternative-energy customers. Not only have new wind power companies come online, Mr. Stubbleski said, a number of facilities that burn methane gas from landfills are also producing power.

"We now have a surplus," he said, "but this is not bad news for the company. It just means that more people have the opportunity to take part in the program."

Mr. Vander Veen said the wind turbines in Mackinaw City were intended to represent a new beginning for power generation in Michigan.

"It was a pilot program," he said. "We wanted the eight million people who cross the Mackinac Bridge each year to see what power production will look like in the 21st century."

"We have one main purpose," he added: "to educate."

# Congressman Stupak Visits Students

\*Continued from page 1

out someone," he said offering the examples of assisting people with Social Security issues and helping veterans with health benefit concerns.

He said what he thinks he has done that will last the longest is providing legislation to preserve and protect the Great Lakes with a law that stops drilling, the sale of Great Lakes water, and the blending of waste water into the lakes.

On the local level, he told students it could be four years before Michigan sees an economic turnaround.

"Michigan's going through some changes because it is based on a manufacturing economy," he said. He told students that the

future for Michigan is in high tech jobs, adding that Governor Jennifer Granholm had just passed a bill to allow Michigan to bond \$1 billion to create those jobs.

"I think we've turned the corner in Michigan and we're heading in the right direction," said Congressman Stupak.

"We're going through a tough time now, but I think we'll be OK," he added.

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