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Gov. Snyder talks townships, partnering at MTA Conference & Expo

Imagine. Focus. Lead. Evolve.

The theme of MTA's Annual Educational Conference & Expo, held Jan. 25-27, 2012, could not have been more fitting when it came to one particular attendee.

Gov. Rick Snyder accepted MTA's invitation to address more than 1,000 township officials, guests and dignitaries during the Association's annual Networking Banquet on Thursday, Jan. 26—the day the state of Michigan celebrated its 175th year as a state.

As introduced by MTA Executive Director Larry Merrill, "[Snyder's] campaign and his administration have consistently emphasized relentless positive action. He brings to Michigan a pledge not to solve its problems, but to reinvent Michigan for the 21st century."

Snyder, a resident of **Superior Charter Township** (Washtenaw Co.), was greeted with a standing ovation and discussed with his township audience the vision he has for the future of the Great Lakes State, and how he hopes townships remain a partner in that future.

Here's what he had to say.

SNYDER: Thank you! What a nice welcome. I'm honored to be with you tonight. You have a great association, and I want to thank [MTA Executive Director] Larry [Merrill] for his work, and [2011 MTA President] Jack [Randolph] for his service as president this year. Thank you so much for what you are doing for townships.

And I also want to say thank you for your legislator of the year. You picked an outstanding person. I've known [Rep.] Mark [Ouimet] for a long time—I'm not going to say how long—but Mark and I go back before either one of us arrived in Lansing. We did a lot of projects and a number of things together, and he's been a stand-up person for a long time in our state. I'm proud to have him in Lansing and the representation he brings from his district there. In terms of Mark and his background and experience, I can tell you this is a person who has truly stood up for townships and the quality of life and so many great things in the state of Michigan.

First of all, I want to wish us all a happy birthday! As I look around the room, I don't see anyone looking 175 years old though! It is great to celebrate 175 years of being a state—and having townships. I appreciate that, and think that's an important part of our legacy, and something that is worth noting.

So I wanted to start off with that. But let's jump right in. When I ran for office—when many of us ran for office—a couple years ago, it wasn't good enough to fix Michigan. Michigan in many respects had become tired and broken. We'd become too negative—because we'd gone through an entire decade of going downhill. Actually, we'd been going downhill before that, but it really accelerated during that time period. And it's nothing we should be ashamed of—it's the natural course of events to say that it's time to reinvent ourselves again.

We've had three eras in Michigan's history; we're starting the third right now. We had the natural resources era, the 1800s, which is what I call "Michigan 1.0." The 1900s, the industrial era, were "Michigan 2.0." And what a fabulous success. Someone asked me the other day, "Are you trying something new and different that we're just not going to understand?", and I said "Absolutely not!" We're just trying to re-ignite what was done before—our spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. If you go back to the industrial era, we weren't just the best in the country—we led the world in innovation and entrepreneurship.

The thing is, we were so successful, we did get complacent and content. We didn't reinvent ourselves when we should have, and that's one of the lessons that we've learned. And so, it's time. That's why I was so excited to have the opportunity to join public service—to join you. A lot of you have been involved a lot longer than me—I'm new at this game. But a lot of it is an opportunity to work together. To say fixing it is not good enough. It's time for fundamental change. And what is that?

It starts with a focus on two things: It starts with more and better jobs. Secondly, it's about our children—about creating a



Township officials were able to meet and talk with Gov. Snyder prior to his address.

great environment, a great place for our kids—and a future for them. And that's what we're on the path to do.

In 2011, we accomplished a lot. It wasn't about talk, it was about action. We showed action. We were a role model for the rest of the United States, in terms of showing what a group of dedicated citizens—a state—could do by working together ... not wasting time on blame, or who's taking credit, but simply standing up and solving problems. And we're going to continue that trend. 2011 was the year to set that foundation. 2012 is to follow through with great implementation, and finish the things we said we were going to start.

One of the reasons I was excited to be here tonight is, for me, 2012 is the year to focus on good government. Good government needs to happen every year, but I think we have a special opportunity in 2012. Again, if I go back to the theme of "more and better jobs," we did a lot to create that environment in terms of having unemployment drop from over 11 percent down to 9.3 percent, adding more than 80,000 jobs, and redoing the tax structure, the budget structure, the regulatory structure.

After you set the policy framework, how do you implement things? How do you really work together? That is what I view as an attitude of partnership. That [attitude] doesn't come across often enough. Good government is not about any single government having all the answers. Good government is about recognizing that we're all team members. We have a role to play and we need to support each other in a constructive way. It's just not about the public sector supporting one another. The solution to most of our problems is not the government. It's about how we reach out and partner with the private sector, the not-for-profit sector and the public sector. It's about collaboration and cooperation. That's a theme you are going to hear a lot. How do we do "best practices" together?

And what do I mean by good government? At the state level, to me, it's about customer service. Whether you recognize it ►

Q&A with Gov. Snyder

MTA Conference attendees had the opportunity to submit questions to the governor, several of which he answered following his remarks at the Networking Banquet. Here's a sample of what officials asked—and how Snyder answered.

How can Michigan's townships partner with you to restore Michigan to prosperity?

One thing is to keep doing what you're doing. I know you're challenged, and that you are doing a good job in a difficult environment. But I ask a couple of things: think about that attitude of customer service and relentless positive action, and how you can make that happen every single day. I can guarantee you'll see a difference in how things operate.

Your State of the State address promoted the revitalization of cities. There are many townships that are actually bigger than cities. Is the differentiation between size of government, or is there some reason cities are given preferential treatment over other forms of government. If the focus is on the revitalization of cities, what is the role of townships in that objective?

We have a serious situation with cities in distress. I want to make sure we're working on all geographies in all areas of our state, but we have to prioritize and work on things in a fairly systematic way. [Michigan has] four of the top 10 most violent cities in the United States. We have educational systems in many of these cities that are dramatically challenged. We have high unemployment and underemployment. We have some of these same issues in some of our rural areas, and I don't underestimate that at all. But, in a relative prioritization of crisis, the cities needed to have priority for 2012.

Now, the good part is, I'm in office for a little bit longer. Let's start the focus on the cities, but let's not stop there. We're all in this together. For Michigan to be a great state again, we need Detroit to be on the path to being a great city again. That's true regardless of where you live. I represent everyone in the state, and I take that very seriously. It's not about win-lose. It's about how to raise everyone up, and if we're doing something in one place, we need to be thoughtful and equitable about how we handle the other places around the state. Every time I make a decision, I think that way.

Are the limits to the role of state government on local problems or issues?

Good government is done by people working with people. It's not about [the state] being overly prescriptive. One of the beauties of our system is that for a lot of issues, it's clearly best handled at the local level. The state doesn't have all the answers. It's about good government. Government isn't here to do everything for everyone. We each have our roles and responsibilities. The question is: instead of looking at ourselves as islands, how are we partners? That's why I encourage this approach of partnership, communication and collaboration. We're a team; we're one big team—and let's win together.

or not, every one of you, as a citizen, is a customer of mine. And I need to show you good customer service—because that's what you deserve. If you think about it, we ask for some of your precious resources in taxes and revenue to do what we're doing, and so in many cases, we're a shopping choice. In some cases, you didn't get a choice as to whether or not you wanted to shop in our store, but we are a shopping choice and we need to deliver good service.

And the best government, in my view, is when our citizens—our customers—can say, "Boy, I'm happy I shopped with them, because I got good value for what I was shopping for, I got good service, and I was treated the right way." And that's something that, at the state level, we need to do a better job at. One thing that I'll share with you: the issue is not with our employees. We've got good, hard-working employees at the state, as I know you do in all your entities. And too often, they get the blame, and sometimes they feel like they are the victim. Well, I agree with the statement that too often, they are the victim. It's the system we established, the bureaucracy we've put in place.

What we're going to start doing this next year is, we're going to start listening a whole lot better. And we're going to do more than listen, we're going to act.

I do employee lunches all the time, and at every meeting I have, I'll ask, "Can anyone in this room tell me about a stupid report that you're working on, that you actually know what you're working on doesn't make a difference and is a waste of time?" Usually 80 to 90 percent—sometimes every single person—will put up their hand. And I say, "Isn't that dumb?" But when I say, "Can you tell me what they are?", they hesitate. Because in some ways, they've been in the system for so long, they don't want to talk about it or are afraid they are going to get into trouble.

We have to create that environment where they are comfortable, in saying that it is dumb, and making those things go away. I know we probably do the same things with [townships]. And that's why we need to continue the dialogue of how we work with townships. I bet if I took a poll, "Can anyone here think of anything dumb that the state does?" ...

But isn't the most important thing to start with that question—to say, let's have an honest dialogue? I'm not here to sugarcoat things—I just want the facts. And the facts are, in 2012, we're going to start that process of, "Let's talk about those dumb things" and get them out of the way, and reallocate those resources toward doing something smart, that helps the customer, or possibly even telling them we can offer that service for a lesser price.

That's the focus. And it won't happen overnight. But one thing, tonight, is that I want to reach out to you and say, shouldn't we partner on this? This is exciting. This is about reinventing.

One thing I'm happy about is a program we created with \$5 million to encourage innovation, collaboration and service



MTA District 9 Director Steve Ebels greeted the governor before his address at the Networking Banquet.

sharing between jurisdictions. We [announced] awards last week, and six townships applied and received awards. Those dollars are going to great use. We had \$5 million in this pot, and more than \$20 million in applications about how to innovate and be entrepreneurial in government. That's something our citizens would like to hear, and see how we're doing that.

I hope we can create this environment where we can work together. It's not just about changing a law, a regulation or a report. The most difficult part of this transition is a cultural one—how we operate, how we work together and how we treat our customers. We have become too negative. The first reaction, too often, when we hear a problem is to say, "They did it. They are to blame." My answer is, "I don't care." Spending time blaming people doesn't solve a problem. And the thing that goes with that is, I don't care who gets credit. Does that matter? If we're working together to give great customer service, the important thing isn't who gets to raise their hand and say, "I did it." The best thing is to say, "Didn't we all win together and can't we *all* get credit?"

That's the whole philosophy—relentless positive action. No blame, no credit, let's solve the problem, let's move on and let's be relentless. That's the one thing that's going to distinguish us from the rest of the country. It worked last year. It works this year. If we can show that every one of us can bring our friends, our colleagues and our neighbors together, we will continue to stand out from the rest of the country as *the* place to be, [as] *the* Michigan 3.0, as *the* place that is showing the rest of the country and the world that we can innovate and be entrepreneurial, and make a real difference. I am absolutely fired up to do this.

But it's not about me. It's about we.

We know we have a lot more problems to solve, but we're just going to get up every day and say, "This is the most important one, let's knock this off. After that's done, let's solve this one." I can tell you, it adds up. We are on the cusp of true invention, of having it so Michiganders can be proud—and it starts with all of you. ■

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A look back at MTA's 2012 Annual Conference & Expo



2012 Keynote Mort Crim was a highlight for many attendees



Township officials were inspired to imagine, focus, lead and evolve at the Conference's Opening Session



2011 MTA President Jack Randolph led the national anthem during the Opening Session



Plenty of opportunities for questions and answers



The MTA Expo offered a chance to talk with vendors about township services and solutions



The new Lunch 'n Learn sessions offered time for networking among colleagues



Never a dull moment at Country & Western Night, sponsored by the Michigan Township Participating Plan



Rep. Mark Quimet was honored as MTA's Legislator of the Year



Educational session topics ranged from wind farms to ethics



Time for catching up with friends and making new connections



Experts shared their knowledge and insights at more than 50 different educational sessions during the week



Rick K and the Allnighters crooned tunes from five-plus decades during the Networking Banquet



More than 40 townships kicked off the Opening Session on an inspirational note with the 2012 Parade of Flags



One last chance for friends and fun at the Afterglow Gala, sponsored by Burnham & Flower Insurance Group



MTA Executive Director Larry Merrill urged officials to embrace positivity



Delegates from MTA-member townships helped shape the Association's legislative policy platform at the Annual Meeting

10 questions with MTA President Bill Renn

With an eye on the future and intentions to lend a listening ear to Michigan's township officials over the upcoming year, 2012 MTA President **Bill Renn**, supervisor of **Chandler Township** (Huron Co.), has great expectations for his year at the helm of the Association. Renn was elected president at the MTA Annual Meeting, held Jan. 27 during the 2012 MTA Annual Educational Conference & Expo in Detroit.

Renn's high expectations are not just for himself—he also expects the MTA Board and townships as a whole to strive for greatness in helping restore Michigan to prosperity. No stranger to hard work, Renn has been township supervisor since 1989 and was first elected to the MTA Board in 2001. With deep ties to his community and the land, Renn works with a neighbor farming more than 3,500 acres, growing soybeans, sugar beets, wheat and corn. They also operate a used truck and trailer sales lot in Chandler Township. He recently sat down with the Michigan Township News to reflect on the experiences that led him to the MTA presidency as well as what he sees for the future of township government.

What are your goals as MTA president, and for townships as a whole, this year? My goal is to listen to our community leaders as I travel through the state—and then incorporate their ideas and concerns into the discussions of leading Michigan back to prosperity.

Also, I want to encourage our townships to be involved in leading Michigan back to prosperity. The decisions we make today will guide Michigan into the future. By townships being involved, our views and objectives can be part of the solution.

How can township officials further engage residents in the local government process? By listening to their comments and keeping them informed on what can be done to resolve any concern. Officials can also encourage local leaders to assist the township through serving on committees.



What can MTA do to get more involvement from our members? We must continue to invite both their verbal and written comments and an expansion of our volunteer program.

What role do townships play in restoring Michigan to prosperity? Townships are the roots of the Michigan tree. For the tree to survive and prosper, the roots must be strong. The decisions townships make to direct their township affect the county, region and the state. While most issues are local, we must always look at the big picture.

When you look into the future, what do you see for township government? The township form of government will be there as our residents demand that their voices be heard—from the local level to the national level. As the needs of a township change over time, because of its local connection, it will adapt to the needs of its residents.



Renn chats with Gov. Rick Snyder before the Networking Banquet.



Renn was among the many officials who took part in the MTA Volunteer Blood Drive.

What advice do you have for township officials in how to achieve quality leadership and service in their communities? Whenever the opportunity comes to attend a training session or workshop, take it. MTA offers sessions at the Annual Educational Conference, *On the Road* regional meetings and throughout the year, plus our Township Governance Academy classes.

Also, LISTEN! To provide leadership, you must know direction. To know direction, you must know the facts. To know the facts, you must listen. You cannot listen if you are talking!

What—in your personal and professional experience— prepared you to serve as MTA president? In the past, I have had the opportunity to serve on several boards at the state level, including the Michigan Crop Improvement Association, Michigan Foundation Seed Association and the Michigan Bean Commission. All of these organizations provide professional leadership training opportunities for their directors.

Why/how did you get started in township government? In 1989, the Chandler Township Board asked me to fill the vacancy after the supervisor resigned. I enjoy working with people, and I love my township. After 20-plus years, I still enjoy what I do.

Upon completion of your term, what would you like your legacy to be? That township officials continue to partner with local, state and federal officials to discuss and resolve issues. We must continue to remind them not to spend a dollar until you earned a dollar. It is also critical that we keep them informed of unfunded mandates that are passed down to local government to implement.

Who is your personal hero? My dad! He gave me his work ethic and love of the land. He always encouraged me to attend meetings and workshops. In the 30-plus years that he served as township trustee, he only missed one MTA Conference. His comment was, "It's my duty to attend and be educated, or it's time to resign."



2011 MTA President Jack Randolph bestows the president's pin on Renn at the 2012 Annual Meeting.

2012 MTA Executive Committee



**Bill Renn,
President**

Supervisor, Chandler Township
(Huron Co.)



**Denny Olson,
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Diane Randall, Member-at-Large

Supervisor, Roscommon Township
(Roscommon Co.)



**Jack Randolph,
Immediate Past President**

Supervisor, East China Charter Township
(St. Clair Co.)

Three new directors elected to MTA Board

Three new faces have joined the MTA Board, after being elected at caucus elections held during the 2012 MTA Annual Conference in Detroit.

Debbie Aubin, District 1 Director

Calumet Charter Township (Houghton Co.) Treasurer **Debbie Aubin** will represent township officials in Gogebic, Houghton, Keweenaw and Ontonagon Counties as District 1 Director on the MTA Board.



Aubin

Aubin sees her new role on the MTA Board as an opportunity for communities to learn from each other's experiences. "I hope to bring home to my District the knowledge and wisdom of MTA to make us better communities, and at the same time, bring my area's challenges and triumphs to the MTA Board so that we can all learn from each other," Aubin said.

She continued, "I want to learn. I want to hopefully make a difference and represent my District with common sense, sincerity and an open mind."

A collaborative effort between the community and the state to keep the National Guard Armory in the township is among Aubin's most rewarding experiences in local government to date, she said. After a successful campaign to retain the National Guard post, a new \$4 million armory was constructed, and the township was able to purchase the former armory, which is now used as the "Calumet Colosseum" hockey arena.

Aubin has served as township treasurer since 1996. She has long been involved in area theatre groups, including the Calumet Theatre Company and the Calumet Players Community Theatre. She received a lifetime achievement award from the Calumet Players in 2008.

Connie Cargill, District 11 Director

MTA District 11—which encompasses Lake, Mason and Oceana Counties—will now be represented by **Connie Cargill, Golden Township** (Oceana Co.) treasurer.



Cargill

Cargill, who has served as township treasurer since 1995 and is also vice chair of the Oceana County MTA Chapter, values her role as a local community leader, and believes that her new position on the MTA Board can help strengthen her efforts to represent area residents.

"I love my job as a township treasurer, and enjoy my involvement at both the county and local level," she said. "Hopefully, I can learn while on the MTA Board of Directors and be a good liaison for my local constituents."

Serving those local constituents is at the heart of Cargill's township pride. "Meeting and serving the people of my township is the most rewarding part of being involved in local government," said Cargill. "I enjoy getting to know the people I represent and helping to solve their problems."

Cargill previously served as deputy treasurer, and has served as a 4-H leader and member of the 4-H Horse Development Committee. She is a board member of the Mason County Saddle Club, and on the Oceana County Parks and Recreation Committee.

Lawrence Krohn, District 14 Director

Oliver Township (Huron Co.) Supervisor **Lawrence Krohn** will represent township officials in Huron and Tuscola Counties as District 14 Director.



Krohn

Serving as a township official is in Krohn's blood—his father served as Oliver Township supervisor for nearly three decades, from 1939 to 1967. Krohn was first elected township trustee in 1981, and became supervisor in 1982—a position he has held since. He previously served as secretary of the Huron County MTA Chapter, and is also involved in the Knights of Columbus.

In his new role on the MTA Board, Krohn aims to help the Association convey the message about the vital role townships play in the state. Relaying this message to the next generation of local leaders is of critical importance, according to Krohn.

"Educating the public, our Legislature and others on the key roles townships play is important," he said. "Getting this information to our high school students is where it needs to start."

Krohn, who notes that his township was the first in the state to establish a wind park, hopes to learn from his fellow colleagues on the MTA Board.

"My goal is to learn strategies from other directors and apply this knowledge to take back to the townships in District 14," he said.

Letter to the editor

Michigan must unite to survive and thrive

A year ago I attended the Michigan Townships Association's Annual Conference. At that time, my beloved community was knee-deep in a recall effort, and my confidence in the political system as a whole had been undeniably shaken. I attended the conference as a non-member with a degree of cynicism, perhaps even contempt, and certainly a negative bias regarding the annual gathering of township officials from all over Michigan. I was pleasantly surprised when I left with a renewed faith in local governments and the assurance that while my township's leaders had been missing the mark, the rest of them were passionate about the privilege of serving their communities.

A year later I returned to the Conference, this time as an elected official. After we successfully recalled three board members (in Hagar Township), having been outspoken as to how board

members should behave, I was asked by my community to put my money where my mouth was.

This year at the Conference I found an atmosphere promoting change, consolidation and collaboration. I participated in discussions regarding local issues that affect my community: election laws, personal property tax, police protection, economic development. The keynote speaker likened the annual meeting to a "reboot" for township officials. Gov. Rick Snyder spoke at dinner and told us 2011 wasn't about talking, it was about action. That had certainly been true in my community. He went on to say he didn't care who was to blame or who should get credit; that we should just keep working together for a common goal. Our recall effort would never have succeeded if not for that motto. Larry Merrill, MTA executive director, told us one of Michigan's greatest challenges is our own negativity. While manufacturing was leaving, we have actually been gaining more service industry. He pointed out that the world economy had changed—people no longer moved

where the jobs were, but rather sought to start businesses where they desired to live. Our focus should be on developing communities that attract these new entrepreneurs. The Michigan Main Street Center explained how Generations X and Y are poised for volunteer involvement in a way we have never seen—we have only to start asking for volunteers.

At our closing dinner, as the band played Lee Greenwood's "Proud to Be an American," I was humbled to realize I was in a roomful of the very people charged with leading Michigan out of economic adversity, and somehow this group had become my peers. I came away with a clear message. Change is coming to Michigan by way of consolidation of services, greater community involvement, small business encouragement and transparency in our government. Business as usual is no longer an option for our school systems, road commissions and local governments.

—**Deb Kavanaugh**, Trustee
Hagar Township (Berrien Co.)

This letter first appeared in the Herald-Palladium