

# *The Daily Ledger*

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Ryan-Hawkinson express strong support for Rt. 336

By JOHN FROEHLING/of the Daily Ledger

LEWISTOWN - Republican candidates for governor and lieutenant governor voiced their strong support for a four-lane highway through Fulton County, connecting Macomb to Peoria. They discussed the importance of the project at a 336 Coalition rally Thursday at the Fulton County Fairgrounds in Lewistown.

Jim Ryan, outgoing Illinois attorney general who is running for governor, was a little late in arriving in his van with his wife. At one point in the trip, a horse wandered into the roadway. Ryan and the other vehicles traveling with him had to stop, turn on emergency lights and wait until it was safe to proceed, according to Marty Green, a former Canton resident who is acting as regional director for Ryan's campaign.

Mark Johann, president of the 336 Coalition, joked with the crowd while waiting for Ryan to arrive by saying the reason it was taking longer than expected was due to the extra time it takes to travel on two-lane roads.

Ryan, who lives in Elmhurst in DuPaige County and also has a suite in Springfield, was emphatic about his support for a four-lane road from Macomb to Peoria. Transportation and economic development go hand in hand and must be a priority, especially in a bad economy, he said. He pledged to do his best to find state and federal funds to get the four-lane highway built.

He said he and state Sen. Carl Hawkinson (R-Galesburg), who is running for lieutenant governor, met recently with a transportation group in Quincy to understand downstate transportation concerns and promised to work for funding to complete a four-lane highway through western Illinois.

Ryan said he attended the 336 Coalition rally to show his support for the project, which will expand economic opportunities, create more jobs and improve the quality of life in this part of the state. That

is a top priority, he said.

Hawkinson seconded that sentiment. "I'm a strong supporter of 336, and we'll make sure this gets done," he said.

Ryan said he interviewed 15 men and women but found none more qualified than Hawkinson to be his running mate as lieutenant governor. Hawkinson represents experience, with 20 years' service in the General Assembly, as well as integrity and character. His record reflects support for road and infrastructure projects like 336, and he also voted to promote ethanol, Ryan said.

"You'll have a strong ally in me and Carl Hawkinson in Springfield to support your efforts," Ryan told the crowd of around 350 people. "The 336 Coalition shows what can happen when people work together in a nonpartisan way to benefit the community," he added.

"After Nov. 5, we'll work together, not as Democrats and Republicans, but to get things done for the state," Hawkinson agreed.

Ryan also said he would work to open new markets for ethanol.

"Ethanol is so important to this state," he said. Promoting its is a win-win situation, because it helps the state's economy and also reduces air pollution, Ryan said.

London Mills area farmer Mike Smith, who is president of Central Illinois Energy which represents the planned ethanol plant 3 1/2 miles south of Canton, said he hoped to break ground for the plant by August or September. The new farm bill will help make ethanol a much stronger force, he said.

Efforts are ongoing to close a deal on the real estate, which involves mine land which is pending release by state mining officials, and obtaining financing from non-farmer sources. The permitting process is also pending, he said.

Neither Democratic candidate for governor or lieutenant governor - Cong. Rod Blagojevich (D-Chicago) and former Illinois Treasurer Pat Quinn, respectively - were able to attend the rally. Both had been invited.

State Rep. Mike Smith (D-Canton) said he offered to fly Blagojevich to the rally, but the congressman's schedule would not allow it.

No spokesman commented on behalf of Quinn.

Numerous elected officials were in attendance. Lewistown Mayor Barry Blackwell said a few words in support of the 336 Coalition and presented a check for \$2,600 to Johann. The City of Lewistown donation represented \$1 for each of the 2,600 residents of Lewistown, he said.

"Thanks. We promise to put that to good use," Johann said.

Johann provided copies of an analysis of four-lane highways and county unemployment rates in Illinois to the audience prior to speaker presentations. The document noted the unemployment rate was 8.6 percent in Fulton County in April 2002. It also offered the following conclusions:

- By land area, Fulton County is the 10th largest county in Illinois. Of the 17 largest counties in the state, it is the only county without any four-lane highways within its borders.

- Since 1980, the county's unemployment rate has not recovered (it was 8.1 percent that year, 8.9 percent in 1990 and 7.2 percent in 2000). It is nearly double the state and national average and currently continues to be highest among the 30 counties listed in the analysis. The 30 counties were listed in order of size by land area.

- Of the 30 largest counties in the state, only three do not have any four-lane highways. Fulton County has the largest population of those three (38,250) compared to 35,372 in Christian County and 22,893 in Shelby County.

- Of the 27 largest counties that have four-lane highways running through them, only seven have smaller populations than Fulton County.

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