Dear Friends,

Since the beginning of the year, I’ve met with individuals and local leaders from across Hillsdale and Branch counties. We’ve talked about the issues we are facing at both the state and local levels, their priorities and concerns.

As always, I’ve considered what you’ve shared with me through your emails, letters, phone and face-to-face conversations as I represent you in Lansing. Your voice has played an important role in shaping this Legislature’s work to strengthen education, fix our roads and bridges, make government more transparent and once again approve a responsible, timely and balanced state budget.

Inside, you’ll find a summary of our efforts and accomplishments so far this term. We’ve tackled big issues, cleaned up needless rules and protected vulnerable citizens.

Because there is no such thing as “good enough” when it comes to hard-working Michigan taxpayers, we’ll continue working every day to expand opportunities and improve quality of life in our communities.

As always, if I may be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact my office at any time. My staff and I are here to serve you.

Sincerely,

ERIC LEUTHEUSER
State Representative

(866) 362-8812 • EricLeutheuser@house.mi.gov
www.RepEricLeutheuser.com
LEUTHEUSER ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO LEARN SKILLED TRADES

Education cannot use a one-size-fits-all approach. As a member of the committee on Workforce and Talent Development, I’m working to ensure all our students obtain the skills they need to be successful in their career and in life.

Across Michigan and here in Hillsdale and Branch counties, we’ve seen the expansion of established businesses as well as new operations coming into the area – bringing with them new job opportunities for area residents. However, Michigan is facing a critical shortage of trained workers for many of these jobs.

To ensure that any high school student seeking a career in the skilled trades is ready to succeed in their field of choice, we’re updating the high school curriculum and striving to improve access to skilled trades training through career and technical education. This will give young adults the opportunity to choose a good-paying, in-demand vocational career right here at home.

MOST FUNDING IN STATE’S HISTORY NOW ALLOCATED TO FIX ROADS

During the “Lost Decade,” our economy fell into disrepair, as did our infrastructure. In fact, it’s unfortunate but no state “general fund” dollars were allocated to improve our roads between 2002-2011.

To help keep Michigan drivers safe and encourage economic growth, we are now dedicating the most funding ever to fix roads and bridges in Michigan.

In 2015, the Legislature approved an unprecedented plan to finally address the problem. This year, we started seeing the results of this dynamic plan. For the 2016-17 fiscal year, more than $2.4 billion will be used to improve local, county and state roadways. For the 2017-18 fiscal year, more than $2.6 billion will be dedicated.

For Hillsdale and Branch counties, that translates into an increase of approximately 33.5 percent more funding in just two short years.

| MTF Distributions to Branch and Hillsdale County-Wide Totals: FY 2017-18 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Branch County  | 5,752,071      | 7,174,931         | 7,676,668         | 1,924,597       | 33.5%           |
| Hillsdale County| 5,899,123      | 7,358,359         | 7,872,923         | 1,973,800       | 33.5%           |

Naturally, it’s going to take time to properly restore our roads and bridges, but we’re beginning to see improvements and the benefits of making our infrastructure a priority once again.

HOUSE APPROVES FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE STATE BUDGET

I appreciated hearing from you during the budget process. I listened to your concerns and fought for a 2017-18 state budget that reflects your priorities. We worked to secure spending to improve life for people across Michigan while making state government more efficient, effective and accountable.

It’s time for government to live within its means. We must continue to restrict the size of government and never lose sight of the fact that every dollar represents a taxpayer’s hard-earned money.

The House-approved budget recently signed by the governor is a fiscally responsible blueprint that properly invests in our state’s future. Highlights of this balanced budget include:

- Allocating the highest funding in our state’s history for K-12 schools.
- Increasing state “revenue sharing” payments to counties, cities, villages and townships.
- Allocating the highest funding in our state’s history for K-12 schools.
- Improving public safety by adding 150 more Michigan State Police troopers.
- Making health care more effective, with an enhanced focus on improving mental health care.
- Paying down debt and adding to the state’s emergency fund for tough times.
- Forcing state government to live within its means by ensuring the next year’s budget does not exceed the rate of inflation.

MTF Distributions to Branch and Hillsdale County-Wide Totals: FY 2017-18

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I cosponsored and helped pass common sense legislation in March to increase transparency and accountability in state government. Our bills require the governor to be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. The legislation also creates a similar transparency requirement for all state legislators.

Currently, Michigan is one of only two states that still exempts its governor, lieutenant governor and the Legislature from sunshine laws. It’s time we remove these exemptions and help improve government accountability. The plan:

• Makes state government more accountable to you;
• Opens the records of the governor and Legislature;
• Protects your private information.

OTHER ACTIONS

As a member of the committees on Commerce and Trade, Regulatory Reform and Financial Liability Reform, I’ve been especially proud to support several bills that seek to encourage job creation, remove barriers and address our state’s long-term fiscal health, as well as those that protect the vulnerable among us.

Some of the House legislative initiatives we’ve been working on include:

HB 4205: Prevents state departments and agencies from creating administrative rules that are more burdensome than those required by the federal government, unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

HB 4608: Eliminates the current requirement for residential painters and decorators to obtain and maintain an unnecessary contractor’s license.

SB 401: Amends MPSERS to protect the existing Defined Contribution (DC) plan for current school employees while offering new employees the option of a more attractive 401(k) plan that mirrors what other state employees are offered. Over time, the new plan will eliminate a large debt for our state.

HBs 4636 – 4642, 4661, 4690: Protects young girls throughout the state by prohibiting the inhumane practice of female genital mutilation and establishing severe penalties for anyone who engages in this horrific procedure.

HB 4219: Expands the “safe harbor” for victims of human trafficking, allowing victims greater hope of escaping their cycle of abuse and “starting over.”
Late last year, the Jonesville American Legion contacted me to explore renaming a portion of US-12 to honor the memory of local Vietnam War hero and Medal of Honor recipient, James Bondsteel. Renaming a state highway requires an act of the Legislature and the governor to sign the measure into law.

I am pleased to report that the first bill I sponsored this term was this district-initiated tribute, and House Bill 4057 has now become Public Act 28 of 2017. By renaming the portion of US-12 that runs through Jonesville in Hillsdale County as the James Bondsteel Memorial Highway, our state expresses its gratitude and appreciation for this soldier’s acts of heroism and service.

Future development of the parcels will include the expansion of campsites on the riverfront, a pavilion and a handicap-accessible canoe/kayak launch. This will be the first canoe and kayak launch of its kind in the county, and will provide the opportunity for shore fishing. We have an abundance of natural resources in our area, and this is a chance to bring enjoyment to more residents, families and anglers.

Since 1976, the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) has been dedicated to protecting our state’s natural resources and developing outdoor recreation opportunities for residents through community grants. Initially, funding for these grants was derived from royalties on the sale and lease of state-owned mineral rights (primarily oil and gas). Happily, grants awarded through the fund today are largely self-sustained by earnings made on the fund’s investments.

This year, Coldwater will receive financial support for a local project from the fund. The City of Coldwater will receive funding to pay for the expansion of Angel Cove Park along the Coldwater River. The $114,000 combination of state and MNRTF money will be used to buy two parcels of land adjacent to the park.