

ALMA

Little trust for Lansing to do the right thing

By Linda Gittleman

Special to the Sun

Only about 20 people showed up in Alma Wednesday to discuss improving public trust in the state government.

But those 20 weren't shy about expressing their views on just how far the state has to go to restore trust.

It's far.

Sponsored by The Center for Michigan, a non partisan, non profit organization, the event is one of many held throughout the state, said moderator Amber DeLind.

The information gathered is then presented to public leaders so they can learn what their constituents are concerned about.

As expected, nearly all of the participants believed there was a great deal of work needed to restore public trust.

In two areas however, a majority of the people believed the state was doing a good job: in holding elec-

tions and fostering economic growth.

On nearly every other subject matter that ranged from public health and the environment to education, redistricting, term limits, emergency managers and campaign finance, Lansing was failing its residents, according to those in attendance.

Since many environmental activists were in the audience, the environment and public health were of great concern.

About 90 percent rated trust in the state to handle public health as very low or low.

An exception was the local health department, as one member of the audience stated.

About 85 percent did not trust the state to protect the environment.

One said, "They should take "pure" out of "Pure Michigan."

Another agreed.

"My biggest thing is water pollution. 'Pure Michigan' irritates me."

"The state has regulations," he said. "But they're not enforcing them."

Others questioned the appointments of people to head departments — like the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality—who have no expertise in that area.

Shouldn't knowledge and experience be required for department heads?

Other concerns centered around a lax administration.

"We all have to follow the rules," one said. "But (some) aren't following the rules and there are no penalties. Justice is not happening."

Another pointed out that the state can't be run like a business.

"You can't do that," he said. "It's fundamentally different to hold public trust."

Most in the room at Van Dusen Commons at Alma College didn't like voter registration laws and campaign financing.

"You can buy an election (in the state.)" one said.

A college student pointed out that students can't get an absentee ballot as a first time voter.

And it was also noted that getting a state approved voter ID can cost up to \$85 and take a long time.

One suggested early voting be allowed as other states are doing, and perhaps allow weekend voting as some European countries are doing.

When it comes to term limits, 37 percent thought it should be eliminated and 47 percent believed the terms allowed should be lengthened.

No one cared for the emergency manager system and one believed it was created to serve the administration and not the cities.

Most believed a plan that would allow the emergency manager to work and make decisions with the local officials to be best.

The results of the state wide information gathering will be published in February.