U.S. actions affect industry: Steiger

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The decisions of government to improve railroads, deregulate transport firms and crack down on a national PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) all will affect the paper industry, as well as private citizens, U.S. Rep. William Steiger, R-Oshkosh, said Saturday at the 42nd annual meeting of Wisconsin Paper Group.

The paper group, consisting of 42 paper industry firms, is a cooperative organization designed to permit pooling of shipments of paper to save transport costs. The annual meeting was at North Shore Country Club.

Railroad shipments, and the fate of the nation's rail system, will be affected because Congress has approved a $6 billion-plus package of rail improvements, Steiger said.

He said some increasing rate flexibility is likely, as is a release of railroads from some requirements now enforced by the Interstate Commerce Commission.

The industry and the public also should be concerned about probable increasing federal action to deal with the PCB problem of pollution to air and water, he said.

There is a need to coordinate state and federal action, he said. Steiger predicted that a toxic substances bill will be passed by Congress to deal with all materials, such as PCBs, which can be toxic. He indicated legislative and administrative pressure on industry may increase.

"My hope," he said, "is that we can temper our responses as well as our actions."

Taxes also may be changed, he said.

Increasingly, according to Steiger, the public is being confused by complex tax reporting forms, and many citizens think tax laws are unfair.

Steiger, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, said tax simplification is being considered. It would have a drastic impact on industry and private citizens because the tax simplification would do away with most deductions. Instead, a straight and simple lower tax rate would be applied to all.

In response to questions, Steiger said, that a balanced federal budget is possible by 1979, as asked for by President Gerald Ford. But it's only possible if Congress now decides to cooperate with the President's plan, he added.

"It will only happen if they (Congress) begin to tear (the debt) down now."

However, Steiger backed an increase in Social Security rates. Congress has voted improved benefits without providing for funding to pay for these benefits, so that inflation and the growing numbers of retired have sharply reduced the Social Security trust fund.

Continued on Page 12

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Continued From Page 10

The system is fundamental enough now to the nation so Congress will protect its integrity, he said. "There is no way you're going to let that system go broke. It's just too profound. Congress will do what's necessary."

He said that a reduction in the size of government can only happen if people begin to expect less from the federal level.

People must cease looking toward the federal government for answers to local questions and instead rely on traditional nongovernmental groups such as volunteer organizations, service clubs and lodges as well as local government, said Steiger.

He backed Ford as the best presidential candidate.

"The president...I think, has done an extremely good job in about the most difficult conditions that a man could," he said.

Ford has been unjustly charged with changing his mind on issues when, as in the case of New York City, he offered aid after the city had decided to help itself out of a financial disaster, Steiger added.

Steiger predicted that upcoming congressional elections will result in the Democratic party maintaining a majority in the House and Senate, but he said Republicans could, if they're fortunate, gain 25-30 seats in the House.

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