

G.A. & F.C. Wagman CEO cautious on Obama infrastructure plan



By **David Dagan**

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President-elect Barack Obama's weekend promise of a surge in federal infrastructure spending bodes well for construction companies, but one midstate road builder wants to see what is around the bend.

Richard Wagman today said he has mixed emotions about Obama's spending plan, which would be part of a stimulus package. Wagman is chairman and chief executive officer of York County-based G.A. & F.C. Wagman Inc. and a former chairman of the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

"Stimulus packages I'm not necessarily in favor of, but if they're going to put one out, I think it would be a wise move to invest the funds in infrastructure," Wagman said. The problem with stimulus spending is that it drives the country further into debt, he said.

Obama said Saturday he wants to upgrade infrastructure, repair schools, make government buildings more energy efficient and invest in computer technology for schools, libraries and medical offices. In the announcement, the president-elect invoked President Dwight D. Eisenhower's program to build the interstate highway system, but that system was largely paid for without debt, Wagman said.

Wagman does want to see more road funding. In fact, he said, any infrastructure funding passed as part of a stimulus would be just a drop in the bucket compared to the total need. The true test will come in September 2009, when Congress is due to vote on a multi-year transportation plan, he said.

"We need a long-term visionary program," Wagman said.

Alternatives to debt funding include public-private partnerships, tolling and increases in the gas tax, he said.