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## Open government again under attack in Michigan

**T**HE HIDE-'N-SNEAK lobby is at it again in Lansing.

That's our nickname for some local governmental officials in Michigan who won't get used to the idea of conducting the public's business in public. Their paternalistic notion of running government is that they'll tell us what they've decided when they're good and ready, and don't ask too many questions, little fellow.

In this case, some elements in the Michigan Association of School Boards are trying again to amend the Open Meetings Act. In the closing days of the 1980 legislative session, they were successful at slipping through a two amendments to chip away at the public's ability to watch what's going on. But a sharp-eyed Gov. William G. Milliken vetoed both measures, in no uncertain terms.

The need for open meetings is four-fold:

- The public has a right to know what the governmental body plans to do before it acts.
- The public has a right to know what options and amendments were offered, not just the final decision.
- The public has a right to know who influenced the board's decision.
- And the public has a right to have its own say before the board acts.

NOW THE HIDE-'n-Sneak Lobby is back with Senate Bill 790, which has been reported out of committee and is heading for the Senate floor. To his credit, Sen. Doug Ross, D-Southfield, resisted it. One facet of the bill adds the annual evaluation of public officers to the list of things which could be done in closed session. In governments which work by the "management by objectives" system, annual reviews are becoming more common for such persons as college presidents, school superintendents and city managers.

According to handbooks for elected board mem-

bers, the annual review is one of the most important things a governing board does, along with hiring the top administrator and setting the budget. If the review is conducted behind closed doors, what important things are left for the public view?

In a review, a board should look at its goals, how the top administration has done in achieving those goals in the past year, and what could be done better in the year ahead.

It should be a conversation between the top administrator and the elected board, not a kangaroo court. A properly-done review will be positive and upbeat. There is no need to hide anything.

WE'VE TALKED about the general public's need for open government. But another group has a strong interest in open meetings.

The Michigan Education Association also is opposed to SB 790. MEA's concern is that a school board could establish a secret plan to hire a union-busting superintendent and use a closed annual review meeting to check on his progress.

If the Hide-'n-Sneak Lobby is successful in closing off annual reviews, its next goal will be to close the doors on the hiring process. This is no idle speculation. The second 1980 attack on the Open Meetings Act mentioned earlier was precisely such a bill.

It may sound as if local governments, particularly schools, have widespread corruption and nefarious dealings. Actually, such evil is rare. Local government in Michigan is pretty clean.

If so, then why do they try so hard to amend the Open Meetings Act? Why do they tell their lawyers to look for loopholes?

The answer seems to be that they simply haven't made up their minds to grow up and get used to conducting the public's business in public.

It's this childish hide-'n-sneak attitude, not the Open Meetings Act, which needs to be amended.



## Cunningham uses media to sell her soap opera

**A** STORY began in the suburbs of Detroit as became America's soap opera. I'm speaking of the continuing saga of Mary Cunningham, hard-charging corporate executive.

For those who may have been in hibernation during the past two years, Mary Cunningham was a fast-rising executive at Bendix Corp. in Southfield in September 1980. Then rumors circulated among disgruntled co-workers that Cunningham's promotions were due to a romantic link with her boss, Bill Agee. Subsequent press coverage forced her to resign her position. She is now vice-president at Joseph E. Seagram Inc. in New York.

But cold facts leave out the color of this exciting soap opera. Picture this: Two young, attractive executives of opposite sex wage a battle for truth, justice and the American way. Jealous fellow corporate executives plot their downfall. Sensational press coverage brings a tearful resignation, rehiring and second resignation of the female party. A visit to an exclusive California health spa and long walks along a sandy beach follow. A kindly priest offers advice. During a visit to St. Patrick's Cath-



**Nick Sharkey**

edral in New York, a statue inspires the female to try again. Then she resumes her meteoric career.

In the best tradition of soap operas, this one will even feature a wedding in an upcoming episode (remember the exciting "General Hospital" wedding last year?). Both Agee and Cunningham coed last week that theirs would be "very soon."

MARY CUNNINGHAM brought her road show to Detroit last week when she drew a record crowd at a meeting of the Women's Economic Club. She is a study in inconsistencies. Examine her two major arguments.

- "Manipulation by the media caused her downfall at Bendix." This is the same Mary Cunningham who grants exclusive interviews to such media stars as Gail Sheehy and Barbara Walters. She writes articles for national magazines like Parade. She will be featured in an upcoming segment of the television show "20/20." She conducts press conferences. She is planning a book about her experiences at Bendix. Who is manipulating whom?

- "When women get rapid promotions, they are victimized by rumors of romance with the boss." Cunningham argues that when a woman must work late at night alone with the boss, the innuendos of a romance begin. That doesn't happen when two men work together late at night.

But in her Parade article, Cunningham takes the other side. She argues that romance between male and female executives can be expected and may be good for the corporation. She can't have it both ways.

Incidentally, as mentioned earlier, Cunningham will soon marry Agee. But she covers that base. She incredibly wants us to believe that the romance

didn't start until she left Bendix.

**BEFORE FEMINISTS** grab pencil and paper to write, be advised that one can be sympathetic to Mary Cunningham's arguments without being sympathetic to Mary Cunningham.

Women are discriminated against in the workplace. They miss promotions available to men. They are being sexually harassed at work. Men do have informal "good old boy" networks not yet available to women.

Women have a long way to go to achieve parity in male-dominated corporate America. Perhaps it takes an aggressive person like Cunningham to be a trailblazer for women executives.

I'm sorry. I can't take Mary Cunningham seriously any more. She has lost her credibility. Cunningham would be more effective if she concentrated her energies on her new career at Seagram and emerged as a leader in American industry.

Mary Cunningham has served the cause of women's equality well. It's time for her to put behind the experiences of 1980.

## Cable TV: pay more, get less

**S**O HERE WE stand, suburban Detroit, ready to pig out on cable television madness.

Hear ye, hear ye. You name it and we'll put it on the air," shout the hucksters of the new medium.

"Up to 120 channels of programming nonsense. Full of fun. Full of local cornball talent. Even you can make a fool of yourself by appearing on cable television."

"Say, folks, no sense waiting for Bob Barker to call your name, or even John and Marilyn, for that matter. Now your own community school, library or city hall can have its own station."

**BUT DON'T KID** yourself. It's all a sham, a smokescreen laid down by a money-hungry mob that is getting rich off your hard-earned dollars. These cable firms could care less about local access. They know you won't watch Marion the librarian.

They also know you'll pay just about anything to watch movies, Las Vegas nightclub revues, pornography and most of all — sports.

On top of that, they know that you'll not only pay once but twice and maybe even three times over to watch a sports event.

The game was up, or should have been, for keen observers who read about the flap over the Tommy Hearn/Mark Hagler Windsor bout.

Now, your favorite sport may be something other than boxing, but what is happening in this case could happen to baseball, football, basketball or playing tiddlywinks with manhole covers.

**THOSE OF YOU** who already have committed yourselves to pay a fee for the "privilege" of watching television probably have heard about this flap. Those non-cable subscribers should pay close heed so you don't get burned the same way.

The cable folks and the boxing promoters are fighting over how many times you should pay to view the event.



**crackerbarrel debate**  
**Steve Barnaby**

In the long run, subscribers will either a) pay an additional fee on top of their subscription rate to watch the fight, b) join their friends at a closed-circuit location and pay a hefty charge to watch it, or c) have it blacked out altogether and watch it two weeks later on commercial television.

All the alternatives are bad — for the viewer. All are good for the media charlatans who stand to make big bucks under any alternative.

And as the cable media takes more and more away from commercial television, the viewer will stand to lose even more.

Cable is making a bid at luring the popular situation comedy "Taxi" onto its stations. We've all heard of the domino theory. Well, watch 'em fall, suckers.

Despite what cable promoters would like you to believe, this isn't a media revolution that has to happen. You really don't want to pay extra to watch television. You really would rather spend your dollars on something other than paying to watch commercials.

**THAT'S CORRECT.** If you all fall prey to the cable hype, commercial television as we know it will disappear. You will pay to watch commercials. A network exec has publicly predicted it.

Commercial-free pay television is a ploy to lure you into the cable lair. After that, ratings won't mean anything. The cable conglomerate will dictate what you will watch — and how much you will pay to watch it.

That also means millions will be cut off from watching altogether because they just won't be able to afford to watch.

But time still exists to fight back. Don't try to keep up with the Joneses. Lead the way in your community and don't buy cable.

## Better ways to curb drunks

**A** LEGISLATOR finds it easier to vote for a bill to satisfy constituents with clout than to solve a problem.

And so the Michigan Senate last week satisfied some pretty MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), articulate, suburban constituents applying political heat to win stiffer penalties against the persons who drank, drove, maimed and killed their loved ones.

It was strange to hear senator after senator predict the "reform" package would never work and yet see them vote for the three bills. The MADD folks watched the voting, but didn't seem to hear the warnings.

**SINCE PROHIBITION** won't work, there must be other ways to curb the mixture of gasoline and grain alcohol and its costs to humans in death, injury, damages and family disruption.

If you figure that only one drunk driver in 500 is going to be caught, it follows that stiffening penalties will do little to curb drunk drivers.

My own first reform would be to change "last call" to about 11:30 p.m. instead of 2 a.m. and close the bars at midnight instead of 2:30 a.m. People would start home two hours less tired, two hours closer to the dinner they ate and with two hours less firewater in their bloodstreams.

The British close their bars at 11 to 12. It seems to work.

Michigan legislators, even the ones honestly horrified by the drunk driving problem, won't consider it. The bar owners would fight too hard, they say, and Detroit has proposed moving the other direction — a 4 a.m. closing.

Such a major social change would have a better



**Tim Richard**

chance of working than stiffer penalties.

**MY NEXT REFORM** would be to exempt places with "tabletop" licenses from the local property tax.

What happens, particularly in these suburbs, is that city councils and township boards are more concerned with property tax revenues than with drunk driving. So before they will issue a new license, they want the business to invest \$1 million or so, boosting the tax base. What they are after is the Holiday Inn types of establishments, and people are forced to drive farther to their favorite watering spots.

What would benefit public safety, however, is the old-fashioned neighborhood bar to which people could walk or, at least, not drive as far. If bar licenses weren't tied to property taxes, governing bodies would have no incentive to wipe out the neighborhood bar.

The system would work — assuming your goal is the reduction of drunk driving rather than property tax revenue.

**MY THIRD** reform would be the ending of urban sprawl and the proper funding of public transit.

Judges and prosecutors would be less reluctant to take away the driving privileges of persons who now must drive to their jobs. And as many senators said, the problem is not that we don't have severe enough laws, but that prosecutors and judges won't prosecute and punish to the full extent of the law.

As you may have guessed, I have no plans to run for the Michigan Legislature. I'm not interested in placating people who are MADD. I'm seriously interested in getting drunks out of cars.