

Michigan Mirror

Public business is everybody's job

By WARREN M. HOYT

Who cares if "public bodies" do their business in public? Everybody should. They're doing the public's business and spending taxpayers' money. Voters have a right—and a duty—to know what's going on.

Even if they don't want to attend the meeting themselves, members of the tax-paying public should care if their media representatives are allowed into meetings of public bodies to carry out their roles as watchdogs of government.

Thus the furor came from many quarters in Michigan when Michigan's new open meetings law was approved. The measure's lions share of the credit for

which goes to Rep. David Hollister (D-Lansing)—takes effect April 1, 1977.

A **LEGAL LOOPHOLE** exists in current law which requires only that the final vote on a given topic must be taken in public. Discussion of the question can be behind closed doors—and never become known to those outside.

The new law requires all meetings of public bodies to be open to the public and held in a place available to the general public. All decisions of a public body shall be made at a meeting open to the public, the law declares.

THERE ARE exceptions, of course, such as chance encounters and social occasions. Some consider that provision a loophole too, but others point out that it probably would be quite unconstitutional to try regulating the social activities of anyone—public officials included.

Other exceptions are meetings held to discuss:

• discussing an employee, public officer or student

• collective bargaining strategy and negotiations between labor and management

for a closed hearing.

• Purchase of real estate up to the time option, purchase or lease is obtained

• Pending litigation, if it is determined that open discussion would be harmful to the public body's legal case.

• Review of applications for employment.

Partisan caucuses of the legislature are also exempt.

CANNED IMPORTS may present a serious problem for Michigan mushroom growers—no tiny matter when you consider that the state produced about 10 million pounds of mushrooms last year.

Calling the industry "small but unique," Gov. William Milliken explained that South Korea and Taiwan have dramatically increased their exports to this country.

Canned mushroom imports were 50 percent higher this July than a year ago, and growers in Michigan and other states faced the very real risk of not finding a market for their crops, the governor said.

President Ford has sent a special trade negotiator abroad to discuss possible voluntary mushroom import restraints with of-

ficials in South Korea and Taiwan. **LETTERS OF MILK**—kilograms of tomatoes and green beans. That's what Michigan consumers may find in their grocery carts in the not too distant future.

The state's department of agriculture notes that Michigan is slowly changing over to the metric system as are all other states in the nation.

But those who may think metrics are complicated might think again—about the metric measure itself is already familiar with. Take for instance kilowatts of electricity, metrically measured skis (and shoes in some cases) as well as camera lenses and other brought from abroad equipment.

METRICS ALSO can help accuracy in the international trade of agricultural products.

Marketing advisor Mansour Hagan points out that the most widely known measures—pounds and bushels—are not as precise as metric measures. The bushel he notes is commonly agreed to be 2144.2 cubic inches in volume. But its weight ranges from 40 pounds for wheat to 56 pounds for corn and 32 pounds for oats.

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What to do when you can't pay your bills

Getting into debt is usually painless. Getting out of it usually isn't. But it is not impossible.

With this realistic assessment, the Michigan Consumer Council begins its new brochure, "What to Do When You Can't Pay Your Bills." The brochure gives practical, detailed advice to consumers who are swamped with debts.

It's easy today to get into debt. Executive Director Linda Joy said. "That's why we've designed a brochure for consumers who feel on the brink of plunging the panic button. It offers a step-by-step action plan to regain financial control."

What to do? "A lot of consumers, in the home, methods of getting out of debt. They range from how to contact the creditors to how to file for bankruptcy. The brochure also includes tips on mortgage payments, utility bills and budget planning."

We hope this brochure will not only give indebted consumers helpful information, but also will relieve some of the hopelessness and frustration of the situation, Joy said.

The Council also has a brochure, "How To Sue Someone in Small Claims Court." In small claims court, consumers can take a company or individual to court without an attorney—and their complaint is less than \$500.

For free copies of the two brochures write to the Michigan Consumer Council, 414 Hollister Building, Lansing 48933.

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