

POINTS OF VIEW

Public bodies squirm under his watchful eye

Godness knows I've beaten up on Attorney General Frank Kelley more than once — for his hypersensitivity about his age (67) and his propensity to trumpet consumer issues in an election year.

So in fairness I should pat him on the back and say, "Attaboy, Frank," when he does something right. He has, and I do.

Kelley last week ruled the Open Meetings Act means what it says about public bodies' posting notices before holding a meeting. No posting, no meeting.

Kelley has been fairly strong in interpreting the Open Meetings Act to protect the public interest, though there are times when I wish he could summon the resources to prosecute violators, as he clearly has the power to do in secs. 10 (1) and 11 (1).

Kelley issued Opinion No. 6763 in response to Rep. Phillip Hoffman, R-Jackson County. Hoffman wanted to know whether a county board could recess its meeting and hold committee meetings that hadn't been posted. The answer was a clear no.

The OMA, as it's called, says, "A meeting of a public body shall not be held unless public notice is given. . . . The public must get 18 hours notice.

The term "public body" includes committees and subcommittees, too — any body which exercises governmental or proprietary authority.

"Whenever a quorum of a public body meets to discuss public business, it is a meeting subject to the OMA," Kelley went on.

Kelley's opinion goes on to give the reader some lessons you never learned in high school civics about the lengths



TIM RICHARD

to which politicians will go in order to meet secretly.

Suppose a county board recesses and a subquorum of a committee meets without posting a notice. That's OK, says Kelley — provided "the committees are purely advisory in nature, and deliberation on a common topic leading to a decision by the public body

does not take place among the committees.

In other words, they may talk about Joe the janitor's retirement party, but they'd better not take up the solid waste plan.

Suppose a county board recesses, and a subquorum of Committee A and a subquorum of Committee B hold separate meetings. Now suppose the two subquorums discuss the same resolution, and the full board acts on the resolution. What then?

No can do. They have to follow the OMA, said Kelley, citing the sins of the Wyoming City Council and the University of Michigan Board of Regents.

Most of Kelley's opinions on the 1976 Open Meetings Act have upheld the public's right to watch its elected officials. Samples:

Remember that 18-hour public notice to hold a meeting? The clock stops

when the building is closed. The board should post the notice outside the building. (No. 5724 of 1980.)

A board may not limit the subject and issues people can cover in addressing a meeting. (No. 5218 of 1977)

A legislative committee may not vote by "round-robin" collection of signatures on a tally sheet. (No. 5222 of 1977)

A public body may not vote by a procedure which prevents the public from knowing how individuals voted. In other words, no secret ballot unless the ballots are signed and made public. (No. 5262 of 1978)

Attaboy, Frank! Pat, pat.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. To leave a message for Richard, dial 349-1700.

Student could teach college about education role

You don't know what it's like. You just don't understand."

My old man said it to his old man, I said it to him and now my kid was saying it to me.

And he was right, of course. Though when I was his age I told myself I'd never forget those feelings and when I had a kid . . .

He and his brother go to different state universities. They both got caught up in the social whirl. They aren't "nerds," after all.

But here he was protesting that the school wasn't hard enough, didn't care enough, didn't teach him anything.

I often felt the same way about college. I told him he had to read on his own. He had to make his own education. He said he had been reading, most after book, most outside class.

Classes are taught on television

("For God's sake!"), he could pass tests without even going to class (uh-oh, he said more than he meant that time), school is irrelevant.

He was also feeling the squeeze, too many expenses, not enough money. I could tell him something about that; in fact I had many times.

But the truth is that the big universities do not teach. They spend most of their time and energy and concern on research. Some of that research is vitally important; some of it is, at least, intellectually interesting. Most of it is worthless, pseudo-scholarship, desperation publication, ego massaging, academic drive.

The university requires him to take a core of classes, the standard liberal arts run through. I tell him that's as it should be; he should know the basics of math, science, literature and history.



HUGH GALLAGHER

He laughs that hollow laugh that I had perfected when I was his age.

In math, he says, they let him sink or swim. The class is taught impersonally to scores of students who are then required to find tutors to make sense of something the instructor (rarely even an assistant professor) doesn't have the time or talent to make sensible.

The English and history classes are a joke, since, as he made quite clear, he read more on his own than he read for class.

Hmm. I could see some of this was special feeling, whining to disguise a lot of mispent time and a devotion to "partying" that surpassed any devotion to academics. But given all of that, he was singing an old song and it was sad how things never change.

Back in the "good old days," the students manned the barricades to denounce the indifference, irrelevancy and pointlessness of higher education. Many of the critics were childish, foggy, tainted by a pseudo-socialist bent. Relevancy often meant rejection of solid academic programs for squishy, touchy-feely, let-it-all-hang-out classes that were even less relevant than learning about Edmund Spenser's

"Faerie Queen."

But beyond all the baloney, there were kernels of truth. The big universities and many of their professors didn't care. The very size of the university, the very need for opening up the schools to more students had created academic factories where students were numbers rather than names and where first and second year students were often less than human.

Twenty years later, the beat goes on. With all the best intentions, we still haven't figured out what we want our universities to do and why we want them to do it. The best education is still the one you give yourself.

Hugh Gallagher is assistant managing editor of copy desk operations for Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave a message for him, dial 953-2118.

LETTERS

Forget more taxes

Raise taxes? Raise taxes? It's dried up. Businesses aren't spending, except for what they absolutely need to get by. Consumers are on their last leg of spending — the problems of business are just now catching up to them.

I already work 70-80 hours a week, every week. I can't work anymore, lest I collapse. And then who is going to pay my personal income

and property taxes and hire my five employees and pay their FICA, MESC, federal and state taxes, the single business taxes, FUDA, corporate year end taxes, real estate and personal property taxes? There will be no jobs for them because no one will be able to afford them.

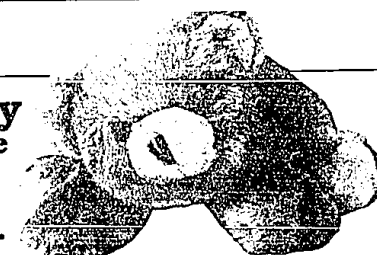
Most people think I'm rich: I live in a big house; I drive a big car; I own a business and some investment property. Little do they know that I wake up every morning in a panic that I won't be able to generate enough income to cov-

er my overhead, make payroll, make my mortgage payments and send half of it to the IRS or they will put a lien on everything the BANK really owns.

And now you want to punish me and all the other small business owners for working so hard

to pay taxes, run respectable businesses and keep people respectably employed? Are there any more government jobs? I'm a hard worker and I have a lot of other colleagues who are too. Bonnie Taubo, Exhausted Business Owner

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