



Multimedia Michigan House airs sessions in variety of ways

By Tim Anderson

Lansing residents searching for their latest news or favorite songs on the FM dial might soon come across a unique programming option - gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Michigan House of Representatives.

As part of its ongoing efforts to make legislative activity more accessible to both lawmakers and the public, the Michigan House is considering the purchase of one of the low-power FM frequencies recently made available to nonprofit entities by the Federal Communications Commission.

The signal would not be much, carrying only six miles outside the limits of Lansing, but neither would the cost, says Gary Randall, clerk of the Michigan House of Representatives. He estimates that for an investment of about \$5,000, House sessions and select committee meetings could be heard live on the radio.

"The radio station would make it much easier to keep the public informed, along with members and staff," Randall says. "And we'd basically just have to put an antenna on top of the building; it wouldn't take anything new in terms of equipment."

Audio coverage already is available in a limited form, with lobbyists, associations and others

with a keen interest in state politics able to subscribe and receive a live feed of ongoing session activity. Randall, though, says the purchase of an FM radio station is an attractive alternative because it would be more easily reached by people. As of March, Randall was waiting for the FCC to begin accepting applications for the FM stations.

Improving access

Ever since representatives moved to the House Office Building, in October 1999, the clerk's office has concentrated its efforts on better delivering the latest legislative activity to people both inside and outside the new structure.

For example, earlier this year, the state began airing live House coverage on the Internet, making it the 13th state in the country to provide the service, Randall says.

Much of the equipment already was in place because of the existing Michigan Government Television, which has broadcast state government for several years. MGTV is available around the state to people whose cable companies offer the channel to customers.

"The Web is just another way to give people access," Randall says. "While MGTV does a fine job, it is somewhat limited because some of what they have to offer has to be tape-delayed with the House and Senate meeting at the same time."

Representatives and their staff are able to keep track of House and Senate activity inside their offices with new closed-circuit televisions, which replaced the squawk boxes that previously had been used. Along with House and Senate floor activity, the closed-circuit televisions offer lawmakers the choice of watching one of two committee meetings being aired.

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House Clerk Gary Randall
Michigan

Randall says reaction to the new televisions has been very favorable, with lawmakers able to catch up on their office work and keep track of legislative activity at the same time. More

than most people, Randall knows what legislators need and want. He previously served 18 years as a House member.

"When I look at what we have now to keep members up to speed on what's happening compared to what we had before, it's just amazing," he says. ✎