

REMARKS BY ROBERT G. LIMING
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FILE

Over the past year, the Governor's Office has been fortunate to have a good relationship with the news media covering the Capitol beat. Of course, I'd like to take the credit for that...but I think the Governor deserves it all because of his strong belief in openness and honesty in dealing with the media. Looking back over the years when I covered the Governor's Office, I'll have to say that Jim Edwards is the most open Governor yet. That's not necessarily a bad reflection on past administrations...but it's a sign that Jim Edwards recognizes the very important role that you people play in our daily lives. He recognizes that there is only one way to deal with the media...and that is with complete openness and fairness.

Public officials all too often withdraw behind walls of secrecy after they have won election. They are inclined to "toot their own horns" and play down their mistakes.

Perhaps that's just human nature...but a public official owes the people he serves complete honesty about both his successes and his failures. He owes the public a full and complete accounting for his actions.

I am personally and professionally proud of the Governor's record on the subject of openness. As some of you know, he has since his inauguration supported a tough Freedom of Information Law. In his two State of the State Addresses, he has pushed for a strong law.

I am happy to tell you that a revised, tougher piece of legislation has passed the House and is now in the Senate. We are concerned about the several pieces of legislation dealing with this area.

Our overriding aim is to have a tough, enforceable law that allows both citizen and newsman the rights he is entitled to in dealing with public agencies.

The piece of legislation that we are supporting at present is an amendment to the 1972 FOI law which would put some teeth in the penalties. In addition to outlining specifically the purposes for executive sessions , it calls for a public vote before entering executive session. It also stipulates that executive sessions shall not be called for the purpose of defeating the spirit of the Freedom of Information Act.

But the strongest part of the amendment calls for a \$500 fine for anyone convicted of willfully violating any portion of the act.

This piece of legislation is a good one. It will go a long way toward helping you and the people of the state to know what government is doing. It is a protection from unreasonable closed-door sessions of public agencies. And it helps to guarantee the people's right to know.