



Old Paint

Kevin Barr (graduate-art) made his way from the congestion of campus to the solitude of the countryside to paint his impressions of Happy Valley's farmland.

Photo by Chuck Andrasik

State supreme court may 'open'

By TIM KONSKI
Daily Collegian Harrisburg Bureau

HARRISBURG — The state Supreme Court's rule-making process may be opened to the public.

Rep. Thomas P. Gannon, R-Delaware County, has proposed legislation that would bring the high court under the Sunshine Law by defining it as a public agency and open its rule-making proceedings.

Gannon said he initiated the bill because "several months ago the court issued a letter saying it was not subject to the Sunshine Law. This means it can make rules affecting litigents without public input."

"The court merely states what it's going to do without conferring with the public under the Sunshine Law as intended," he said.

Gannon cited as an example the court's rule that requires a criminal defendant to be brought to trial within 180 days of arrest. He said the rule was con-

trouversial because the court issues it without hearing public opinion.

"I am certain such rule-making could benefit from input from members of the legal and law enforcement professions and from the general citizenry," he said.

Gannon also said the legislation would not hinder the court's judicial freedom.

"This measure in no way would affect the court's judicial authority to decide on cases," he said. "It deals strictly with its administrative rule-making process, not its judicial function."

He said the bill would not require the court to determine rules according to popular opinion, but, instead, would compel "the justices to hear other people's opinions."

However, Nick Lippincott, aide to the House judiciary committee's chairman, Rep. Warren Spencer, R-Wellesboro, said the bill may be meaningless because of "serious constitutional questions."

"The state constitution says the Supreme Court has rule-making power," he said. "I don't see how the Legislature can tell it how to make rules anymore than the court can tell the Legislature how to draft bills."

Although Chief Justice Michael Egan was not available for comment, Lippincott said the court previously stated it intends to continue holding its rule-making sessions secretly because if the sessions were public, litigents may try to anticipate decisions and alter their cases.

Prior to his current bill, Gannon sponsored legislation designed to bring the Supreme Court under the Sunshine Law by way of a constitutional amendment.

"I believe the constitutional amendment process, which requires action by two consecutive Legislatures and by the voters, is not necessary to achieve the goal of opening up the court's rule-making process," he said. "I believe it will be easier and less time-consuming to conform to the Sunshine Law."

Heavy trucks may pay higher fees

HARRISBURG (AP) — Just when lawmakers thought it was safe to return to Harrisburg, the Thornburgh administration is pushing them for more highway money.

The administration wants a bill that will permit heavier trucks in return for increased heavy truck registration fees.

With \$22.5 million from the fees, the state Transportation Department says it could make headway on the capitol program, the long-stalled list of highway bypasses and reconstruction projects.

Local governments would get \$7.5 million for their highway projects.

This week, when lawmakers return from their nine-week summer recess, a conference committee of House and Senate leaders will try to fashion a final version.

In the midst of the budget battle last June, the bill had been a key part of the administration's highway package.

But the House tossed in sections lifting the studded tire ban and cutting vehicle inspections from twice to once a year.

At the time, Senate Majority Leader Edward Zemprelli said the bill had too many extras to suit the Senate.

He said Friday that he still has problems with the bill.

"I'm unalterably opposed to increasing truck weights," he said. "It would be devastating to my district and it's one of the contributing factors to road damage in the commonwealth."

The bill will raise the present 73,280 pound maximum to 80,000 pounds, but adjust axle weights to help minimize road damage.

In return, truckers will have to pay \$1,124 a year for the heaviest trucks. Fees for existing trucks of over 7,000 pounds would increase between \$16 and \$269 a year.

Without the measure, Gov. Dick Thornburgh was forced to trim \$67.6 million from the \$1.1 billion highway budget that had passed earlier in June.

And PennDOT officials are complaining that the two cent increase in the gasoline tax enacted in July won't be enough to produce the kind of highway program the state needs.

Because of reduced gasoline consumption, the value of each penny's worth of tax dropped about 5.5 percent between June and July, said Kant Rao, PennDOT's fiscal deputy. Each penny now equals about \$5 million in revenue, compared to \$58 million earlier in the year.

In August alone, revenue collections were down 16 percent, Rao said.

For the year, he said, the tax may produce anywhere from \$5 million to \$30 million less than expected.

Officials are also worried that the number of drivers may have peaked and that revenues from license fees will also be dipping.

Rao said that if money becomes tight as the year progresses, spring construction work will suffer.

"If it looks like in the early months of the calendar year that revenue is falling ... we will make adjustments in our program ...," he said.

Zemprelli remains skeptical.

"It's the same old story," he said. "We gave them money in July ... They have more money now for roads than they can spend in this fiscal year."

While tangling with those money matters, the Legislature also has some other major bills awaiting action that could take its session well into December.

Some of the bigger issues are:

Divorce: The so-called no-fault divorce reform would allow one spouse to walk away from a marriage after a

one-year separation. However, counseling sessions would be mandated. For the first time, alimony payments would be set up in Pennsylvania.

Workfare: It would require welfare recipients to work for state or local government or charitable organizations for their cash grants. Disabled and elderly persons and mothers with dependent children would be exempt.

Spending limits: State and local governments would have to limit their expenditures based on an index, such as one indicating the value of all goods produced in Pennsylvania in a year.

Pay hikes: A Senate-passed bill, pending in the House, would give a \$3,000 raise to all county office holders in January 1980.

No-Fault Insurance: Legislators are considering whether to limit further a car accident victim's ability to file costly lawsuits for pain and suffering. They also will decide whether to limit the currently unlimited medical benefits for accident victims.

Ethics: Some legislators want to exempt local elected officials from the strict financial disclosure in the Ethics Act.

Oil reserve values may escalate

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The oil reserves of the 23 largest U.S. oil firms will soar in value by \$424 billion if decontrolled domestic crude prices reach \$25 a barrel, an Energy Action Foundation study concluded yesterday.

The Washington-based energy consumer group, which used 1978 oil company reserve estimates to arrive at its figure, said American energy consumers will ultimately pay the increase in higher fuel costs under decontrol.

"It's clear that what decontrol does is transfer large amounts of money to the oil companies from the public," said James Plug, who heads Energy Action.

The group said the windfall to the major oil companies would cost each American between \$1,500 and \$2,000.

And Energy Action said higher prices for unproven oil reserves and other forms of energy that tend to follow oil prices would "add very substantially to the massive income transfers resulting from oil price decontrol."

The American Petroleum Institute, a big oil trade group, said Energy Action's study "totally overlooks the purpose of decontrol."

"Our national objective is to reduce our reliance on uncertain foreign sources of crude oil," an API spokesman said

Sunday. "President Carter's decontrol action will bring about the production of an estimated 2 million barrels a day, more domestic oil by the late 1980s than would be produced without decontrol."

President Carter decided last spring to phase out domestic crude oil price controls gradually by October 1981. By that time, domestic prices will rise to the world market level, currently pegged to \$18-a-barrel Saudi Arabian light crude.

Plug said his estimate was conservative because prices are rising rapidly and some foreign oil is already selling for \$25 a barrel or more.

The API spokesman did not dispute the figures but cautioned that proven reserves — oil that is already discovered and can be produced — could be misleading.

"A lot of it is estimated," he said. "They have to estimate the amount of oil in a discovered field and that's hard to do."

Energy Action used 1978 proven reserve figures which the 23 largest companies furnished the Securities and Exchange Commission. They totaled 24.7 billion barrels of crude or three-quarters of all U.S. oil reserves.

In 1978, the reserves were worth \$192.8 billion at the average prevailing price of \$10.24 per barrel.

Hollywood homes ruined in fire

LOS ANGELES (UPI) — Eighteen homes were destroyed when a spectacular brush fire broke out in an affluent residential area of Hollywood Hills yesterday. Another blaze several miles to the east burned out of control and threatened homes.

One fireman was slightly injured battling the Hollywood blaze. Four juveniles were taken into custody for playing with illegal fireworks, but the official cause of the fire was not determined.

The fire in Hollywood Hills, which broke out at about 2:30 p.m., was contained at dusk, but another "totally out of control" fire in Hacienda Heights, near Whittier,

forced the evacuation of many homes.

"It's total chaos out there right now," said county fire inspector Bob Davis at the Hacienda Heights fire. "It's totally out of control. It's bad and it's going in all directions."

High power lines webbing the area hampered the firefighting efforts of two helicopters and two airplanes.

In other areas of southern California numerous fires yesterday burned thousands of acres of brush.

"That's my home," said Elmer Valentine as he stood beside the charred ruins of his Hollywood home. "My whole life is there. I have three dogs and I can't find them."

One of the homes destroyed in the

Hollywood Hills blaze reportedly belonged to British musician John Mayall.

Throughout the afternoon, flames, sometimes shooting as high as 75 feet, consumed about 120 acres of brush in the Laurel Canyon area, but no evacuations were ordered.

"We've got a handle on it," said fire Chief John Gerard. "It could have been worse. The problem was that the flames started at the bottom of a grassy hill and it roared up the slope and consumed 10 houses immediately."

Several homeowners in Hollywood Hills watered down their houses, which average \$150,000 in value, until water pressure was gone.

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