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Dodging meeting act not healthy for insurance debate, Michiganders

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Editorial

While it is admirable for state Rep. Virgil Smith, D-Detroit, to try a low-key approach to find a compromise on major health insurance legislation, it's wrong to do it by deliberately dodging the state's Open Meeting Act.

Work groups are not uncommon in the Legislature, with elected officials pulling in stakeholders from opposing groups to find out whether negotiating room exists. But those work groups, whether publicized or not, generally do not look exactly like committee sessions just short of the number of members that would make it an official meeting. That's exactly what Smith did, in pulling together House and Senate members to work through differences on legislation related to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

The perception, merited or not, is that consumers take it on the chin when back-room deals keep them out.

In this case, no deals may result even outside of public view. The complex health insurance bills cover individual health insurance rates and the market structure. They have almost everyone up in arms, whether they prefer the initial Blues-friendly version passed by the House, the more measured substitution passed by the Senate or something else entirely. Lawmakers have to remember that no matter who's in any one meeting, they represent the need of all Michiganders -- in sickness and in health -- to have affordable health insurance.