Courtney Burton and Emanuel Augustus quit punching each other more than a week ago. Immediately thereafter, Michigan boxing started absorbing its own whipping, and the onslaught has lasted far more than 10 rounds. Blow after blow continues to land, with nary a counterpunch in sight, save for a promise to review the horrifyingly misguided decision on Aug. 31, almost two months later. Nothing moves quickly in bureaucracy, which underscores the overrriding problem with Michigan boxing.

The one-way whipping Michigan boxing continues to absorb is hardly unjustified. The many people at fault have heard and felt the criticism. So file this column under the heading that, on occasion, the only thing some people understand is an old-fashioned butt-kicking.

How to end the massacre productively is at question now.

That bloody, pulpy, peninsular-shaped mass at boxing's feet is The Great State of Michigan. The state that produced, in sum or part, the likes of yesteryear's Joe Louis, Stanley Ketchel, Sugar Ray Robinson and Thomas Hearns, and today's Floyd Mayweather Jr., James Toney and Chris Byrd, finds itself facing questions it can't answer without legislation, and cowering under the beating it's taking because there are too many assailants to fight back.

The question now is what to do about it, and how long it takes Michigan boxing to get off the canvas.

Positive change often needs awful circumstances to manifest it. To date, I have spoken to precisely four people who believe Burton legitimately deserved the split decision he was awarded over Augustus: Burton, the two judges who scored the fight for him, and his promoter Malcolm Garrett. The first and last are incidental. The middle two are central to a controversy that simply won't go away. It clogs message boards. It creates column and story fodder. It has spawned a unique effort by the Boxing Writers Association of America to request formal accounting of the fight and its aftermath.

And that brings us back to what to do about it.

In this column, I will attempt to redirect some of the energy from all-out bitching to all-out overhaul. Fans can affect change. Journalists can affect change. If there are bureaucrats and politicians in

Lansing who decide to cross their arms and show everyone who's boss, the efforts won't proceed far, and the only voices heard will be those of Michigan registered voters in November, if they care. But I've covered boxing in Michigan for nearly 20 years and believe there are enough stalwart boxing people in the state to overcome any such potential stonewalling.

Some of those good people include the officials under assault for the wrongful decision in the Burton-Augustus fight, though the accusations against them, and natural tendency to mount a self-defense, probably won't make them helpful in the final reckoning of what to do about the travesty. Ed Mosley, who scored 97-92 for Burton, is a retired cop. Robert Paganelli, who scored 99-90 for Burton, comes from the best-known family of sports officials in Michigan, though most of that experience is in college and professional football. They aren't dishonorable people. They just may not be very good boxing judges, and how they could have seen the fight so one-sidedly for Burton remains beyond almost everyone's comprehension.

Dan Kelley, the referee whose actions came under question in the Burton-Augustus debacle, and a friend of mine for nearly 20 years, is actually a good referee. I've seen him officiate hundreds upon hundreds of professional and amateur bouts. He had a bad night. It happens.

Steve Mann, the chief of inspectors who oversaw the Burton-Augustus fight, and was blindsided in a postfight interview because of a mislabeled master scoresheet, has been a Michigan inspector for nearly two decades. Yes, he knows the difference between a majority decision and a split decision. No, he wasn't responsible for writing "majority decision" on the final tally sheet, which in overall final reckoning was an incredibly minor issue. Another inspector compiled the master scoresheet and made the mistake. When Mann went to retrieve the scorecard from the television announcers, he saw "majority decision" on the bottom line, and initially assumed it was just that, until closer inspection. He should have reviewed the master scoresheet before it went to the ring announcer. I'll bet he does in the future. But he is no buffoon, as he was made to appear on television.

The State of Michigan, and specifically the Department of Labor and Economic Growth which regulates boxing in the state, has some people who wish boxing would dry up and blow away. It also has some people who passionately care about seeing boxing regulated properly. The structure of Michigan boxing governance never will allow the latter, not without the proposed legislative overhaul sitting in a Senate committee right now, because there are too many

know-little bureaucrats who can dip their toes into boxing's cesspool when one forms. Some people at DLEG, through their actions, probably don't want such overhaul. That's merely personal theory, because reporters aren't allowed to speak with most hands-on Michigan boxing workers without clearance through a media department, and even then, fear of retribution tends to short-circuit honest opinion. I can pick up a phone and call Marc Ratner in Nevada, or Larry Hazzard in New Jersey, and they'll answer both the phone and my questions. I can't do so in my own state, and often it's difficult just to figure out where authority lies on a given matter, because of the sprawling DLEG bureaucracy and its licensing, regulation and enforcement divisions which oversee segmented portions of the sport.

That doesn't mean DLEG people are bad, or incompetent. It just means Michigan boxing has a fouled-up structure in significant need of streamlining.

Now that all the disclaimers have been written, let any promoter or manager who brings a fight or fighter to Michigan be forewarned that the potential exists for more Burton-Augustus results. It is real and palpable, because while there were some good people involved in the bad outcome -- even some good boxing people -- the overall mind-numbing incompetence of June 6 is, and shall remain, at the forefront.

It starts with the judges. Paganelli scoring nine of 10 rounds for Burton is incredible. He said he thought Burton landed more scoring blows. That certainly didn't appear to be the case to the naked eye, and even if it were, Augustus controlled the action and landed the preponderance of damaging punches. Mosley, meanwhile, said he thought Burton landed the majority of "strong, legal blows." His explanation sounded curiously like that of an amateur judge, describing a punch thrown with shoulder force and landing with the white-tipped glove to a specified scoring area. But in point of fact, Mosley has limited amateur boxing experience. He was licensed as a pro judge just 20 months before Burton-Augustus, and an active amateur boxing judge for less than a year before obtaining his professional license. Michigan Athletic Board of Control rules require a two-year amateur apprenticeship before a judge can be assigned to a pro fight. Mosley never served it. His appointment to judge Burton-Augustus put him in position to fail. He did so masterfully.

If you watched the ebb and flow without scoring, Augustus was a runaway winner. If you scored round-by-round, it was possible to see it close. When the fight ended, my scorecard had Augustus winning 95-94. Most cards had a wider margin. As the fight ended, I leaned over to a

colleague and said, "I can't believe I have this fight so close." But I did. That Mosley and Paganelli scored the bout for Burton wasn't as big an issue as that they had him winning by five points, much less nine points. I don't question their honesty or integrity. But I do question their competence as judges, and whether they ever should work a pro fight again.

Kelley, the referee, tried to explain to ESPN2 announcers why he deducted a point from Augustus for a hold-and-spin tactic in the ninth round. That five-second attempt, in the heat of the moment before the 10th round, was a big mistake. Kelley should have ignored the announcers. Instead, he gave a half-hearted explanation, which came to sound like a half-hearted reason. His post-fight explanation to me -- that Augustus on three occasions tried to hold Burton and spin him into pre-determined position of Augustus' choosing -- was far more sensible. Independently, and without prompting, Burton later explained to me that Augustus had been warned twice for the hold-and-spin move before the point deduction, just as Kelley asserted.

More important was Kelley's ruling that a fourth-round knockdown came from a low blow. The shot was on the beltline, and Burton crumbled. Not only did the errant judgment call cost Augustus a knockdown, but the recovery time granted to Burton might have turned a potential knockout victory for Augustus into a stick-up decision against him.

Finally, there is the State of Michigan and DLEG. There have been frequent references to the incompetence of "the Michigan commission" in the aftermath of this fight.

Let's get one thing straight -- THERE IS NOT A MICHIGAN COMMISSION. I hope I got my point across on that. Journalists and fans alike, please quit referring to "the Michigan commission," or to Brad Wright as "the Michigan commissioner." The state's largest newspaper, the Detroit Free Press, commonly makes both mistakes. The Michigan Athletic Board of Control is an advisory agency that reports to DLEG. Brad Wright is the board chairman, an astute boxing man, but essentially powerless except for post-fight penalties (i.e., drug sanctions, which Augustus could face if his prediction holds true that his drug test in conjunction with the Burton fight will prove positive for marijuana, though the state has not received the results yet).

The Athletic Board of Control -- made up of nine gubernatorial appointees, including three professional boxing licensees, and six public appointees who historically are owed a political favor -- has no fight-night regulatory power.

The board does not appoint judges or referees.

The board does not hire inspectors.

The board can't even call its own meetings.

That's up to DLEG. The outcry after Burton-Augustus was so vitriolic that DLEG has, in fact, called a special meeting of the Athletic Board of Control to review the fight. But the board's lack of power and reliance on DLEG, and DLEG's need to schedule the review at a time conducive to its hierarchy, resulted in the meeting being scheduled eight weeks after the fight's conclusion.

By then, much of the furor will have died down. Interest by journalists and fans alike will have waned to some extent. Several big fights will have occurred. We will have moved on to new subjects.

At least, that's the assumption. But the uproar over Burton-Augustus is unlike most in recent boxing history. It will not go away quietly. We need to know why it happened, and what measures may be taken to minimize the likelihood of a repeat.

Nothing will stop raw decisions in boxing. But proper governance will help. Mandatory instruction of officials, and adherance to experience minimums, will help. Most of all, letting boxing people -- the ones whose livelihoods depend on the sport operating efficiently and cleanly -- run boxing will help.

None of those happen in Michigan. But a bill currently stuck in a State Senate committee will help.

The Michigan House of Representatives passed a boxing reform bill 106-1 in January. It would update fighter insurance benefit minimums, which currently are an incredibly insufficient $5,000 medical, and $5,000 accidental death. It would require bonding of promoters, to ensure fighters get paid. And it would form a Michigan Boxing Commission, made up of seven volunteer gubernatorial appointees, a majority of them boxing licensees, with regulatory powers.

The governor, predictably, wanted to know what all this will cost. DLEG says it currently regulates Michigan boxing at a cost of $113,000 annually which, conveniently, is precisely the amount it says it receives from boxing. Wow, the magic of numbers. So what about the new structure? According to DLEG -- a sprawling state agency within the executive branch, meaning it answers directly to, and takes orders directly from, Gov. Jennifer Granholm -- has estimated that the new

structure will cost -- get this -- $394,000 annually.

That's so ludicrous that boxing people are even more unanimous about the inflated estimate than they are that Augustus got jobbed. That's more than the Nevada Athletic Commission spends on boxing. The proposed staff would include one full-time inspector in charge and one full-time analyst, both utterly unnecessary. It also includes 1.5 full-time staffers and a part-time clerical employee, which should be tweaked to one full-time executive director and his full-time administrative assistant. Their combined salaries would be less than $100,000 annually. Toss in employee benefits, office space, upkeep, mailings, faxes, phones, travel, etc., and you're still looking at a mild bump in cost, at most. Nineteen boxing shows were conducted in the Michigan jurisdiction last year. One executive director and a full-time assistant could handle all staffing needs, with help from one licensing official within DLEG. The contractual inspectors could remain in their current form. Enforcement could be handled within that executive director/state inspectors framework. The commission -- made up entirely of volunteer gubernatorial appointees, mind you -- could meet monthly to discuss sanctions, rules promulgation requests, and any other regular business.

The bill was revised recently to include a three-percent television tax, capped at $25,000 maximum. They call it a fee because Republicans don't levy taxes, but whatever. Every time a network paid a promoter a rights fee to televise a fight card from Michigan, the promoter would have to turn over three percent of that amount to the state, unless the rights fee topped $833,333, in which case the $25,000 cap would go into effect.

Most of these figures are skewed because bureaucrats and politicians don't count money the way the rest of us do. None of this takes into account income taxes paid by fighters, real money going directly to the state. It doesn't include hotel revenues or restaurant revenues, or the taxes generated by ticket intake, concessions, marketing, advertising, and other revenue sources.

Right now, Michigan boxing is at the bottom of the heap. It is bloodied and battered. In the aftermath of one of the most regrettable decisions in recent boxing history, one promoter told me recently he would be surprised if there are three more cards in the state this year. Major outside promoters have no faith in the system, so why go to Michigan?

Meantime, the boxing bureaucracy in a constricted-budget state is concerned with how it will come up with the money to revamp boxing

regulation in Michigan, and generate more cards and additional revenue.

What it should ask is how much it already is losing.

Consider this: Mayweather, when he fought Phillip Ndou last November in Grand Rapids, earned a $3.05 million purse. Of that, he paid roughly $120,000 in state income tax. On one night, Mayweather himself paid enough money into state coffers to fund the entire 2003 regulatory structure of Michigan boxing.

There has been no such major fight in Michigan this year. Promoters everywhere are waiting to see what happens with the state's regulatory structure. They aren't bringing major shows into the nation's eighth-largest state, and there is no current plan to do so. That isn't phony money. It's revenue dripping out of a budget-strapped state, little by little, day by day.

It won't come back without a reliable regulatory structure. The home of Joe Louis and Stanley Ketchel and James Toney and Thomas Hearns probably won't have a major televised fight this year. The closest it came was Augustus-Burton, a fight that underscored the many problems with Michigan boxing, and made clear to promoters, managers and fighters alike that until boxing reform occurs, an old axiom holds true:

When you come to fight in Michigan, you'd better come prepared to defend yourself at all times.

That is, if you can figure out who's throwing the punches.