

More records available to public

A host of new initiatives went into effect on July 1 that will mean more public records will be available to Kansans.

Thanks to a controversy that sparked a lawsuit last year in Lawrence, all records relating to public employee compensation now will be available for public inspection.

The *Lawrence Journal-World*, the Associated Press and the Kansas Press Association joined together to sue the University of Kansas, which refused to divulge all compensation records for KU Athletic Director Lew Perkins. The plaintiffs won, so KPA went to the Kansas Legislature this year to codify the court's findings into state law.

The controversy in Lawrence had stemmed from KU's refusal to release the records of Perkins' compensation beyond his salary. Pay that had come from boosters and other bonus agreements was not released. In a sweeping ruling, the judge in the case said: "An expenditure of public funds through an employment contract cannot be considered exempt from KORA (Kansas Open Records Act). Were this true, all payment agreements not specifically included or designated as 'salary' would be exempt from public inspection.

"The public has a valid right to discover how a public institution spends its money. Nondisclosure in this case is exactly the type of situation the Legislature intended to prevent with the passage of KORA."

The "Lou Perkins Bill" will allow the public to follow the money that pays their public officials, no matter the source. And why not? Taxpayers have a right to know all the sources of income — public and private — that might affect a public official's decision-making.

The measuring stick should be simple: If you're going to accept public money, all payments that flow your way because of your public position should be open to inspection. If you don't want those agreements to be accessible, then don't accept a publicly funded job.

While this was an important bill in 2005, the single most important piece of legislation — in the long run — may well turn out to be the requirement that every county and district attorney document the open records and open meetings complaints they receive and how they were handled.

This is critical because it will identify the areas that might be causing the most confusion to records custodians. Once we know that, we can work to close the remaining loopholes and guarantee citizens the right of access they deserve.

Here are the other changes effective July 1:

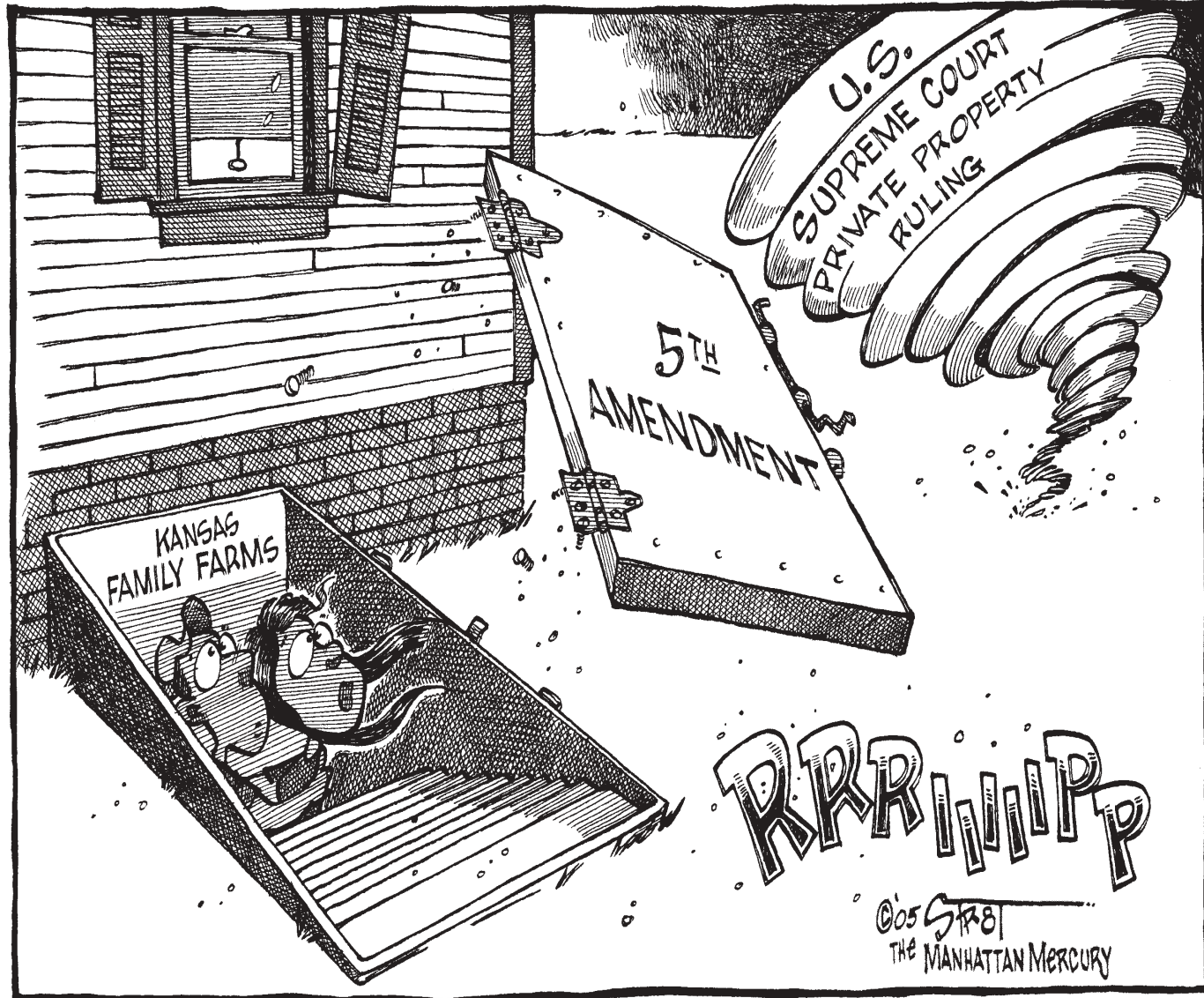
- Not-for-profits who receive and spend more than \$350 per year in tax money will be required to account for how the money was spent. Before, if an organization or agency wasn't defined as a "public agency," even though it received tax money, it was exempt.

- The concept of what constitutes a "clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy" now has a definition: "Revealing information that would be highly offensive to a reasonable person, including information that may pose a risk to person or property, and is not of legitimate concern to the public."

The new language "including information that may pose a risk to person or property" is designed simply as a test that would meet the "highly offensive to a reasonable person" requirement. But if the information still was deemed to be of legitimate concern to the public, the information could not be withheld. This would help keep sensitive personal information off-limits to stalkers and identity thieves, but not embarrassing personal information that is of public interest.

- In addition, the compensation records of faculty members at our universities that have research contracts, paid by private companies, if the faculty members make more than \$50,000 in salary, are open to public scrutiny. Faculty members will have to submit substantial interest reports to the Ethics Commission and those reports will be public records.

— Doug Anstaett
executive director
Kansas Press Association
Topeka



Now is time to appraise home, life

Before we could move and sell our house it had to be appraised.

That bothered me. After all, who was this person to come into my house and decide its worth.

I knew I was taking it too personally but, it seemed like a value was being placed on 19 years of our lives. How can anyone else think they are qualified to do that?

There has been a lot of appraising going on as of late.

I went through my pictures and scrapbooks and such. I carefully appraised them and only saved pictures of people I could identify. I burned a bunch of stuff. Why would I keep things I haven't looked at in 30 years? If I don't care, would anyone else?

I took some pictures of my brother to him. He was really pleased. It felt good to make someone else happy.

A friend said, "You should have kept everything, your kids might get a kick out of it someday."

I had a nightmare. I dreamed we were all moved and I kept finding drawers and doors full of stuff. I couldn't believe there was so much stuff, after all my purging. Then I realized it wasn't my stuff, it was my mother-in-law's.

You don't have to be Freud to figure that dream out. She still has things in our basement. And I truly want her to keep anything she wants or needs. I just wish it could be kept somewhere else.

I had a moving sale.

A few things I moved, unpacked, looked at, and then moved back to try to sell.

The weekend of my moving sale we went to an anniversary party for some dear

Back Home
Nancy Hagman



friends. The hubby and I introduced the couple.

She is the kind of friend I can pick up a conversation with at the point we ended it six months before. Sometimes it is that long between conversations. When we were young couples we lived near each other. One very nice thing about moving is we will be neighbors again.

At the party they displayed their photo albums for guests to look through. They had beautiful albums. And there were lots and lots of them. (I started reappraising those things I'd burned.)

The best pictures (in my opinion) were those from college and of the actual wedding. If we had known then what we know now.

I suppose the things this couple has been through are not so different from what any long married couple faces. I know they have had sorrows. But albums and the evening bore witness to many, many joys.

A move, selling a house, anniversary parties, these are definitely times of appraisal.

Each thing I pick up, pack and unpack brings so many memories. There are things I had long since forgotten and things I wish I could.

A Bible study I once attended put forth the idea that no matter how difficult or

tragic a situation you could always learn something from it. At some point the experience will have some value. I think the worst time our family went through was when the hubby broke both his heel bones. I've appraised that situation backward and forward and I've never been able to figure out one thing of value I got out of it.

At the time (when I was so worried about all the things there were to do and the husband, so frustrated, was in a wheelchair with nothing to offer but his iron will) a friend told me his father always said, "If you hadn't had it, you couldn't have lost it."

In the end we didn't loose too much except peace of mind. That is probably why I have had such a hard time moving past it.

I remember a little prayer: "Thank you God, for all that you have given us: for all that you have taken away and for all we have left."

Maybe some man can come into my home and decide how many dollars someone else should pay for it. It can be his job. People will respect his opinion and it be treated as a thing of importance.

But he will never know the things that really make that house valuable. I hope that in time the new owners will find them (or find things of their own to value.)

So here is my appraisal of how to live in a worthwhile way: Enjoy everything you have, as long as you have it. And know when it is time to move on.

Now if only I can follow my own advice, "back home", somewhere north of Claudell, Kan.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Flag burning angers, saddens former serviceman

After two 4th of July editorials on why we should have the right to burn the American Flag as Freedom of Speech (Expression), let me have my right of speech and give you the other side.

The side that around eighty percent of the American people want. The Right to Vote on protecting our American National Symbol from desecration.

The symbol of our National Anthem, that which we pledge allegiance to, bury American presidents and American veterans under, the first thing raised at the site of the 9/11 attack to show our will to survive and defend our way of life!

Just like the picture of Jane Fonda on an anti-aircraft gun in Hanoi, when guys like Randy "Duke" Cunningham were flying above it. The "Duke" wasn't a politician then! He was a USN fighter pilot! The first Vietnam Jet Pilot Ace and the only pilot to get three MIG's in one day. In any other war he'd been a front-page hero, but that didn't sell papers then, as it probably won't now.

Then you come back and stand on American soil! Get called a "Baby Killer!", and want to do some serious damage! You don't, as that would be real hot front-page news. You let it ride, walk off, wondering if you're really back in the

States. But upon seeing an American Flag, the anger dissipates, as you salute it with tears in your eyes, thanking God and Country for being safe at home one more time!

The American Flag is Our Symbol! It is indeed sad that it takes an Amendment to the Constitution to protect it from, not aliens, but our own citizens! Who desecrate it freely, hiding behind the First Amendment! Even sadder are those who are afraid of Democracy at work! The vote of free people on what they want! Have a little faith and give us the choice!

Joe E. Ballinger
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