

There are more secrets than there need to be

If you sort the millions of documents stamped secret by federal employees last year into stacks each as high as the Washington Monument, you would have a dozen or more monuments.

When you take into account that as many as half of those don't deserve to be secret then you have monumentally darkened the landscape of our open society.

These thoughts are provoked by the release of a new report, "Secrecy Report Card 2005: Quantitative Indicators of Secrecy in the Federal Government" by OpenTheGovernment.org, a coalition of public-interest, consumer and press organizations.

Government workers made 15.6 million classification decisions in 2004, 81 percent more than the year before Sept. 11, 2001.

American taxpayers forked over \$460 each time a government worker wielded the secrecy stamp last year, shelling out \$7.2 billion to keep all of those secrets secure; that compares to \$3.8 billion in 1997.

The government spent \$148 making new secrets for every dollar it spent unmaking old ones; for comparison, the government spent \$20 on classification for every \$1 spent on declassification from 1997 to 2001.

The shadowy Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court granted every single one of the 1,754 requests for surveillance orders on foreign nationals in the U.S.; the number of such requests has doubled in the last five years.

The White House and federal agencies invoked the "state secrecy" privilege 33 times more often in the last four years than during the height of the Cold War. This legal tactic allows the government to brush off court cases by asserting that going to court would put foreign policy or national-security concerns at risk.

These form just the tip of the controlled-information iceberg.

As for open meetings, nearly two-thirds of the 7,045 meetings governed by the 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act, which explicitly endorsed the idea of openness in expert scientific and technical advice to policy makers, were nevertheless closed to the public.

The record at the state level was equally dismal. At least 62 new laws putting public information behind closed doors were passed by states last year.

Ironically, while the government is placing more restrictions on access, the report documents a 25 percent increase in public requests for federal government information — more than 4 million during 2004. Spending to accommodate those requests rose only 5 percent, however, to \$336.8 million, and only 14 of the 90 agencies surveyed by the Department of Justice were able to respond to those requests as required by law.

There is a lot more, of course, but these examples are enough to paint a picture of a highly disciplined, if vaguely desperate, policy of delay and denial. It demonstrates that secrecy is pervasive.

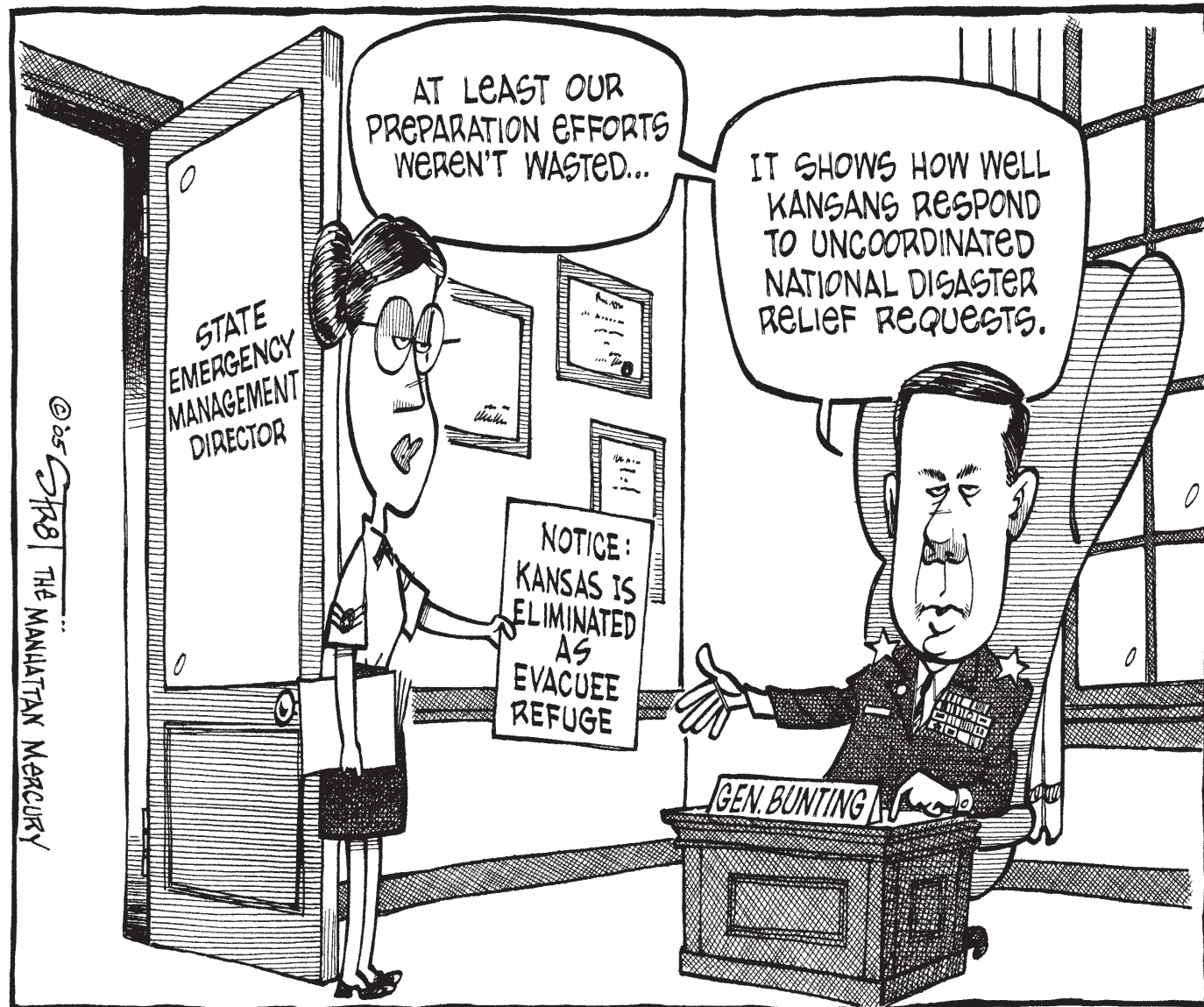
For those who say that such secrecy is necessary this report card describes a condition of severe democratic distress. It is precisely during times of crisis that communication between a government and its citizens must be honest, open and informed.

Instead, government officials are demanding and hoarding information about private citizens and providing less about public policy. Beyond that, they are fostering a climate of intimidation among workers, scholars, public-interest groups, the press and others seeking access.

What we don't know can leave us unprepared for our government's being unprepared. When policy is formulated in isolation from public knowledge or participation, the nation is left exposed to a lack of accountability or lack of preparedness.

When our leaders fail to anticipate or adequately respond to threats because the civic dialogue has broken down, we court the emergence of a dysfunctional democracy, or government by hindsight, in which post-crisis commissions, joint committees and endless investigations struggle to explain what never should have happened. Excess secrecy is a chilling invitation to such calamities.

— Paul K. McMasters, the First Amendment Center, Arlington, Va.



Camp teaches that 'life does go on'

I don't go out of town without my husband very often, but once a year, I love to go to a women's retreat sponsored by churches in the central to northwest part of the state.

I made him a chocolate cake and a big beef stew, so I knew he would survive my two nights away.

The setting is a lovely, wooded camp a few miles east and north of Salina. Dormitories with bunk beds house the 80-100 women who show up. We ate in a dining hall, where all our meals were prepared for us. A bathhouse had plenty of shower stalls, plenty of mirrors with shelves for cosmetics and plug-ins for hair dryers and curling irons.

I don't care how old a woman gets, she is still going to primp and fuss over her appearance. When it comes to my makeup, I say it's like a paint-by-number set. Doesn't matter if it is only women, we want to look our best.

Some women have been coming to camp for 25 or more years. I've missed a few, but want it to become a tradition.

The speaker this year was a very funny lady — and a very spiritual woman. Suzy had us laughing from the moment she began, and we scarcely stopped all weekend. When people are laughing, they are

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



teachable, and she taught us a lot in two days.

Perhaps the most important thing I learned was, "Life does go on." The first night she spoke, we learned she and her husband had been missionaries in Chile for 13 years. They had three sons and after several years, finally, had the little girl they had prayed for. When she was about 3 months old, they began to suspect something was wrong. She was not developing like other children and they were told their little girl was mentally handicapped. But, life goes on.

Suzy showed us pictures and told how her beautiful, blonde little girl, who is now 17 but forever 7, mentally, has been such a joy in their lives — the funny things she says and her innocent approach to life.

Then Suzy dropped the bomb. She told us that a few months ago her daughter

made a remark about an incident that caused Suzy to ask questions. And then more questions. The answers they got were a parent's worst fear. Suzy and her husband learned their daughter had been raped. Tests proved it and DNA results positively identified the rapist. But, life goes on.

Here was this Godly woman spilling her guts out to a room full of women she had just met and yet, in that moment we were all sisters, mothers and friends. What her revelation did, too, was open the floodgates. It was astounding the number of women who came forward with stories of their own abuse or an instance within their own families. This is a pervasive problem.

Do I have any answers? No. Except, to try to encourage families to get help for their loved ones, those who have been victims and for those who have been the victimizers.

Suzy and her family are now facing the legal process. Charges have been filed but the perpetrator still denies his guilt. She saw him in a courtroom for the first time last week and said, "As Christians we are supposed to forgive, but... I'm not there, yet. Please pray for me."

We will, Suzy. And, as she knows, life does go on.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Rural fire chief gives his side of the story

To the Editor:

The reason why I didn't appear for the public hearing on Sept. 12 is because I was told it would not be necessary for me to attend. It was published in the newspaper that it was a public hearing for just the fire department. I understood that it was also for the ambulance department. Was it not? Did anyone from the ambulance department show up?

The request is for more funds this year because chassis, iron, aluminum and materials go up every year. When you go to buy a new automobile, does the price not go up? Do you think if these companies kept the same pricing that they would still be in business? Doesn't inflation happen just about every year? Twenty thousand dollars over isn't that bad considering these trucks will be built on 2006 chassis.

The Rural Fire Department has applied for a pumper truck for the past three years through the Federal Homeland Security Fire Acts grant. This grant is basically just like the CDBG grant process.

You fill out an application, send it in with your specs, and wait to see if you are qualified. If so, you are awarded the grant. If not, you wait and apply the following year. It's all the luck of the draw. Buying a "fire truck" for \$160,000 to \$200,000

doesn't happen without some help from somewhere. Nobody will be at greater ease than the firemen and fire board if this grant goes through.

We did lose a barn on Sept. 11, 2005. But, what needs to be taken into consideration is how long had the barn been burning before it was called in, the weather conditions (temperature, wind), the fire load, the response time, etc. The page went out at 16:02 and the first unit arrived at 16:10. That was eight minutes to get to the station, put bunker gear on, get in a truck, and drive four miles. That is pretty good timing in my book. Even if we did have a "fire truck", that barn was still going to burn to the ground.

We have saved some houses from burning down in the past several years — David and Charla Sprigg, David and Patsy Maddy — and that's not the total problem. We respond to approximately 30 fires a year, which are mostly grass and range fires. Mutual aid is a big part of the rural fire service and it gets used quite frequently. Agreements are with Almena, Lenora, Norcat, Logan, Corrections and some departments in Nebraska.

Mr. Lang, (County Commission Leroy Lang) I would like to know if you have ever been a fireman. How many fires have

you responded to with the Rural Fire Department? Do you know how many fires we have had to respond to this year? Were the fires put out without further damage to anything but what had already burned? How do you know what equipment we need and how to do our job?

We are volunteers that put in a lot of hours away from our families and jobs to try and save other property. I myself have been on this department for better than 10 years and worked with a lot less equipment than we have now. This department has taken care of a lot of fires without a "fire truck" and will do so until we have one.

The Rural Fire Department Board has been working awfully hard and very willingly to help me, the chief of this department, apply for these grants. I, as the chief, have to say that the firemen who work under me work just as hard or harder with the equipment we have to do a thankless job. You would never be able to replace any harder working individuals than this fire board and the firemen on this department. You can't fire a volunteer! I myself think that the county commissioner couldn't do a better job than what this fire department is doing now.

Steve Otter
Rural Fire Chief

WRITE:

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to

the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

Office hours:

8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

Phone: (785) 877-3361

Fax: (785) 877-3732

E-mail: telegram@nwkansas.com

STAFF

Cynthia Haynes editor and publisher
Veronica Monier staff reporter
Dick Boyd Blue Jay sports
Carolyn Plotts society editor
Sherry Hickman circulation
Vicki Henderson computer production
Susie Marble computer production
Sonya Montgomery bookkeeping

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654
Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers

Dick and Mary Beth Boyd

Publishers, 1970-2002

Incorporating the Norton County Champion

Marion R. Krehbiel, editor

