

## Closed meetings raise red flags

Guest Editorial

What happens when elected officials meet behind closed doors without anyone having any knowledge about what they are discussing? Of course, there are several outcomes. However do these people who are elected to represent residents and taxpayers fully understand the implications of meeting behind closed doors?

First, everyone is left to wonder what they are discussing? Think about it: They come out from their private meeting after anywhere from 5 minutes to an hour or more, possibly make a motion and change the lives of people who elected them.

What happened in that room while they were meeting in private without any members of the press or the public? Is there a chance they discussed something other than what they claimed to be talking about when they decided to close the meeting to the media and taxpayers? Are they making back-room deals to curry favors with business owners, friends or family members?

There really are too many variables to consider when it comes to elected officials who meet behind closed doors without any witnesses.

A lot of elected officials believe they can call private meetings based on any number of allowed circumstances and then come to a "consensus" behind closed doors. Whether they want to admit it or not, when they poll each other for a consensus during an "executive session", they are violating the Kansas Open Records and Open Meetings law.

Basically, they reach a decision after discussion without tax-paying residents having any knowledge about what they said or thought on the subject. Many times, when they finally return to an open session with members of the media or residents, no one comments and none of them state any reasons for their support or disapproval for the ensuing motion that is either passed or rejected by the governing body, usually unanimously.

A perfect example occurred earlier this month when the Leavenworth City Commission decided to meet behind closed doors for 45 minutes to discuss several items with the city's lawyer.

On the agenda, the commissioners were scheduled to consider some legal issues related to a property that was scheduled for demolition. In the past, the commissioners always discussed the property in an open session, and everyone knew what was going on.

This time, once the city's lawyer informed commissioners that there were legal implications sought by the owner of the property, they decided to discuss

everything behind closed doors.

The action they took in the open session after the private meeting included no comments and no explanation as to why they voted not to consider removing the home from a demolition list.

Instead, they quickly made their vote, as if they already knew what each other thought about the issue and how they would vote.

Once again, they reached a consensus behind closed doors, so they basically polled each other in private and determined what type of rubber stamp they should apply in front of the public.

That is contrary to open government.

How many other circumstances have arisen where elected officials determine the outcome in private and put on a public show only after they have already come to a conclusion when it comes to their decision? How many times have they circumvented the legal process when it comes to their loose definition of a "consensus" among elected officials? How much longer must residents, taxpayers and voters be kept in the dark when it comes to "important" things that are decided behind closed doors without anyone knowing what was discussed?

At least city commissioners abide by the rules when they decide to meet in private, unlike the Leavenworth County Commission.

Leavenworth County commissioners are probably the biggest violators of the Kansas Open Meetings Act. County commissioners illustrated that point earlier this week when they decided to extend their private meetings behind closed doors without following the correct procedure outlined in state laws.

If they insist on making decisions that affect the public while meeting in an "executive session", they should at least have the decency to play by the rules and follow the law when it comes to holding their private meetings behind closed doors.

Elected officials sometimes believe they can circumvent Sunshine Laws by meeting in private under the guise of what is referred to as an "executive session."

However all they are doing is causing voters and residents to no longer trust their ability to hold an elected office because they are afraid to participate in an open process of governing those who elected them to office.

—Leavenworth Times



## Retreats serve an important role

This past weekend was my annual women's retreat. I didn't think it could have been better than last year, but, I was wrong. There's just something about getting away from your comfort zone for a few days that recharges your batteries.

Of course, it helps to have a beautiful nature setting, all your meals prepared for you and great friends to share it with. Speaking of "comfort zone" there is nothing comfortable about sleeping on bunk beds with a wafer-thin mattress. But, it's all part of the experience. Next year, however, I'm taking one of my twin-size air mattresses.

The featured speaker was wonderful. She was funny, articulate and had a machine gun delivery which I really enjoy. You had to listen fast. She was a real person with a real history, real problems and a real, unshakable faith.

The workshops were equally as good. It's always hard to choose which ones to attend. I settled on "Managing Your Time" and "Beyond Regrets." The craft session I chose was flower arranging.

My friend, April, taught the "Time" class. She began by listing all the things, we, as women, try to accomplish in a 24-hour day. Many women still had full-time jobs that ate up eight to nine hours out

Out Back  
Carolyn Plotts



of the day; sleeping took another eight; television about three hours; housework, children, husband, cooking took another chunk; then there were kids' sporting events, volunteer and church work, hobbies and friends. All to point out that there is simply not enough time to do everything and we shouldn't try to be "Superwoman". Learn to say, "No".

I didn't know what "Beyond Regrets" would be about, but, as the title suggested, it dealt with the regrets we have in our life. I felt a little awkward after answering the leader's questionnaire because I was the only one who couldn't list any regrets. She wanted to know if we had regrets that still haunted us or debilitated us in any way.

Do I regret some of the decisions I've made; some of things that have happened in the past; wrongs that have been done to me? Of course, I do. But, (and this is the key) I don't dwell on them. I don't even

think about them. They don't matter.

I regret that my first husband couldn't keep his marriage vows and was unfaithful. However, I wouldn't have the two daughters God gave me had I not been married to their father. I regret the mistakes I made during the years I was single but, I wouldn't have been ready to meet (and appreciate) the Godly man put into my life, had I not gone through that time. My life isn't perfect, but no regrets.

My craft project was flower arranging. It was loosely organized with an instructor who advised, "There's no wrong way to do this. Whatever you like is just fine." We were given a wide selection of baskets, bowls and vases to choose from plus bushels of silk flowers and greenery. It was a mad flurry of wire snips cutting blossoms and leaves from stems. Some went for the fall colors, others a red, white and blue theme, some pastel and me — I chose a yellow and white spring flower theme. We were all very proud of our arrangements and crowded over everyone else's.

The drive home gave us a little time to decompress as we came back to the reality of dirty dishes, unmade beds and dust bunnies in the corners. It might be a crazy life, but, it's my life and I love it. I'll be ready for retreat again next year.

## Several factors figure in addiction

Here we are again continuing our look at the definition of alcoholism. Last time we talked about the disease concept and the chronic nature of the disease. Today, we will look at what we mean by "Genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors." You will find the full definition below:

"Alcoholism is a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is often progressive and fatal. It is characterized by continuous or periodic: impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, most notably denial."

When we talk about genetic factors of addiction, we are talking about the tendency for addiction to run in families. This is the same with heart disease, cancer and diabetes. If a direct relative (parents, grandparents, etc.) is addicted, your chance of addiction increases.

For men, if your father was addicted,

Where There's Hope

Carla Moore

you have four times the chance of becoming addicted if you use than the person off the street. For women, this number is smaller. This is why we encourage people who are addicted, or have addiction in their family, to TALK about it with their families. The more information your family has about addiction, the better chance they have of making an intelligent choice as to whether to begin drinking/using or not.

Psychosocial factors reflect our personal growth as it relates to our social interactions. Alcoholics and addicts have a tendency to hang out with people who abuse alcohol or drugs.

They begin to reflect the values of the people they socialize with so their actions and beliefs do not stand out from their

peers. As a family member or friend who is watching someone enter the downward spiral of addiction, you begin to notice an increase in lying, sneaking alcohol or drugs, a lower class of friends and/or an increase in excuses to drink/drug or not follow through with commitments.

Finally, environmental: where do you work, live, or play? One of the sayings in 12-step recovery meetings is, "If you hang out in the barber shop long enough, you'll get a hair cut." This is a direct statement towards people who are trying to get and stay sober hanging out in bars or at using friends' homes.

Are most of your clothes or walls decorated with advertisements for beer, alcohol or drugs? Do you only go where beer or alcohol is served? All of these are environmental factors to take into consideration. As humans, we have a tendency to surround ourselves with what is important to us.

This is probably enough information for one article. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me. (cmoore@valleyhope.com)

## Thumbs Up

To... The new Washington Street Park. (Brought in)

To... Mr. Will and the Norton Community High School band for a beautiful presentation of The Star Spangled Banner. (e-mail)

To... Gloria Nelson and all others who had a dream come true Friday night as the new Washington Street Park was officially dedicated. (e-mail)

To... The Hanes family and the city, for coming to terms on the land on which their place of business was located before it was destroyed by fire, allowing for the new park to be born. (regular mail)

(To submit a name or names, please e-mail tom.d@nwkansas.com, call either 877-3361 or 6908, fax 877-3732, regular mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654 or drop by the office. Thanks for your input. - td)

**Obama?  
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