

Let sun shine on Kansas government

On the Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



Since it's Sunshine Week, it's a good time to talk about the Kansas Open Meetings Act, sometimes called the Sunshine Law, which requires public meetings in this state to be announced in advance and open to the public.

Maybe the most important section of this law is the first, which declares open meetings to be "the policy of the state."

Oddly enough, this law is and has always been unpopular with some elected public officials. You'd think as our representatives, they'd want the public to know what they are doing – and many do – but there's a strong undercurrent among those few who'd just as soon we didn't.

This is not a problem we've seen in Oberlin or Decatur County. Public meetings here have been conducted pretty much in compliance with the law over the years, because officials have cared enough to follow the law, and because they've had good legal advice.

Elsewhere, however, that's not always the case. The law comes under attack from officials who chafe at its restrictions. One that's often cited is the basic rule that a "meeting" includes any gathering of a majority of a given commission, committee, council or board where public business is discussed.

Because a majority of a county commission is two, commissioners are particularly sensitive to this rule, which also includes telephone calls and e-mail discussions.

One claim, being repeated in the wake of Gov. Sam Brownback's ill-starred meeting for legislators last year at the governor's mansion, is that members at a "social gathering" such as a party or wedding might be breaking the law if they talk. That's just not true; they would have to be discussing public business with a majority capable of making a decision (together or in a "serial meeting") to break the law.

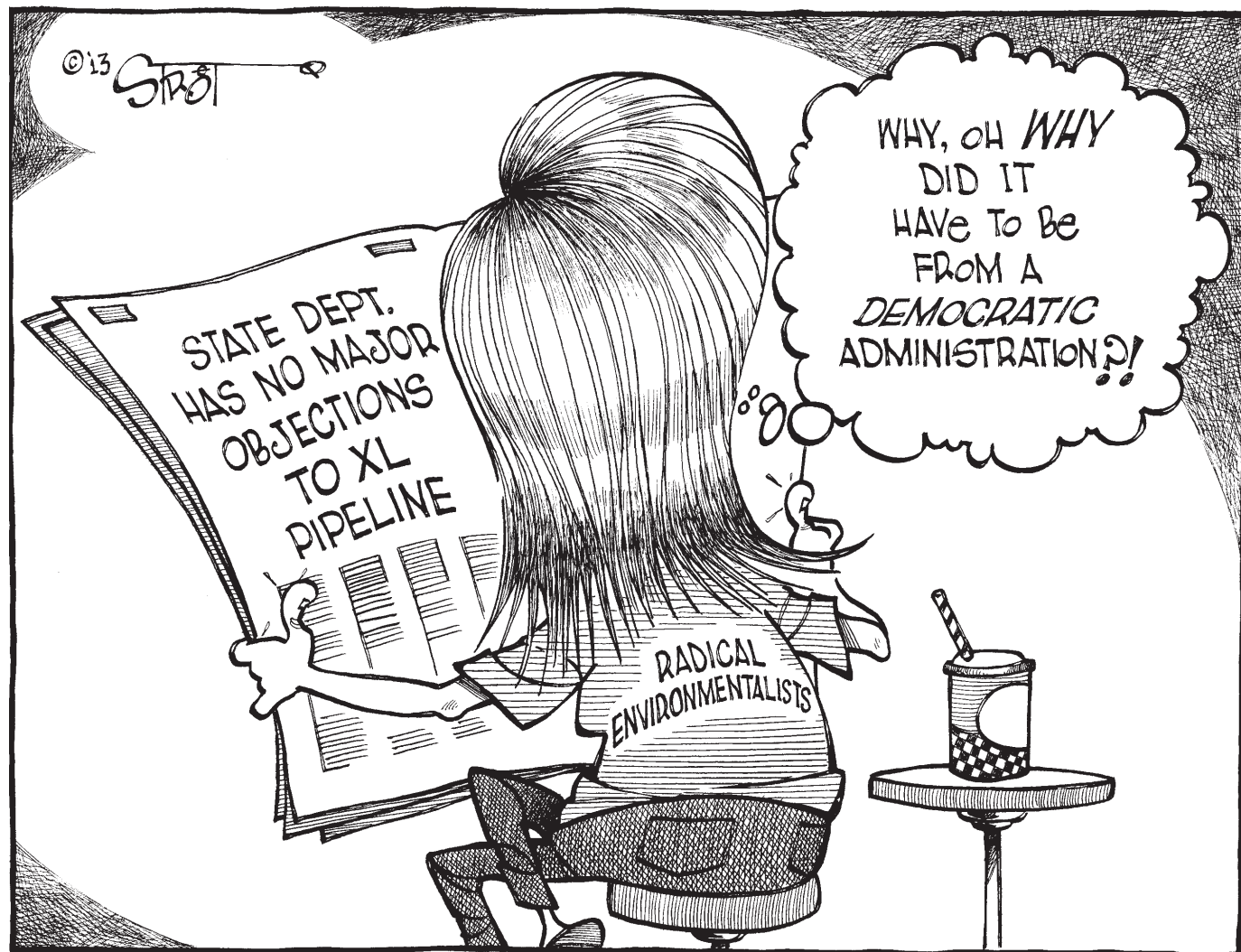
Besides, the governor's meetings, where he invited the members of whole committees, then talked about his policy goals, were hardly social events. He's not covered by the law, however; he's not a member of a board or commission. And the legislators were OK as long as they did not discuss what he said during the sessions.

Still, it was one of those times where the appearance of impropriety could have been avoided by just inviting a few reporters – or some taxpayers.

This year, however, the Sunshine Law is under attack in both houses of the Legislature, with bills aimed at easing the definition of a "meeting." One (SB200) would soften the definition to require "substantial discussion" of issues and even votes. HB2336 would change the definition to exclude "social gatherings," even, apparently, if the purpose is public business. Neither bill has moved so far, but there's always the danger they might.

The law, as it stands now, works, and we see no reason to weaken it. It's not about inconveniencing elected officials, but about allowing voters to see and hear what's going on. So, for Sunshine Week, we say, just let the sun shine on Kansas government.

– Steve Haynes



The importance of fighting some bills

We lived in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in the mid-1980s, and I took classes at the University. One course was basic Human Development. We were assigned a group and told to prepare a discussion on abortion. I remember so well, the young man, maybe 19, with tears streaming down his face as he shared his story.

His sister became pregnant and delivered a baby at the age of 14. He recounted the tragic details of her delivery, which resulted in the death of the baby and of his sister. He said he had always opposed abortion, a belief held by his family, yet after losing his sister he wasn't sure how he felt. This young man grieved for his sister and her baby, struggled to understand his God, and to comprehend how something that was a natural event could go so terribly wrong.

Unplanned pregnancies occur at all ages, but a pregnant 14 year old faces

Phase II
Mary Kay Woodyard



many risks. The dangers of unprotected sex can result in more than just a pregnant teen. The CDC reports there are 20 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STI) annually, with over half of these occurring in youth between the ages of 15 and 24.

I bring this up because of a bill in the Kansas legislature which will not allow abortion providers, such as Planned Parenthood, or any entity which provides abortions, to furnish materials for sex education to public schools. The bill further states "school employees and contractors providing

educational services cannot be involved in performing abortions." I am not supporting a pro-abortion campaign in the schools, what I am supporting is the gathering of qualified people with knowledge, facts and materials to teach and protect our youth.

I believe education strengthens young people. I also believe it is imperative to work together within our communities by combining and coordinating all of our resources. Only 3 percent of Planned Parenthood service is abortion, whereas the treatment and testing of STDs and STIs accounts for 35 percent. They are the largest provider for sex education in the country. Let's not let lawmakers become so fearful of abortion, that they fail to value a resource that offers our young people what they need. Information. Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

We are always trying to control the uncontrollable

I wasn't going to say any more about Daylight Savings Time.

BUT-----
Perhaps because the change occurred on a weekend when many experienced a blizzard; this year "springing forward" seems particularly insane!

An old Native American was told of DST and had this to say, "Only the government would think you could cut a foot off the top of the blanket, sew it to the bottom and have a longer blanket!"

My sister posted pictures of the Winter Wonderland and posed a question: "What do we do with the extra hour of day light? Play golf, work in the yard?" Well, she could shovel snow!

The foolish parents of my future grandchild spent too long in eastern Kansas, then risked all their lives returning to Lincoln, NE late Sunday afternoon. Is there any place more miserable than Lincoln in the winter? It's cold, snowy and industrial enough that the snow is always dirty! Come to think of it I've never been to Lincoln in any season when it particularly impressed me, though come May I'm placing bets there will be the sweetest little baby ever up there!

At our house the day of the switch went pretty well. Because of the snow the sun did not seem slow arising, it was

This Too Shall Pass
Nancy Hagman



cloudy and gloomy all morning. I reset all the clocks. Church was cancelled so we eased into DST or so I thought.

The next morning, I awakened and looked at the clock: 8:00. Man was it dark! It annoyed me, I cursed DST. But as the hubby was sleeping soundly, I attempted to follow suite. I tossed and turned for 30 minutes or so, then got up.

About 9:00 the hubby wandered into the kitchen. I gave him the business about his beauty rest. He laughed and said, well, the clock in the bedroom is an hour fast. Then he tells me that clock is programmed to reset for DST. So it was really only 8:00 or 7:00 regular time, about the time he usually gets up.

What? How could that be? The time was correct (DST) when we went to bed. It may reset but it did it one day late! I cursed some more!

Nonetheless DST put me in the spring cleaning mode. I did the kitchen

cabinets and the floor. I tore the recliner apart and added stuffing. I've been washing rugs and curtains and windows!

My calendar says the first day of spring is March 21. When I step outside reality hits; there is quite a chill in the air! I guess I won't put the coats away quite yet!

The hyacinths are about to bloom; my favorite flower. And lots of tulips are popping up. I don't know what happened to the crocuses? Did they bloom under the February snow?

It appears things have not come out of dormancy as early as last year. Maybe wheat harvest will be at the usual time. And if the heat does not have as much time to build perhaps we will be spared the extreme July heat.

My faith may be misplaced but it does seem if we are patient things even out.

What is it about people that makes us think we can improve or change things beyond our control? No matter how hard we try to manipulate it, there are only 24 hours in a day. The earth tilts on its axis, determining the number of hours of lightness and darkness.

This is all I'm saying, I promise: Leave it alone!



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