

Opinion

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

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Attorney General's open government seminar in July

We'd like to urge every elected official in this area to take time out for a seminar on open-government laws being presented by the Kansas attorney general's office from 9 a.m. to noon Tuesday, July 23, in Colby.

On the Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



Most city, county and school boards and commissions in our area do their best to follow state Open Meetings and Open Records laws. We think they do a damned good job, but it never hurts to learn more.

The seminar is part of a series the attorney general puts on across the state, and it may be awhile before we have another session in our area. It'd be great if each and every elected official would go to this one, and if the room fills up (reservations are required), maybe the attorney general could schedule an afternoon class.

The Kansas Open Meetings Act requires public meetings – state, county, city and school district – to be open to the public unless a given topic falls under one of several exemptions. Even then, the board or council has to take a vote and state why and how long it'll be in closed session. No binding action can be taken behind closed doors, either.

And while our officials have been pretty good about this, there have been some notable problems, especially when the governor invited whole committees of the Legislature to his mansion for evening discussions. Both he and the legislators should have known better.

The Open Records Act is more mysterious. Many agencies have trouble following it, because it makes most records open to public inspection. That means they are supposed to be handed over to anyone who asks for them when the office is open, without questions or delay.

Often, officials are unsure what records they should release or want to talk "to the boss" before giving someone a document. Sheriff's departments seem to be suspicious of everyone, asking for identification and demanding to know why people want documents. None of that is allowed, but it happens all too often. Sheriffs, of all people, should want to follow the law.

The proper response to a document request – unless the item falls into an exemption in the laws – is a polite, "Sure. Let me get that." No questions asked, no delays, no obfuscation. And employees should be trained how to handle these requests.

A little training wouldn't hurt anyone who deals with open records requests, and here's a great chance for officials and their employees to get that. It's a way to help serve the public better, not a nuisance or a problem.

The seminar will run from 9 a.m. to noon July 23 at the student union at Colby Community College. Everyone – public officials, reporters, private citizens – can and should go. This law is for the people, not just one special group or two. To sign up, go to www.ags.kg.gov or call (785) 296-2215.

And remember, please, that meetings and document files of all kinds are open to the public because they belong to the public, except for those narrow exemptions. That's the law, and that's the way things should be.

– Steve Haynes



Watching our "P's" and our "Q's"

Some news stories are like a magnet, sucking you into the frenzy. Such is the situation with the Paula Deen fiasco. First off, in my mind, she should have never uttered a word until she sought counsel, not from an attorney, but from a marketing strategist. Her so called apology on the Today Show did nothing to improve her image.

Although she claims she did not use the N-word in recent times, nevertheless it was acknowledged she used it when describing the "theme" for brother Bubba's wedding in 2007. Now let me interject something here, white people in the South truly do not see that as being racist. It is how they have a-l-w-a-y-s done it, so there is no reason to change.

"Why, that's just the way we talk. Ya'll understand, right? We don't mean nothin' by it." Believe me, I heard that explanation many times in Alabama.

After all, as one Southern gentleman

Phase II
Mary Kay
Woodyard



told me one time, "We loved our Nanny just like she was one of our family. She was just one of us." That may be true, however you also expected her to serve your holiday meals at your table when you wanted it, while her family waited until you were done. She and her family never sat down at the same table for dinner, but she was one of ya'll's? Then the response was, "Well, we pay her to do it. That's her job."

Really? You think? Then don't tell us her less than minimum wage job makes her just "one of the family." We lived in Alabama in the late 1980s and to say

I was shocked by the attitudes would be putting it mildly. Has it changed? I don't know. What I do know is things take longer to change in small communities than larger metropolitan areas. To paraphrase Max Planck, new ideas do not gain acceptance, it is merely their opponents die out.

To say Ms. Deen was dropped like a hot potato is a culinary understatement. You hear the complaints about the unfairness of it all, especially when compared to other so-called celebrities who were reprimanded with a slight tap on the hand.

Perhaps this lawsuit was just what the doctor ordered for the Food Network. Perhaps Ms. Deen's time had come. Perhaps, just perhaps, the outcome was because they were ready to let her go and new thinking emerge. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

We do what we have to and hope for the best

A young woman who has a degree in dietetics, told me as a special treat she took her kids to Arby's for curly fries. When they returned home her four year old dumped her fries as she exited the car. The child is very dramatic: mom looked at the child and the fries. She assessed the cleanliness of the floor, scooped the fries up and let the kid eat them. The child lived.

It proves the premise: When your first child eats dirt you take him to the emergency room, when the second does it you wash his mouth out, with the third you wonder "Do I have to fix supper?"

A farm wife recounted a recent misadventure. Her husband was baling hay late into the night. When he finished his pickup would not start. Fortunately he had his cell phone so he called, "Come get me!"

She was frustrated because their three children were sound asleep. The kids are young but not babies. After careful consideration she left the kids in bed and hurriedly rescued her hubby.

In a similar circumstance one wintery day when Kate and Elizabeth were very young (maybe two and five), the hubby called from a neighbor's. His vehicle quit. It was only a mile, so thinking I'd only be gone two minutes;

This Too Shall Pass
Nancy
Hagman



I left the kids rather than bundle them up. It wouldn't take any longer than a bathroom break.

However rather than come right back home the hubby insisted I take him to town, a trip of eight miles one way, so he could complete the errand he had set off to do.

I must have chewed him out royally. Because the next day he brought me roses! Sometimes a little drama pays off handsomely. You get curly fries or even roses!

I can laugh about it now! I even clued my fellow farm wife in! Maybe there are flowers in her future!

Under different circumstances we could be looking at an investigation from social services at the very least and great tragedy at the worst.

We've all been there. Sometimes you have to make a decision. Luckily nothing bad happens, no one is the wiser. We thank our lucky stars

someone wasn't there recording it with a cell phone or an army of "news" reporters weren't nearby.

Does the proliferation of media and easy access to it, lead us to instant judgments about situations we don't understand? Do we consider ourselves experts on every subject from child welfare to nuclear fission because we Googled it?

They say the best revenge for parents is watching their children parent! Ah ha-----not as easy as it looked is it? (And if it looked easy you weren't paying attention!)

New mom, Patricia, posted a very touching essay on Facebook. It was taken from a blog "Realistic Moms" and attributed only to Sarah.

As I wrote last week, we have a "People" magazine mentality. In the comment section the essay was criticized for being toooooooo long!

I was happy to read every word and see that my daughter has realized in less than 2 months; things are not going to be perfect! Also she has found reassurance for her efforts!

As Sarah said, "No matter how far from perfect you are, you are better than you think!"

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THUMBS UP! Thumbs Up to Laurie Cliff for her Letter to the Editor!!!! A well written letter. Emailed in.

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