

Other Viewpoints

Teach lawmakers to open meetings

On more than one occasion over the past several months, this space has been used to criticize legislators for their lack of knowledge about the Kansas Open Meetings Act or their indifference for it.

Fair is fair, and it now is time to acknowledge progress is being made and some legislators are scheduled for refresher courses – or introductory courses, depending upon who sits in – on the law.

The Kansas Attorney General's Office is scheduled to provide open meetings law training to House Republicans on Jan. 17 and Senate Democrats have planned an open meetings education program for Jan. 15, to be presented by someone from the revisor's office or the attorney general's office, or both.

The Kansas Open Meetings Act prohibits the majority of a legislative body, including legislative committees, from meeting behind closed doors to discuss business.

Rep. Barbara Ballard, D-Lawrence, caucus chairwoman for House Democrats, said that group didn't have anything scheduled as yet on open meetings education but generally covers the topic whenever it meets. Sen. Terry Bruce, R-Hutchinson, said Senate Republicans don't have any training in the works but also hasn't made plans for its first caucus.

Ballard and Bruce would do well to schedule the training, and leaders of the House Republicans and Senate Democrats are to be commended for taking steps to educate their parties' members.

Instrumental to our form of government at the federal, state and local levels are the requirements that our elected leaders conduct business in view of the public during open meetings and that most government records also are open to the public.

Kansas' open meetings and public records laws were put in place to ensure those requirements are met. Legislators should want to be well-versed on both laws.

Many Republican legislators weren't sufficiently well-versed to avoid the appearance, at the least, of impropriety earlier this year when they attended private dinners at the governor's residence. The dinners sparked an investigation by Shawnee County District Attorney Chad Taylor's office and the subsequent report found technical violations of the law but said there was insufficient evidence to prove more substantive violations.

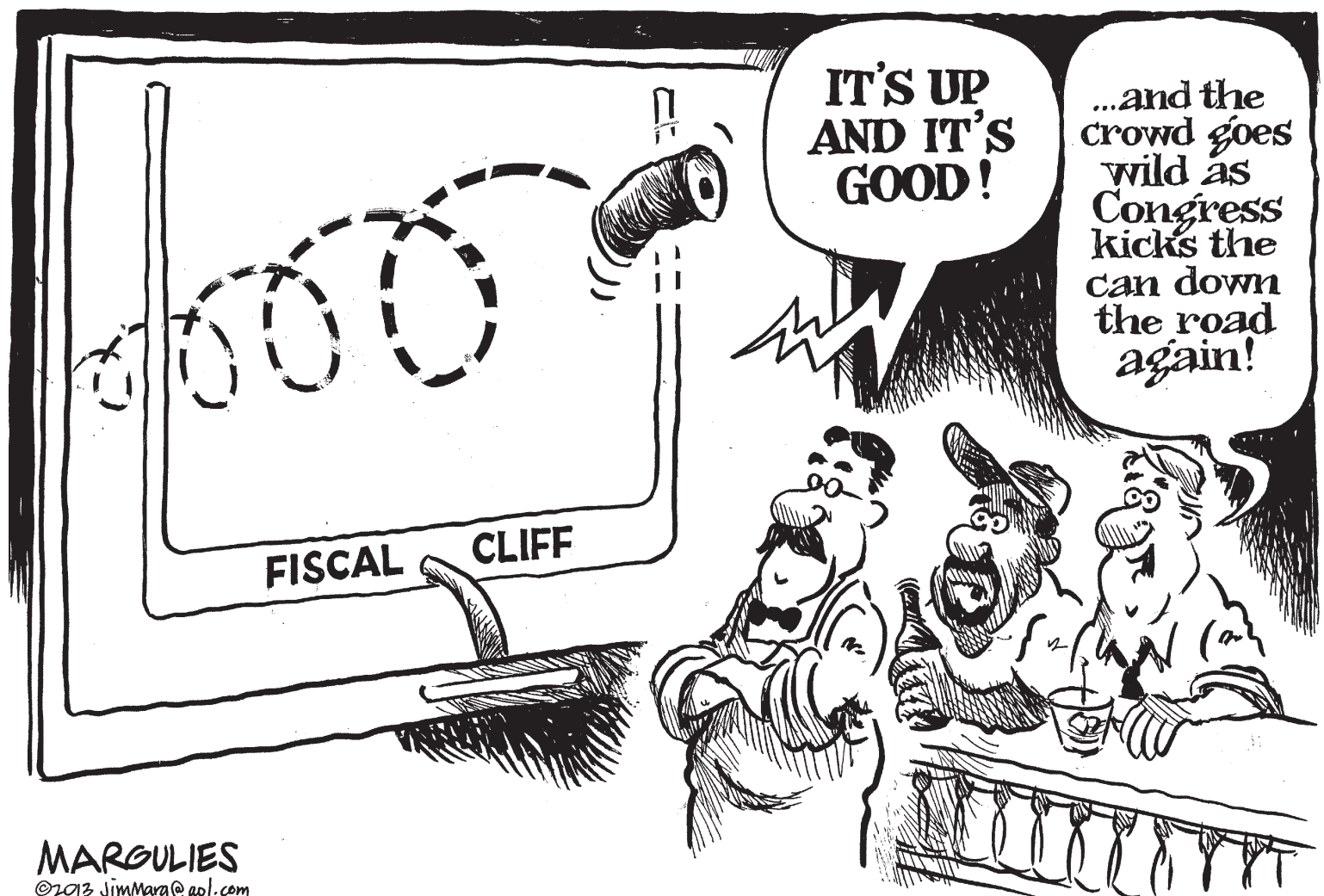
Given the current makeup of the Legislature, Senate or House Democrats alone couldn't violate the law's prohibition on a majority of a legislative body, or a legislative committee, meeting behind closed doors. Democrats definitely are the minority in both chambers.

Republicans are not, and Senate Republicans should take advantage of the opportunity extended by the attorney general's office to also become knowledgeable about the law.

And even though they are in the minority, House Democrats could find themselves at meetings outside the Statehouse also attended by Republicans, which could put the law into play.

There's simply no reason any legislator shouldn't have a thorough understanding of the law.

—The Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press



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Winter road workers deserve kudos

It's weeks like last week that ought to make us appreciate the guys who keep the roads open and safe for travel, day or night, rain or snow: the state highway crews, troopers and deputies, firemen, tow-truck drivers and all the others who keep us moving and sometimes save us from ourselves.

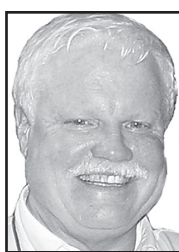
Most of the time, we take them for granted. The only time we come in contact with a trooper might be when we're going a bit too fast. And highway crews, they're the guys with the orange cones and stop signs who hold us back, make us late for that appointment in the next town.

We haven't had much winter yet, but that's when these people really shine. State crews went to 12-hour shifts as the storm approached before Christmas, keeping the plows moving day and night until the roads were clear. Next day when the sun came out, they were dry.

Say what you will, but I have a lot of respect for people who can work that way, 12 hours on, 12 off, in the worst weather of the year, plowing icy roads in a howling storm where sometimes you can't see the road at all.

But they know there are people out there who depend on them – stuck in the ditch, hurt in icy spinouts – the ones who might be stuck if they don't keep plowing.

Troopers and tow-truck drivers, deputies and firemen all have to get out on the pavement to



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

check the people stuck in the ditch, direct traffic, hook up chains, all the time never knowing when the next driver might not stop in time, might skid out of control. It's no wonder they close the roads when things get bad.

This isn't just work; it's stress. It's dangerous.

Not that working out on the road is much easier in the summer. The sun is hot, safety rules make the work drag on and people don't slow down much just because you're out there in orange.

Flagging may look like the easiest job, but it's maybe the hardest. You're on your feet in the sun all day, with wind, dust, rain and traffic. And stress. Who knows if the woman barreling down on you is awake, or on the phone, or yelling at her kids, or putting on her makeup? Who knows if she sees the flag? Who knows if she's even going to stop?

Yeah, a lot of times it may not look like the crew is getting much done. And there're

all those jokes about road crews; you know, "What's orange and sleeps three?"

The people who think these things up have never driven a plow alone at night in a blizzard, or shoveled hot asphalt patch on a summer day, or stood and flagged traffic, safely, for hours on end.

They have nice office jobs, live in California maybe. It's OK. A lot of guys on the road crews have a sense of humor.

How about this? Next time you see a bunch of road workers – but only if it's safe to stop – you might just want to stop and say thanks. Tell 'em how much you appreciate what they do, day and night, winter and summer. Same for the trooper in your town or the deputy who lives down the block, your neighbor the volunteer fireman, the tow-truck guy who never seems to have a thing to do all day.

Not many people bother, you know. Most just drive on by or shake their fist at the delay. (How do they think roads get fixed, anyway?)

Heck, stop and talk to the guys, they might just show you some of those new shovels the state bought. You know, the ones that stand up by themselves so the crew can get some work done.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Why give the college an advance?

To the Editor:

On the matter of the \$600,000 advance to Colby Community College, where is the discipline to try to get through the year without an advance?

Our school districts have been cut by the state, and they've dealt with it.

What would happen if the cities and the school districts come in for an advance? What

would the commissioners and county treasurer say them?

I support the college, but I think it needs to learn from the school boards on how it manages money. Where is the discipline when it comes to money? What happens if the schools and cities all come in for an advance?

Fred Albers, Rexford



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

How you play – or how you win?

Other Opinions

• Daris Howard Life's Outtakes

I am not a gamer, and I doubt I ever could be. I was a math and computer science major, and I have always found myself more interested in how programs worked, and trying to outsmart a game, than in actually playing it.

But if there is one thing I am, it is competitive. Thus, even though I've never been into video games, when my wife, Donna, claims she can beat me at one, I take it seriously.

One night when we were newly married, Donna challenged me to a game of Tombstone City. I told her I didn't have time because I had a lot of homework to do. She just laughed, knowing my lack of expertise. "That's okay. It will probably take less than 5 minutes for the tumbleweeds to get you anyway."

Tombstone City was a game on an old TI computer someone had given us. The computer connected to our television, which basically didn't have any other use since it usually didn't pick up a TV signal anyway.

In Tombstone City, tumbleweeds would come after the character on the screen. If they hit him, he died. But if he shot the tumbleweed before it got him, it turned into a tombstone. Tombstones became permanent, and the tumbleweeds were forced around them.

A person received points in two ways. First, 10 points came for each tumbleweed shot. Sec-

ond, a person received 1 point for each minute their character survived. Surviving became harder as the tumbleweeds came faster.

I told Donna I would take her challenge and told her to go first while I studied. Donna has good reflexes and her turn lasted about 10 minutes. She racked up about 700 points, knocking off a lot of tumbleweeds. When she finished, she grinned at me. "See if you can beat that!"

She went off to check on dinner, and I sat down to play. I moved my player into the center and waited for the tumbleweeds to come to me. As they did, I fired until I had a circle of tombstones around my player so tumbleweeds couldn't get through. I went back to my studies.

Donna came into the room and saw me studying again. She glanced at the screen and laughed. "You only made 62 points? Six tum-

bleweeds and two minutes of life has got to be a new record low, even for you."

I smiled back at her. "You might want to note the game is not over yet. I'm still playing."

"What do you mean? You're back at your studies."

"Look at the screen," I replied.

She looked and saw the game was not over and that I had just gained my 63rd point. Knowing me, she went over and studied the screen to figure out what I had done. When she realized I had enclosed myself in tombstones, she spoke in exasperation. "What kind of a game strategy is that?"

"I am getting 1 point for every minute," I told her. "It will only take me a little over 11 hours to equal your score, and then I will continue to surpass it. I figure I can just let it keep going forever."

"That's cheating," she replied.

"If you don't want to get beat," I told her, "you should learn not to challenge the master."

And that was when Donna, as master of the power cord, pulled the plug on the computer.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

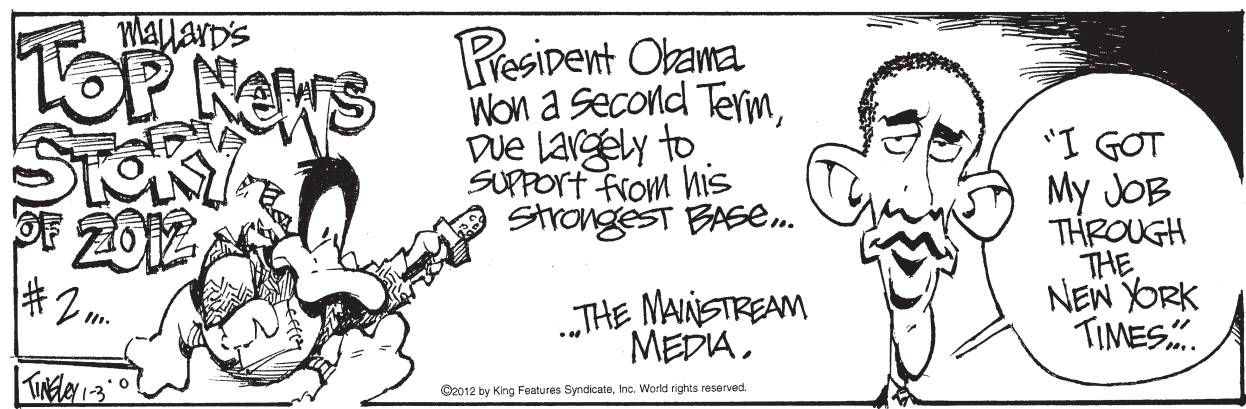
PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan., 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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