



Free Press Viewpoint

Open meeting law needs full training

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.

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 darned 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.ag.ks.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*

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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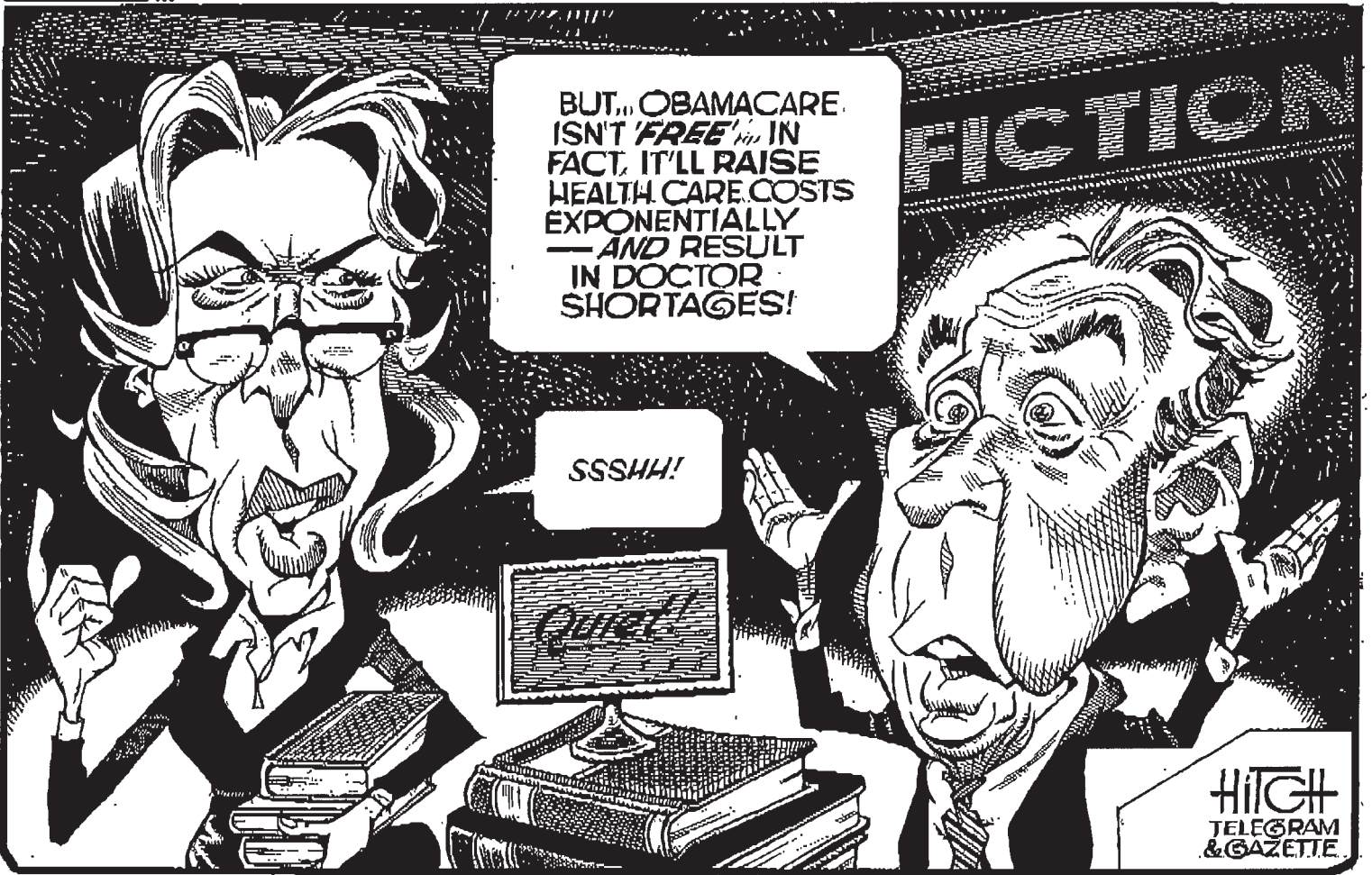
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NEWS ITEM WHITE HOUSE RECRUITS LIBRARIES TO PROMOTE OBAMACARE



She kept cool head about chilling food

You'd think I'd learn to take a cooler with me everywhere I go.

So often when I leave the house on an overnight expedition, though, it just doesn't seem like I'll need one. I have nothing that needs refrigeration and I don't plan to buy anything that will need to stay cool.

Even those times I think about it, I often dismiss the need. So there I stood with a styrofoam container of delicious leftovers, and the cooler was back at home.

It was a chilly night, and I left the food in the truck with the windows down, but in the morning the sun was starting to heat things up and we weren't ready to leave yet.

Our friend Mary, with whom we had spent the night, offered to put the leftovers in her 'fridge. That would work until we left, but it was a good two-to-three-hour trip home and that food needed to be kept cool if we were going to eat it later.

Mary rummaged around in her back room and came up with a couple of little lunch box-type bags but none of them was big enough to hold the large styrofoam container. The instructions on them said that they should be put



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

in the freezer for several hours before use anyway. We didn't have a few hours, and Mary's freezer didn't have any extra space.

Finally she offered us an insulated grocery bag. That would work.

But, wait. There was no need to borrow hers. We had one of our own in the truck, under the seat with all the other reusable bags we habitually forget to take into the store with us.

The only problem now was how to keep the food inside cool. The insulation would keep it cool if we had something cold to put in with it.

Mary had the ideal solution: a recycled peanut butter jar full of ice. She said that she always keeps one or two in the freezer for just this sort of thing. Then when she gets where she is going, she said, she can either refreeze

the jar or toss it.

The peanut butter jar is now in my freezer and Mary can either retrieve it when she comes to visit us or it'll end up in the trash on my next trip.

Actually, I use a similar idea, but with vegetables.

I buy a couple of bags of cheap frozen corn or peas and toss them in with the items I need to keep cool. When we arrive, if the vegetables are still mostly frozen, we eat them. If they are way thawed, we toss them.

Another trick is to use bottles of water. This is similar to Mary's peanut butter jar but the water bottles are only partly full of ice. The rest is water, and if you get thirsty on the trip, you can drink your cooling agent.

Or you can just take the dang cooler along. Of course, you still need something to cool it, so don't throw out the empty peanut butter jar.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Show patriotism through service

The Fourth of July is an all-American holiday — a day when communities across the country come together to wave the red, white and blue and commemorate our nation's independence with parades, fireworks and good barbecue. Every Kansas family celebrates in their own special way, but we are all united in our cause for celebration: the many blessings we enjoy as Americans and the sacrifices made in the name of our freedom.

While Independence Day traditionally honors the struggle for independence from Great Britain during the American Revolution, it is impossible to overlook the service of the current generation in our armed forces who continue to bravely defend freedom, liberty and the American dream.

It has been almost 10 years since I first met Katrina Gier Lewison, then a captain in the U.S. Army 101st Airborne Division. She grew up in Hutchinson, graduated from West Point and served in Iraq as a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter pilot. Capt. Lewison's letters home to her parents during her deployment had been published regularly by the *Hutchinson News*, and I took great interest in reading about the service of her battalion in the Mosul area of Iraq as they helped villagers, repaired local schools, ran engineering projects and built a clinic.

I had the opportunity to travel to Iraq in August 2003, and told my traveling companion — Gen. David Petraeus — that I would like to meet Capt. Lewison. Little did I know she was riding in the cockpit of our helicopter and I was shocked when she responded to me herself over the headset. During our mid-flight conversation, I learned that she had been injured just a few weeks prior by shrapnel from a grenade thrown at a Humvee she was traveling in. At that moment, Gen. Petraeus revealed to Capt. Lewison that she was to be awarded the Purple Heart for her injuries. After our helicopter landed, I had the honor of presenting the Purple Heart pin to this brave Kansan during an ceremony service that left tears in the eyes of many in attendance — including my



U.S. Senator Jerry Moran

• Moran's Memo

own. Many Kansans, like Lewison, choose military service because of their passionate faith in our nation. But you don't have to sign up for one of the Armed Forces to serve our country. Hubert H. Humphrey, the 38th vice president of the United States, once said, "What we need are critical lovers of America — patriots who express their faith in their country by working to improve it."

The fact is, one individual or organization can change the course of someone's life. Regardless of where you live, how much you earn, or how far you went in school, you can volunteer. Whether it's visiting the sick and disabled, feeding the hungry, mentoring children or supporting your community, you can make a difference.

There are opportunities to serve our nation on the home front throughout Kansas. Here are just a few suggestions: volunteer at an after school program; serve as a scoutmaster, work with your local 4-H chapter, adopt a "little" through the Big Brothers Big Sisters, coach a youth sports team or serve your church congregation. The youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow, so we need to help them develop into individuals capable of dreaming big and pursuing those dreams.

As Kansans, we have witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by natural disasters like tornadoes, and many Kansans have been on the receiving end of their fellow Americans' generosity. Another way to serve our country is by donating time, goods or money to those who have lost everything due to a natural disaster. A great resource is the American Red Cross; local chapters gather volunteers and



Sen. Moran presented the Purple Heart pin to Capt. Katrina Gier Lewison in Iraq, August 2003.

funds to help those in need. Your support can help give your fellow citizens the courage to persevere in spite of enormous challenges. Go to redcross.org to learn more about opportunities to serve.

As we celebrate the 237th birthday of our great nation, we should be mindful that with freedom comes responsibility. Great sacrifices have been made by many, including Lewison, so we can live in freedom. We must continue to work to uphold the ideals of the Declaration of Independence — life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness — and work to make certain the United States of America remains the land of opportunity. As Americans, we are called upon to better our communities and nation through patriotic service, and I hope you are compelled to answer that call.

Jerry Moran of Hays is the junior U.S. senator from Kansas. His committee appointments include Appropriations; Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs; Veterans Affairs; Small Business and Entrepreneurship; and the Special Committee on Aging. To sign up for his weekly newsletter, go to moran.senate.gov.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

