

**STAHLER**  
 @THE CINCINNATI POST, 2001  
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# commentary

from our viewpoint...

## Officials appear better at giving public access

Kansas newspapers have been rechecking results from a compliance audit of the state Open Records Act run more than a year ago.

The results aren't in yet — they'll be detailed in stories later in all the cooperating newspaper — but they appear to be a lot better than those from the original survey.

So good, in fact, that you'd almost think somebody had warned the sheriffs and school offices that reporters were coming.

That's OK, though.

When the survey, which became known as the Access Project, started, the idea was to see what would happen if someone walked into public agencies in every Kansas county and asked to see records that, while sensitive, are by law open to any citizen.

Reporters who were not known in the office, often from out of town, were sent to ask for specific public records. The idea was that for a fair test, the person asking for the records should be not a friend, but a stranger.

The results then were interesting. Cities and county clerks generally provided the records. Their compliance rate, though not perfect, was good.

School district offices posted a less enviable record when asked for the records showing an administrator's salary. Most complied, but not enough. Chalk it up to the paranoia schools often have about personnel records, though under the law, salaries are public information.

Sheriffs, as a group, flunked the test. Though you'd think that officers sworn to uphold the law would be the best at following it, lawmen tend to be secretive and suspicious. They spend their days dealing with the worst elements of society, criminals, drug dealers and other lowlife. Maybe it's tough to be trusting in that environment.

At any rate, the sheriffs' people were suspicious of the snoop people, sometimes even abusive. One was detained until she finally had the undersheriff of a southern Kansas county call her editor. Many were checked in the computer or questioned.

And that's not what should happen to a citizen trying to look at a legally open public record, in this case, the last injury accident in the county.

Whatever the reason, things seem a lot better this year when reporters fanned out to recheck those who failed to follow the law last time. Maybe it was the publicity surrounding the last survey. Maybe the fact that the Legislature toughened the Open Records Act last year. Maybe the word was out.

That's not bad, if it means that more and more public agencies are aware of the Open Records Act and willing to follow it. That, after all, was one purpose of the initial survey and the follow up. Whatever happened, it seems to be working.

And all Kansans who care about how their government runs, city, county, school and state, are the winners. — *Steve Haynes*

PS: It'd be wrong not to mention the fact that the vast majority of public agencies did comply with the law, especially city and county offices, but schools and sheriffs as well. That is the real story, of course, the good guys who know and follow the law without any prompting. They are the majority.



## I would do things differently if I had a chance

I don't know about you, but I'm still thinking about mothering.

It struck me funny that we honor mothers in May, and marriages in June.

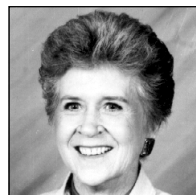
That's kind of like our world has become. Motherhood before marriage.

By the calendar, my birthday came before my parents' anniversary date. My mother was appalled to hear me tell a friend that I was born two weeks before my folks were married. (Of course I failed to also mention that I was the third child in a marriage that began well before the birth of my older siblings.)

Nowadays, we aren't even bothered by the fact that babies come out of wedlock. Not exactly social progress.

Continuing my warped train of thought today, I must mention that we honor fathers in June, hopefully not as an afterthought.

Last week I mentioned I would do some things differently if I had a chance to go back to my



**lorna g. t.**

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"mothering" days.

Dolores Curran puts into words many of my thoughts:

"It's not too late to tell our kids we're sorry, that we meant well, that what we did, we did out of love, and that we parented the best way we knew how. If I were to re-parent these same children, I would relax and enjoy them more. I would accept God's basic and wonderfully unique design of each instead of trying to form them into my image of a perfect child. I wouldn't over-react to normal albeit frustrating childhood behaviors. I would allow them to show more anger and to dis-

agree with me more.

"I would pressure them less. I would let them enjoy being children rather than seeing them as pre-mature adults. I wouldn't hassle them so much about messy rooms and eating peas before dessert.

"I'd say, 'I'm sorry,' and 'I'm unsure,' and 'I'm human,' more often. I wouldn't try to be in control all the time, and I'd be sillier. I'd tell them often how rich my life was because of them."

I think I did a pretty good job of parenting, considering how young I was, and that circumstances forced me into single-parenthood.

I wanted them to have the best life possible, and I did what I thought was necessary for that.

I'm not sorry I took them to church. I still believe that faith in God is essential to a full life.

They are all wonderful children, parenting terrific families of their own.

Hopefully, they are understanding me better as they meet the challenges of parenthood and aging.

## Medicare fight may revive dead Bush plan

Initially dismissed as dead on arrival, President Bush's plan for a state-based prescription drug benefit could be revived before the 2002 Congressional elections.

The \$46 billion, five-year "immediate helping hand" proposal for low-income seniors could re-emerge if, as seems likely, more ambitious Republican plans for full-scale Medicare reform get bogged down in partisan warfare.

Along with tax cuts, the budget, trade and energy, Medicare is likely to be one of the most contentious issues of the 107th Congress — and one of the most political. Seniors are a key swing voting group that has been leaning Republican in recent elections, though most seniors supported Democrat Al Gore in 2000.

Democrats and Republicans differ profoundly on practically everything about the system except the facts that it is destined to go broke and that seniors want a drug benefit.

Just after taking office, Bush proposed "Helping Hand" as an interim program while full-scale Medicare reform was put into place.

It was immediately written off as dead by both parties and by analysts because governors — even Republicans — don't want the responsibility of running it and because it seemed Congress would want the credit for giving seniors a federal drug benefit.

However, it may be impossible for Republicans to push a market-based overhaul of Medicare through Congress — particularly the Senate — before the next election.

Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Calif., wants to bring a Medicare reform-drug bill to the floor before the August recess.

He's proved adept at getting what he wants, but his aim is complicated by a demand from Energy and Commerce Chairman Billy Tauzin, R-La., for jurisdiction over parts of Medicare.

In the Senate, Finance Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, also wants to pass a reform bill this year, and committee members John Breaux, D-La., and Bill Frist, R-Tenn., are refining measures they've introduced in the past.

However, passing a Medicare bill will require 60 votes in the Senate, and mainline Democrats and Republicans differ on money, coverage and phi-



**morton kondracke**

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losophy — that is, on practically everything.

Democrats favor a stand-alone prescription drug benefit costing \$500 billion over 10 years that would pay 50 percent of all seniors' drug costs regardless of their incomes.

Bush's budget contains just \$156 billion spread out over 10 years for Medicare reform, including Helping Hand. He is also planning to spend an unspecified sum from an \$860 billion "contingency fund" that is also supposed to pay for defense increases, emergencies and Social Security reform.

Under the so-called Breaux-Frist II bill that Bush favors, all seniors would have the option to get a Medicare drug benefit, but subsidies would be available only to lower-income seniors.

The biggest disagreement of all is over Medicare reform. Democrats fundamentally want to keep the system as it is and add money to it. Republicans (and Breaux) consider it a bureaucratic relic that has to be reformed.

They point out that the agency administering Medicare, the Health Care Finance Administration, has 130,000 pages of regulations — four times the bulk of the Internal Revenue Code.

HCFACan take up to five years to decide whether to pay for a new medical device, and it sets 11,000 reimbursement rates for various medical procedures in the nation's 8,000 counties.

Doctors can't ask patients to pay more than HCFAC allows, so many won't see Medicare patients. To see a physical therapist requires a visit to a physician's office — verified by a bill — and additional expensive visits to keep therapy going. Phone call consultations aren't allowed.

If a prescription drug benefit is added to the existing system, Bush administration officials say, HCFAC and Congress would micromanage medicine, deciding which drugs are covered and how much should be charged for them.

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The Goodland Daily News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten if possible, and should include a telephone number and, most importantly, a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with phone numbers, by e-mail to: <daily@nwkansas.com>.

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## 24 hour relay canceled for June

Dear Community and 24 Hour Relay Helpers:

The 24 Hour Relay Committee wants to thank all of the local businesses and community members for its support for the safety of our youth throughout a weekend of fun in a non-alcoholic, violence and drug free environment. We regret that we are not going to be able to conduct the Relay this year, due to complicating factors. We will start the planning process for 2002 next fall and hope to have a lot of support from the community once again. We need volunteers to make this event a success and would welcome anyone interested to please, contact the high school. We will publicly notify the community when we are ready to begin



from our readers

• to the editor

this process. This is truly a process that takes months of planning and all support is welcome.

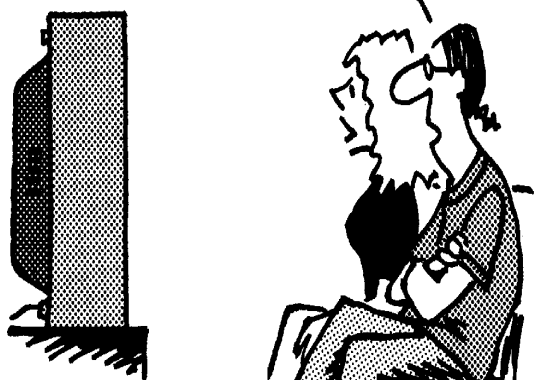
There is no better way to show support for our kids than through positive interaction with them. We have many great kids who go unrecognized and this is a wonderful way to get to know them.

24 Hour Relay Committee

### berry's world

THOSE FBI DOCUMENTS ON McVEIGH THAT TURNED UP — THE DELAY OF THE EXECUTION — WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

THAT GORE VIDAL MIGHT HAVE GONE BACK TO HIS HOME IN ITALY FOR A WHILE.



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