

from our viewpoint...

Sunshine Week celebrates vital issue

Sunshine Week came and went last week with little notice in this part of the state.

Be that as it may, the cause is worthy, and the need bears occasional mention.

Sunshine Week celebrates a year-around cause dear to many, and vital to all of us in a free society: open government.

Its backers range from the American Library Association to the League of Women Voters to the Society of Professional Journalists. And while many of this effort's leaders are news people, it's not just a "media" cause.

Sunshine is meant for all of us. Secrecy in government hurts everyone.

Over years of struggle, Sunshine proponents have passed laws in nearly every state requiring government meetings and records to be open to the public. The federal government, too, has such laws.

But that's not the end of the fight. Every year, state legislators and members of Congress, office holders and lobbying groups propose dozens of new exemptions for state and federal laws. Worse yet, many federal agencies simply ignore the law when they choose.

The federal Freedom of Information Act has no enforcement tools, no penalties, no teeth. A bill to create an ombudsman's office to handle citizen complaints passed Congress and was signed into law a couple of years ago, but it's been hamstrung by poor treatment and budget cuts from the Obama administration.

And while the administration pays lip service to openness, or "transparency," as the politicians like to call it today, it too often backs more secrecy, especially in the areas of security, law enforcement and diplomacy.

But even workaday federal agencies sometime ignore this law. And despite charges by some politicians that open government is just a "media" issue, it's often an ordinary citizen who's faced with a recalcitrant agency. The taxpayer's choices are few: forget the information he or she needed, or pay big legal fees to sue the government.

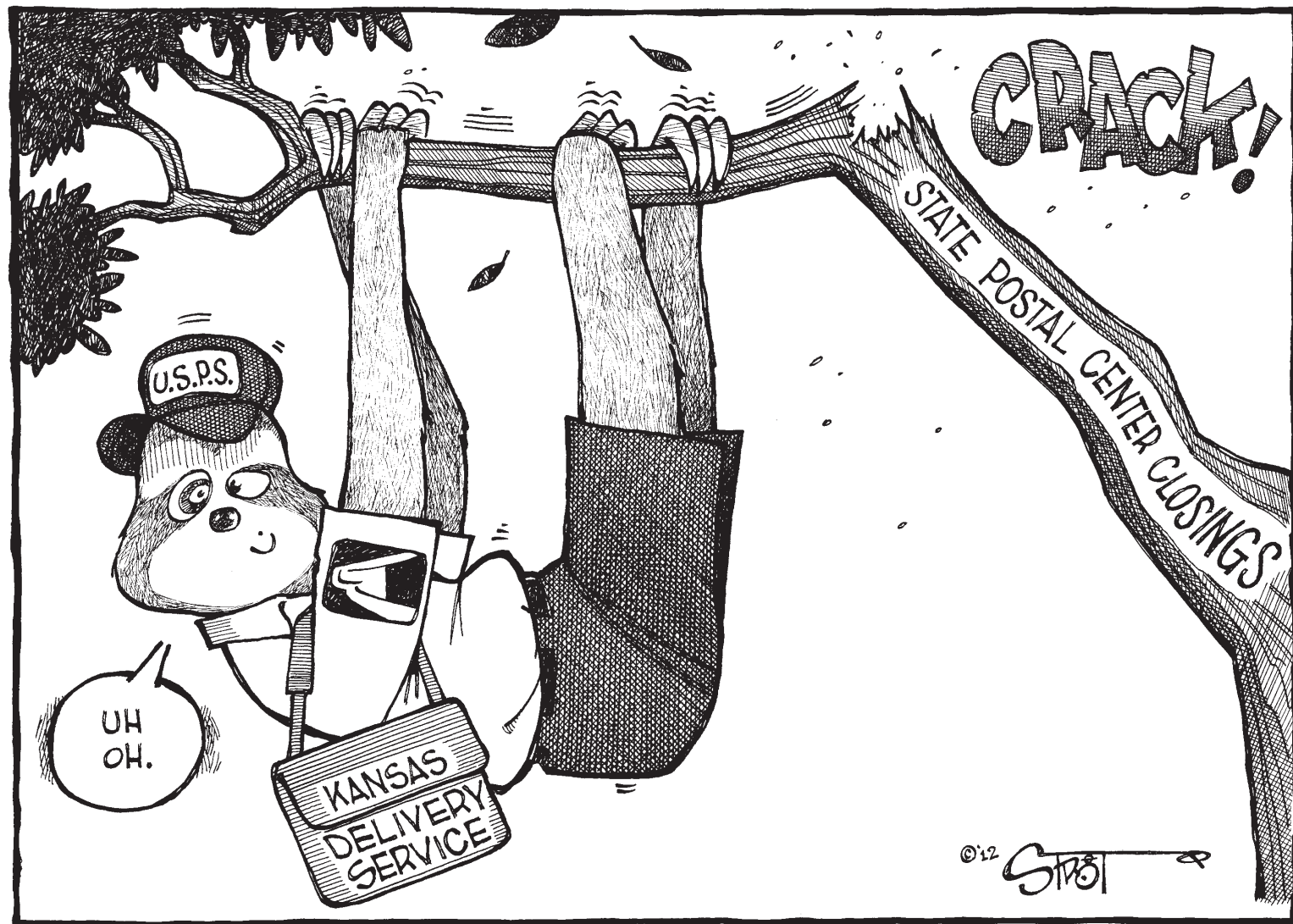
And while lawsuits often succeed, they can take years and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Why should anyone, a citizen or a reporter, have to sue the government to get what should be an open record, available to anyone who asks?

"The media" often get involved in this issue because it's our job to ask questions of the government. We see the abuses day after day; the average person could go a lifetime and never get turned down on an a request for government records. Until the day comes....

Around here, we find that public officials normally do their best to honor both the open records and open meetings laws. City and county attorneys usually advise officials to comply, and Kansas law does carry penalties: \$500 fines and court orders to take classes on open government.

Still, there are exceptions. Gov. Sam Brownback invited members of the Legislature to meetings at his official mansion, Cedar Crest, which obviously were aimed at influencing legislation this year. The governor and legislative leaders bobbed and weaved, but it was an ugly move. Mr. Brownback should have known better than to skirt the law.

For what we expect of our leaders is not lip service, but compliance with the letter and spirit of the laws which declare public business to be public. It's our right, and it's the right thing to do. — Steve Haynes



Op-ed ignored Fast and Furious debacle

To the Editor:

In the March 13 edition of the *Goodland Star News*, Alan Jilka wrote about the drug war going on in Mexico and on the US border. In that article he made a statement, "there has been a deluge of arms flooding into Mexico in recent years, mostly from the United States." That statement is only somewhat true.

What he conveniently forgot to tell you is that those arms were supplied by the United States Department of Justice in Operation Fast and Furious operated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, better known as the ATF. Alan Jilka certainly knows about Operation Fast and Furious but chose to try to keep the arms to Mexico lie alive by not mentioning Fast and Furious and the Department of Justice role in supplying those arms to the Mexican drug cartel.

Fast and Furious was uncovered when a United States Border Patrol officer was killed and guns used in the ambush were tied to those supplied by the United States. Three ATF agents finally found their moral compass and came forward with details of Operation Fast



from our readers

to the editor

and Furious. The initial explanation of Operation Fast and Furious was that it was to track those weapons to uncover the identities of drug cartel members. It was a lie! Not one weapon was ever tracked to a cartel member. The sole purpose of the operation was to inspire outrage and drum up support for more gun laws in the United States.

Even the three "major networks" were duped into running video after video of rows and rows of weapons supposedly purchased in the United States by drug cartel members and captured in Mexico. Those weapons came from the ATF. Mexico's President Calderon was kept in the dark about the Operation Fast and Furious and was duped into calling for the reinstatement of the Assault Weapon Ban in the US.

Does anyone really believe that more gun

laws in the United States will stop the flow of weapons into Mexico? How many unprotected ports of entry are there into Mexico? Certainly the US-Mexico border isn't the only place guns can enter Mexico. There are hundreds of unguarded sea ports into Mexico and there is no shortage of countries that would gladly sell a boat load of AK47's to the cartels and at a fraction of the price of a similar firearm from a licensed US firearms dealer. That is a "no brainer!"

Alan Jilka's op-ed piece in the *Goodland Star News* (and repeated in other papers as well, originally in the *Salina Journal*) could have been an interesting and insightful piece on the drug war and a possible solution, but he lost credibility when he couldn't resist perpetuating the worn out lie that lax US gun laws are part of the drug war violence, especially when he knew the US Department of Justice's ATF agents were walking guns across the border illegally in Operation Fast and Furious.

Richard Liess
Goodland

Stay supportive of wind power

The increasing cost of conducting business in the United States threatens innovation and investment in new technologies. In today's unstable business environment, American industries are understandably reluctant to invest the time and resources necessary to grow their businesses. This is especially true for domestic energy production.

Energy production is one of the most highly regulated markets in the United States today. Government policies are hurting our country's ability to compete within the global economy, limiting our domestic energy supply and driving up the cost of energy for consumers. To ensure Kansans have access to a reliable and affordable supply of energy, we must develop more of our nation's natural resources.

One resource that is plentiful in Kansas is wind. Our state has the second highest wind resource potential in our country and leads the nation in wind production capacity currently under construction. If we expect the wind energy industry to provide for our country's future energy needs and make long-term investments in their businesses, Congress must reauthorize the wind production tax credit (PTC) that expires this year. By extending the wind PTC, Congress will allow the wind industry to complete its transformation from being a high tech startup to becoming cost competitive in the energy marketplace. Failure to do so will result in a tax hike on wind energy companies and will only further delay this industry's ability to compete.

There are those who view government intervention in the energy sector as picking winners and losers. But the wind PTC is a win-



from other pens

by Sen. Jerry Moran & Gov. Sam Brownback

ning solution because it allows companies to keep more of their own dollars in exchange for the production of energy. These are not cash handouts; they are reductions in taxes that help cover the cost of doing business. Unlike President Obama's failed stimulus plan that rewards individual, unproven companies like Solyndra with cash handouts, the wind PTC is an industry tax credit that has led to \$20 billion in annual private investment in our energy infrastructure.

Today, the American wind industry includes more than 400 manufacturing facilities in 43 states. In 2005, just 25 percent of the value of a wind turbine was produced in the United States compared to more than 60 percent today. Because of their close proximity to wind farms, American workers can produce the critical components at a lower cost than their European and Asian counterparts. As more components are manufactured in the United States and not overseas, the cost to produce electricity from wind farms will be further driven down.

If the wind PTC is allowed to expire, local economies across our state will suffer. Kansas

counties will lose \$3.7 million in annual payments from wind companies. Kansas landowners will lose nearly \$4 million annually in additional income they earn from leasing or selling their land for wind farms. And every Kansan will ultimately be affected because the power generated by these wind facilities contributes to our supply of electricity. By eliminating additional sources of electricity, utility rates will climb.

To meet our country's energy needs and remain competitive in the global market, Congress must develop a national energy policy. Recent events in the Middle East have demonstrated once again the importance of having access to an ample domestic energy supply so we are less dependent on foreign sources. If Congress fails, Kansans will soon be paying much higher energy prices — for the gas to fill up our cars, for the fuel to power our farm equipment, and for the electricity to turn on our lights.

Temporarily extending the wind PTC is not about picking winners and losers — it is about preparing our country to meet our growing energy demand. Rather than make it more difficult for the private sector to develop energy sources, we should lower taxes, reduce regulations, and allow the private sector to succeed in the free market. In turn, the wind industry will grow and become fully competitive — no longer needing the wind PTC. By strengthening American energy production, our country's future will be stronger and more secure.

where to write

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; E-mail address — <http://roberts.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=EmailPat>

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, Russell Senate Office Building, Courtyard 4, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; Fax (202) 228-6966. E-mail address — <http://moran.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/e-mail-jerry>

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 1st Congressional District, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington D.C., 20575-1601. (202-225-2715) E-mail address — <https://huelskamp.house.gov/contact-me/email-me>

State Rep. Rick Billinger, Docking State Office Building Rm 724, Topeka, KS 66612. Phone (785) 296-7659, cell (785) 899-4770, home (785) 899-5824. E-mail rick_billinger@house.ks.gov.

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Rm. 225-E, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785-296-7399; e-mail address — ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

Kansas Attorney General, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

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Member: Kansas Press Association

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e-mail: star.news@nwkansas.com

Steve Haynes, President

Kevin Bottrell, Editor

Pat Schiefen, Society Editor

Advertising Department

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Nor'west Press

Richard Westfahl, General Manager

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Gary Meyer, Judy McKnight



nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(nt.betz@nwkansas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansas.com)

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