

from our viewpoint...

# What is going on behind those doors?

They are refereed to by government people as “executive sessions,” but that just means they have closed the doors so the public can’t know what’s being said.

Kansas law provides some very narrow limits on when a government agency can close the public out of discussions. The law says the board, commission or council can close the doors if they are discussing legal matters with their attorney, purchase of real property, affairs of non-elected personnel and discussions with a company where private financial or business secrets might be revealed.

The most-used exemption is the one for personnel, and the law specifically says that it applies only to non-elected employees.

Monday night, the Goodland City Commission went behind closed doors to chastise one its members, which is *not* allowed under the law. The commission members were complaining behind those closed doors that Commissioner Dean Blume had talked to the newspaper about what was said at a previous closed session.

Blume was not the only commissioner who talked to the editor after that session, and there is nothing in Kansas law which prevents *anyone* from talking about what is said in a closed session. It’s up to those present whether they talk publicly about what went on. If other commissioners didn’t like it, they were bound to say so in public, not in a closed meeting.

Commissioner Blume chose to talk about the closed session because he was frustrated by the lack of action on the city manager’s salary.

The problem with the closed sessions is that the only thing the commission had to discuss was the amount of raise to offer City Manager Ron Pickman. The contract was adopted last year and was for two years with an automatic two-year extension. The only part to be reviewed annually is pay.

This year, however, the city commission complicated the problem by approving a 75-cents-an-hour raise for all full-time city employees, then approved a smaller raise of \$1,000 for the city manager.

City Attorney Perry Warren was explaining to the commission behind closed doors that the manager’s contract has a clause which says he will receive the same raises provided to other full time city employees. The general employee raise is worth \$1,560 a year beginning in January.

Last year, the commissioners approved a \$100 a month raise for Pickman, telling him they could not give him a larger raise because of the budget problems, but promising they would make up for it this year.

The decision on Monday may have left Pickman looking at his options and wondering if the someone is trying to get him to leave.

In closed session, the commissioners apparently misfigured what a 75-cents-an-hour raise was worth and came up with the \$1,000 figure. Not wanting to admit they made a mistake, the commission staked out the position that they would only authorize the \$1,000 they had said they were going to approve on Nov. 1, though no motion was made.

All this over \$560, and it is no wonder Blume was frustrated as meeting after meeting went by without a decision being made.

Closed sessions have their place as narrowly defined by state law, but they are not supposed to be either an excuse to chew out an elected official or a means to delay simple decisions.

Using closed sessions this way makes government decisions more suspect to the public, and gives the appearance that the commission or board is not able to face up to the duties and responsibilities of elected office.

That’s no way to run a city. — *Tom Betz*



# I am fascinated by what I read

I don’t know about you, but I like to read.

I often wonder how I might be able to stand it if I lost my eyesight. Television would become radio, and books would be lost completely to me — unless I could learn Braille.

Besides — television can be entertaining, but not as a steady diet with no reprieves.

Because my major in college was in English, I find myself fascinated with authors’ writing styles.

Someone has said that there is “nothing new under the sun.” Isn’t that from the Bible? Ecclesiastes, I think.

Even conceding that might be true, I still find things in my reading which jump right off the page at me because of the fresh way they’re written.

For instance:

From St. Valentine’s Night by Andrew M. Greeley: “He was a (heck) of a lot of fun, a never-a-dull-moment kind of guy.”

By V.C. Andrews in Rain: “If we didn’t have our memories, we wouldn’t have a doorway of escape.”

In the book Ragtime by E. L. Doctorow (1974), there are no quotation marks when people speak. It makes for interesting reading.

From a lecture: “When you dance with a bear,



**lorna  
gt**  
• commentary

you don’t just dance until you’re tired. You dance until the bear gets tired.” (bear = God)

From Farewell, I’m Bound to Leave You by Fred Chappell: “Our talk fastened upon religion. My grandmother had a monstrous sweet tooth for sanctified chatter.”

By John Kellerman in The Conspiracy Club — “On Friday, serious rain arrived, frigid, unannounced, relentless as a military assault. Overtaxed storm drains backed up, and some regions of the city were assailed by filth. Auto collisions played a drumbeat on tight urban skin. The air smelled like mercurochrome. The docks at the harbor grew slick with accumulated slaps of oily lake water, boats rocked and sank, and unshaven men in knit caps and waders retired to dark bars to drink themselves senseless.”

A woman who didn’t talk much described herself: “I fill my own space with a kind of in-audible loudness” (Happy All the Time by

Laurie Colwin.)

“We need a new definition of holiness for times in which religion isn’t relevant” (again from Happy All the Time by Laurie Colwin.)

“The storm had its sleeves rolled up, its collar unbuttoned, and its tie hanging loose. Going for a two-footer” (Kathy Reichs in Monday Mourning.)

From The Oath by John Lescroart: “Glitsky’s gaze would have frozen flame.”

Again from Farewell, I’m Bound to Leave You by Fred Chappell about a story sprinkled with profanity: “It was only a mild spring-scalion type of profanity, nothing like the raw hot Spanish-onion oaths that have lately become so common a part of discourse.”

There are many times when I wish I could write colorful descriptions like those. But I rationalize that I just don’t have the time. (And writing takes much more time than you would imagine.)

Then when I do have time, I’m not in the mood to write.

Guess I was meant to be an “appreciator” of other people’s terminology instead of a serious writer myself.

Isn’t it wonderful that the world is big enough for both types?

# Puerto Rico was beautiful; not the trip home

I went to Oklahoma City for my wedding in October and then my husband Patrick and I flew out for our honeymoon in Puerto Rico. Although the flight was long, the way out was fun and exciting since we were seeing a new place.



**kathryn  
burke**  
• commentary

Puerto Rico was beautiful. The ocean, the people and the atmosphere were all great. Our vacation was just what it promised to be, that is, until the ride home.

Everything was smooth in the San Juan, Puerto Rico, airport and the flight into Orlando, Fla. was great.

Due to a mechanical error, the plane out of Florida was delayed which set us down in Dallas, Texas, 45 minutes past schedule, but only 10 minutes late for our flight back to Oklahoma City.

A ten-minute miss put us on “priority” standby for a flight leaving an hour and a half later, but it was full. (And by “priority,” they mean number 19 and 20 on a long list of other stranded passengers).

The next flight was also full, but we got on and made it home.

The over four hour wait in the airport was roughly the time it would have taken Patrick and me to rent a car and drive home. Instead we sat in an airport and waited.

The delay is not what angered me the most. I can keep myself busy with a good book as long as the airline is willing to admit their mistake and compensate me for my time.

Why do airlines think they can do whatever they want and ignore the customer?

It was their fault we landed in Dallas late, and they didn’t bat an eye or attempt to apologize. We went to the counter to complain, the lady never made eye contact and repeated the same flight information over and over. They never apologized.

While waiting for the first flight to Oklahoma City, the ticket counter announced that the airline was offering \$250 travel vouchers for people willing to give up their seats.

People who willingly give up their seats were given huge rewards while they forced me to give up my seat and gave me nothing. The ticket lady didn’t see the injustice in that either when I brought it to her attention.

So we waited some more. We were in the airport long enough to need to eat, but even McDonald’s has marked up prices for airport food. Each “value” meal is higher by at least \$1 and the 39-cent hamburgers are up to \$1.09!

Trapped in the airport, we are at the mercy of their whim.

I was so angry at one point that I wondered what people who fly regularly feel. The few flights I’ve taken in my life were delayed or slowed for one reason or another. How do people who encounter this pain on a regular

basis deal with it?

I think if someone felt the rage I felt that Friday once or twice a month, the airlines should stop fearing terrorists and look to their customers.

The only recourse I have is to stop flying on that airline and tell my friends. The airlines complained and complained after 9/11 about how no one was using their services, but now that traffic has picked up, they have decided to mistreat the same customers they were begging for.

Instead of treating us with the courtesy we deserved, the airline placed the burden on us to prove our case to them. Only after a well-written letter by Patrick did we receive a \$400 travel voucher for our troubles. But I won’t forget that Friday afternoon for a long time, and you won’t see me traveling by plane soon.



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## garfield

