

from our viewpoint...

Leaders join forces to insure openness

Legislative leaders from all three sides of the aisle, the attorney general and governor have joined Kansas newspapers pushing for a new constitutional right — the right of voters and citizens to know what their government is doing.

Open government sounds as simple as it does obvious. In a democracy, don't the people always have a right to know what their officials are up to?

Sadly, many officials don't agree. Once elected, they think they should know things that "the people" shouldn't hear or see.

Kansas has an Open Meetings and Open Records laws, but they are violated daily, sometimes right in our own county, by officials who either don't know or don't care about or don't understand the public's rights.

And while the laws have been toughened some, it's difficult and expensive to enforce them. One newspaper spent more than \$13,000 in legal fees to get the state's list of dangerous railroad crossings. The Department of Transportation lost the suit — why it wanted to keep the information a secret is beyond us — but spent thousands more in tax money to keep its files closed.

Many times, citizen requests are met with a stonewall by public officials who just don't understand the laws. Most people just can't afford to sue.

Other times, officials meet behind closed doors and discuss things they know are not legal. Since no one hears what they say, who can challenge the secrecy?

The legislative push includes a constitutional amendment which will let voters decide the issue.

It would create an Office of Public Integrity under the attorney general to enforce the public's rights, and change one exemption to the records law to be certain that all compensation of public employees, and not just cash pay, is open to the public. (A lawsuit last year cleared up that exemption, at a cost of more than \$75,000, but the University of Kansas chose not to appeal, so the state Supreme Court did not get to make a definitive ruling.)

The program, created by the Kansas Press Association, would expand the definition of a public agency to include private firms that contract to run state programs, an increasingly popular dodge.

All this may sound great, but there will be opposition. Many officials feel the public really doesn't need to know what government is up to.

Some will support the amendment and the accompanying bills publicly, but drag their feet in hopes that the effort will go away.

There is little in state, county, city or school files that should *not* be open to public inspection. Current exemptions to the laws would remain to protect those few things, such as personnel and student records, that should be closed.

But it will take a lot of work and strong support from taxpayers and voters to get a two-thirds vote in both houses of the state Legislature. An affirmative vote by the people in 2006 is more certain, because Kansans understand they're entitled to this information.

This plan, enshrining a basic right in the Constitution and creating an agency to enforce it, deserves our support. It's important to our freedom to know what government does.

Here's hoping that the Legislature gets with the program. — *Steve Haynes*

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com

Steve Haynes, President

Tom Betz, Editor

Pat Schiefen, Copy Editor

Sharon Corcoran, Society Editor

Sports Editor/Reporter

Kathryn Burke, Reporter

Doug Jackson, Advertising Coordinator

Mona Carver, Adv. Sales

Sheila Smith, Office Manager

Nor'west Press

Jim Bowker, General Manager

Richard Westfahl Ron VanLoenen Judy McKnight Betty Morris

Aaron Hickert Travis Jones Jerry Kirkpatrick Lana Westfahl

 **nwkansas.com**

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkanssas.com)

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

Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735. Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkanssas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$24; six months, \$42; 12 months, \$76. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$34; six months, \$49; 12 months, \$84. Mailed individually each day: 12 months, \$119. (All tax included.)

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

**The Sherman
County Herald**

Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company

THE SHERMAN COUNTY
STAR
Founded by Eric and
Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001



Lent season for personal renewal

I don't know about you, but, as a Christian, I will observe the season of Lent.

It began this week in most churches with an Ash Wednesday service.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of a 40-day period of self-examination, looking for habits and attitudes that separate you from being all God wants you to be.

This is a time of preparation, much as Jesus' time in the desert before he began his ministry on earth. Ash Wednesday emphasizes a dual encounter: we confront our transience and confess our sin before God within the community of faith.

Now I know a lot of you think you're pretty straight with God and that sin really isn't a problem in your lives. Well then, maybe you should look deeper and see if you aren't a victim of pride.

Here are some thoughts about sin to help you assess your lifestyle and personal mind-sets:

A Bible dictionary will tell you "sin is that which is in opposition to God's benevolent purposes for (God's) creation. Sin is an ever-present reality that enslaves the human race and has corrupted God's created order." (Highlighting is mine. LGT)

No one is totally free from sin. One of the biggest sins is thinking that we are free of it.



**lorna
g t**

• commentary

The great white shark stalks its prey by swimming around and around on the bottom of shallow water. With no warning, it darts to the surface for its attack. "Just as this shark stalks its prey, so does Satan. If you choose to linger in the ocean of sin, you can be sure of this: There is a shark in the waters, and sooner or later..." (from Contemporary Illustrations, editor Craig Brian Larson).

A jolt of incoming 120 volt AC electricity can be enough to paralyze your muscles to that you can't let go. Just a little more can stop your heart muscle.

"So it is with sin. People dabble with sin because they don't fear its power to paralyze the muscles of the soul. Then it's too late. Even when people know a sinful behavior is hurting them and they want to quit, they can't let go. Sin is never safe!" The truth is we all need God's help with the problem of sin. (from Contemporary Illustrations, editor Craig Brian Larson).

Legislature moving bills through process

What's up in Topeka?

DOMA: The Defense of Marriage Amendment to the Kansas Constitution has been passed by the Legislature and will be voted on in the April 5 elections. It needs 50 percent plus one vote to be placed in the Constitution. The question on the ballot will be: "being constituted by one man and one woman only. All other marriages are declared to be contrary to the public policy of this state and are considered void."

EDUCATION subcommittees are nearly completed discussing the issues of suitability and weighting. The Senate says they will have a position this week. The House should have its position the following week.

BOW HUNTERS will be happy about HB 2115, which would repeal legislation passed late last session that severely limited the areas in which bow hunters could hunt. Passage of the bill will once again allow bow hunters to hunt statewide. It was to be heard in Wildlife, Tourism and Parks Committee on Monday.

DEATH PENALTY will be discussed this week in Rep. Ward Loyd's Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee. You may remember the state. Supreme Court recently ruled the current death penalty statute unconstitutional.

PAYDAY LOANS are the object of discussion in the Financial Institutions Committee. A bill to cap interest rates is scheduled for hearing next week. I have data that appears to suggest higher rates are being charged for ATM fees, credit card fees (especially late charges), check overdraft fees and many other fees, nearing as much as 1000 percent, considerably higher than payday loans. This will be an interesting discussion that could morph into a bill addressing fees charged by all lenders.



**jim
morrison**

• capitol review

HEALTH is an issue important to everyone. You will likely tire of my saying it is the single most important issue of your life. Without health, you die.

Accessibility, Affordability and Availability (the 3As) of health care and your health information should be important to everyone. HB 2256, addressing, in part, the 3As was scheduled for hearings Wednesday and Thursday in my Health committee. The bill would allow Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioners the unrestricted practice of medicine. Over time, this could mean you would see an MD, DO or ARNP for anything from a sore throat to brain surgery. Some background on part of the issues in HB2256 is in the Jan. 31-Feb. 7 issue of U.S. News & World Report. The special health issue is worth a read.

My intention is to create as much discussion on basic problems as I can. Chairman Holmes (Utilities Committee) is doing the same regarding wind turbines, broadband, predatory telecommunication practices and such. That is another story — to be included in subsequent information in the newspaper.

Thank you very much for all your support, feedback, help, prayers and just plain friendship. I have a legislative aide, Skyler Goodwin, a Goodland native and second-year student at Washburn School of Law. His help is greatly appreciated as well.

REMINDER: All documents utilized in my

"Sin is the arrogant pretense of self-sufficiency; it dethrones God and sets the mighty little self in His place" (from Interpreter's Bible, Hebrews).

Sin is thinking you don't need God, that you can handle everything by yourself. Self becomes your god, and your humanity allows you to think and live however you choose. You have no need to listen to or be accountable to God.

You have to overcome sin moment by moment. It is always there — both in the world and within your self. You must learn to disclose your tendency toward sin. Confession is necessary. Admitting you need God's help is essential. If you won't acknowledge sin, you can't get rid of it.

This Lent I invite and encourage you to examine yourself.

Our God is gracious and merciful. If we admit our sin, God will forgive and strengthen us. To conquer sin is why Jesus came to earth.

The solemn time of scrutiny ends with a celebration. The darkness of Lent gives way to the light and joy of Easter.

Hopefully when Easter comes this year, you will be celebrating all that Jesus did to save you from sin and to show you God's love and forgiveness, but also you'll rejoice in a new and better you.

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and 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 address and phone numbers, by e-mail to: <star-news@nwkanssas.com>.

garfield

