

from our viewpoint...

## Sunshine Week aim open government

Last week was Sunshine Week, dedicated to open government.

It's a new national celebration, devoted to the idea that the people need to know what their public servants are doing.

In a democracy, that should be a simple concept. In Kansas, it drew support from the governor, legislative leaders, the attorney general and members of Congress. And it came just a couple of weeks after the attorney general met privately with members of the state Board of Education to talk about evolution.

That illustrates the problem: Often, officials are afraid to discuss public business out in the open. They may seek political advantage, or they're embarrassed by the topic. Sometimes they claim they're protecting someone's privacy, or avoiding a lawsuit.

State open meetings and open record laws have exceptions to cover legitimate problems, but the reasons for secrecy often go beyond those. Officials sometimes don't understand the people's right to know, or they just don't care.

Kansas has good laws, but still officials try to dodge them when they think openness will hurt them. Sometimes, they keep secrets just because they can. Clerks often put roadblocks in the way of citizens seeking government records, though the law may say they are open.

Ignorance of this right may be its worst enemy. Often people go home without the information they need or want about their government.

In a continuing push for openness, the Kansas Press Association formed a coalition to put open government into the state Constitution, protecting the right to know for all time and publicizing its importance.

This drew broad support in Topeka, everywhere from the governor's office to the Democratic and Republican leadership, both liberal and conservative. The coalition has been hampered by the evolution meetings, however, and the amendment hasn't moved much.

Federal law is much weaker than states'. While Congress generally meets in open session, federal agencies cling to secrecy. Citizens may spend years and thousands of dollars chasing public records.

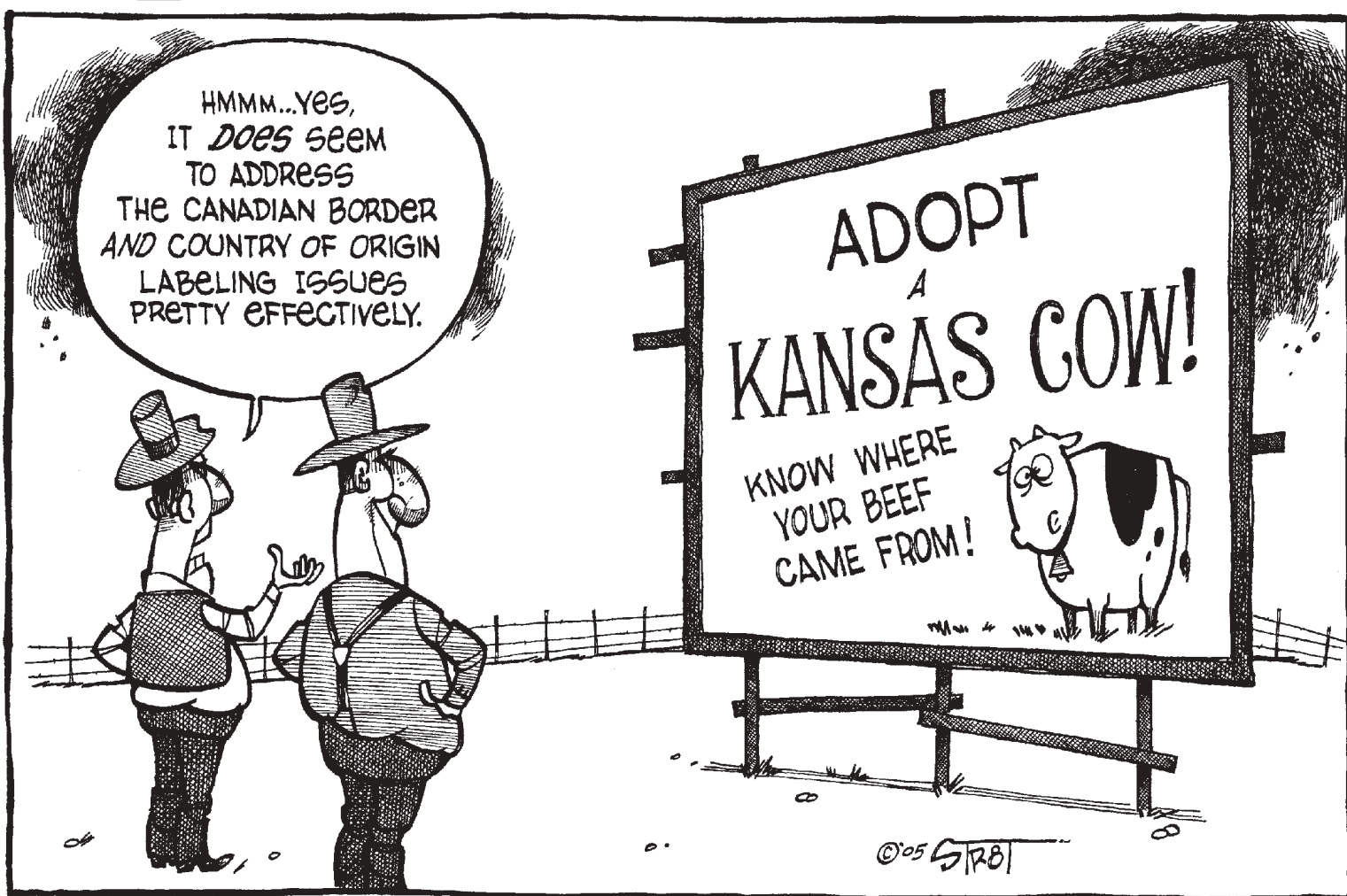
In Washington, Sen. John Cornyn, a Texas conservative, and Sen. Patrick Leahy, a Vermont liberal, have joined forces to push a stronger Freedom of Information Act. It would restore much of what citizens have lost in recent years, though the secrecy surrounding the Patriot Act remains a problem.

Sen. Cornyn, a former state attorney general, said it well earlier this month:

"I can't think of an issue that's more central to who we are than open government. We are a self-governing people."

Open government is the bedrock of our democracy, he said; "It allows taxpayers to see where their money is going."

Amen to that. Remember Sunshine Week. — Steve Haynes



## With cats 'eggs' always in danger

Steve says that the cats see everything on tables, counters, shelves and ledges as eggs.

His reasoning is that cats are hunters. In the wild, they are always looking for something to eat, and eggs are a good source of food for small predators.

But, of course, eggs can be a problem. Snakes just swallow them whole and some birds take them into the air and drop them. Cats and other ground-dwelling predators need a way to get past the hard shell to the tasty insides.

Pushing them off high ground works well. This is especially useful if the "egg" is already on a raised surface, such as a table, counter or ledge.

So, he thinks, cats will shove every movable item on the counter over the edge. The pens, pencils, paper clips, stapler, silverware, scissors, rubber bands, small books and occasionally glassware all end up on the floor.

Except for the glassware, the problem is minor and only requires reaching down and picking them up.

But the rare bunch of flowers that finds its way to our table is in constant peril of becoming floor decor.



**cynthia haynes**

• open season

I keep telling myself that this is good for me because:

Leaning over to pick up all that junk every day is good exercise.

Perhaps this will make me be more neat. (It hasn't worked yet, but I keep hoping.)

I never lose pencils or pens on my desk. I can always find one on the floor.

With four cats in the house, the "eggs" are always in danger.

Actually, I'm only sure about having three cats.

Molly Monster growls at everyone and everything. She hates cats and rules the roost. No "eggs" get past her. Besides, when she sprawls on an end table, the table quakes and the contents crash.

April Alice prefers the couch and bed. She seldom spends much time pushing stuff off the

tables, but she gets plenty of hair on my furniture.

Rupert, one of my daughter's cats on temporary loan to us, is the softest, grayest cat you can imagine. She is also the worst about getting up on the kitchen counter. Cats are not allowed on my counters, and my two know that. They are good about staying off the counter, if nowhere else. Rupert, however, seems to think that my food should be her food, and she undoubtedly believes there are "eggs" on those counters.

Then there is Jezebel. At least, I think we have a cat named Jezebel. Jez is shy. She is seldom seen out of the basement, where she hides in the rafters.

I'm guessing that the "eggs" on the floor of the basement got there with the help of Miss Jez, though.

The sad part of this whole story is that I really left an uncooked egg sitting out on my table and the cats knocked it off, they wouldn't know what to do with it. They're all so picky, they won't eat anything but the Science Diet cat food I buy at the vet's.

So much for my carnivorous little predators.

## Where is the pride in our town?

To the Editor:

Years ago, taxes in arrears on a piece of property stirred up a real disturbance in a small town on the very top side of Kansas. Since that time, a lot of slam dunks have occurred, and while some towns and cities are encouraging people to move in and work together for the best of the people — we have a town that wants people to move on out to the east side of wherever, and just let the weeds grow in the parks and let the trash pile up in the ditches.

Pride — let us see now — just what is the definition of that word? The state of being proud, and I will also add, accomplishing something to be proud of.

This town has an ambulance here; WOW! We really have an uptown, small town now. At first, the ambulance wasn't fully equipped, nor would it even start. A citizen died here which one person thought could have been avoided. OK now, we needed two certified emergency medical technicians.

A lot of people in this town think this is all unnecessary. Finally, two women took all those hours of schooling and passed all the tests. WOW, should we ALL ever be proud. NOPE! We can't house the ambulance with the fire trucks. We can't have a fire truck in the K-day parade — so the ambulance lead the parade. We can't have a fire truck in the Christmas parade, unless 10 people ride in it. People who are part of the City Council are not supposed to be EMTs.

This community really works hard to pull everyone together.

One if by land, and two if by sea, and I on the opposite side shall be — ready to ride and spread the alarm. Famous words of Paul Revere. Some people set here with their feet in the dirt pull back, and we don't have Paul Revere's



**from our readers**

• to the editor

fast steed, but rather a stubborn mule.

We have had a Cinco de Mayo celebration day here — something we never had before. Kanorado Day went well, with a big parade. We always remember the 9/11 victims with candles. When some people wouldn't call bingo, others volunteered their time. The tables at one of the city parks have been repaired. One

thing left to do: A fence needs repairing that a maintainer just could not avoid, because that fence couldn't run fast enough to get out of the way.

Some people have a weird way of thinking that they are pulling the community together. Instead of co-operating with one another, they are competing with one another, and all they are doing is to keep a bad fight going.

Some people think the devil went down to Georgia. Well, I shore wish he and his helpers would stay there, cause we don't need him up here.

Bob and Linda Handle  
Kanorado

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