

from our viewpoint...

People step forward to fill planning void

The cash-strapped Goodland Chamber of Commerce had to step aside, but others have stepped up to fill the void organizing events and promotions.

When the Chamber realized they were digging a deeper hole after losing money on the Tracy Lawrence concert this summer, the board cut off the spending.

Members hope the Chamber can emerge from this crisis and be a force to help businesses, but right now, they're just trying to pay old bills and keep the office open.

Without the Chamber, there's no one to organize events and business promotions. Before the Chamber's downfall, a separate committee, which represents all the groups involved, had begun organizing the Flatlander Fall Festival.

Flatlander was a success this year, and efforts are underway to make it better next year. To help get the committee off to a start, the city and county provided about \$2,400 to cover the basic budget this year.

The Flatlander Committee will be reviewing what went right and see what they have to begin planning for next year. There is hope the festival can break even financially. If not, the committee will have to look for ways to raise money to cover the budget.

Next comes the holiday season. In the past, the Chamber organized a promotion program to encourage people to shop in Goodland for Christmas. To fill this void, the Sherman County Economic Development Council stepped forward last Tuesday to help organize and pay for the holiday promotion.

"We need a strategy to promote Goodland for the holiday season," said Council Chairman John Garcia.

To help with the effort, Garcia invited representatives from the Goodland Ambassadors, the Chamber, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the radio stations and *The Goodland Star-News* to meet. S & T Communications was represented by Don Newell, who is a council member.

It took about an hour to get the details together, but at the end, there was a outline of a holiday promotion. There will be a parade on Saturday, Nov. 19, and Debbie Reed from the Chamber will help organize this. The Goodland Ambassadors with Kathy Melia will hand out refreshments and candy for Santa's big entrance that day.

The theme for the holiday promotion is "Santa's Sleigh starts in Goodland."

The council decided to put up \$3,000 that will be split between the radio, cable television, televisoin and newspaper to promote the holiday events and encourage people to shop in Goodland. Each outlet will have its own promotion, such as *The Star-News'* Christmas On Us, which brings people to the city to buy presents and pay bills, and collect tickets for the big drawing for \$1,500 on Dec. 17.

With the holiday program being handled through the Economic Development Council, there remains one major event that needs someone to be the leader — Fourth of July. This is the time to be thinking about how this event should be organized, and to find an organization to take the lead.

Any volunteers? — *Tom Betz*

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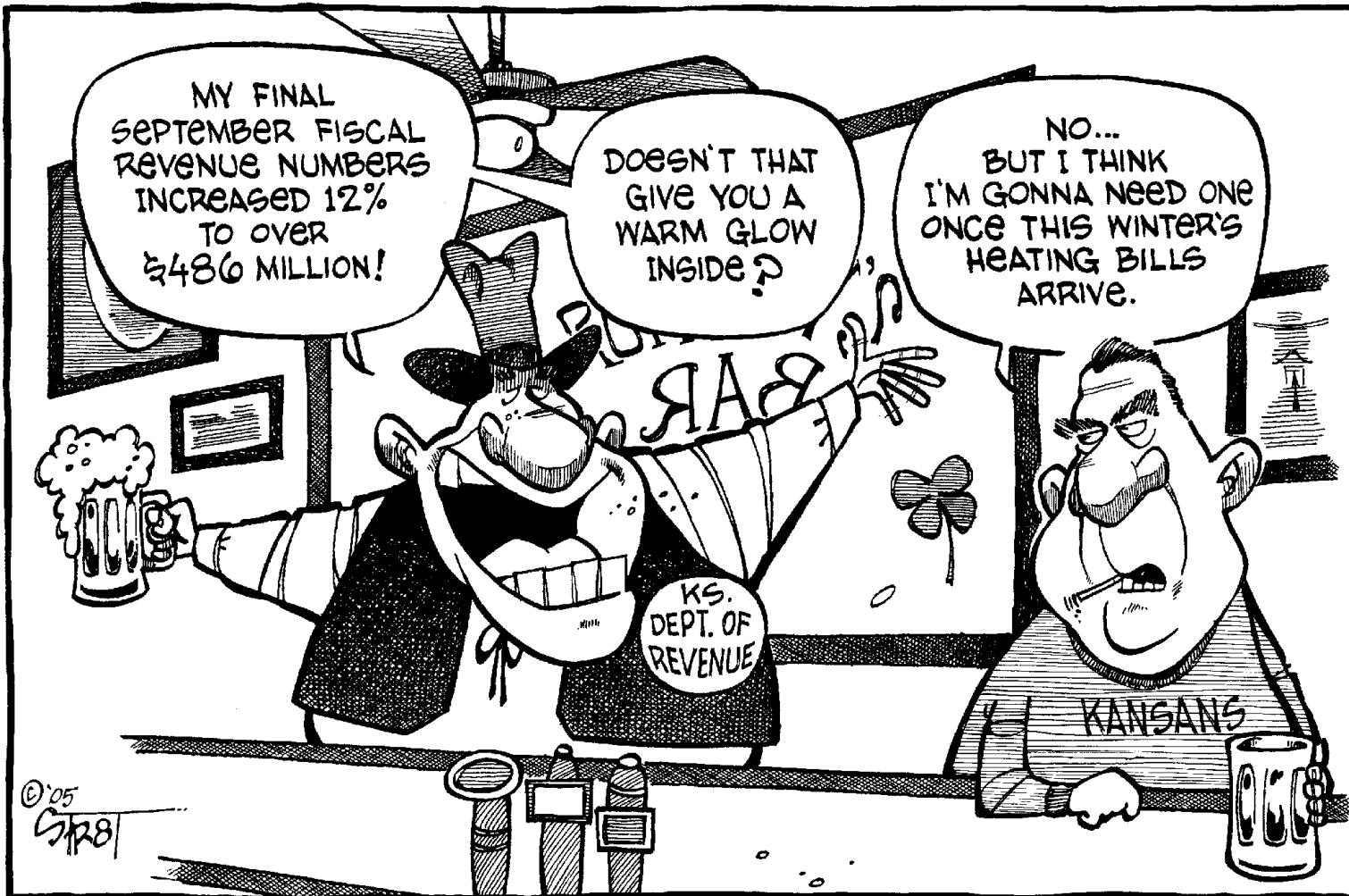
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Secrecy: Pervasive and dangerous

By Paul K. McMasters

First Amendment Center

If you sort the millions of pages, documents and computer disks stamped secret by federal employees last year into stacks each as high as the Washington Monument, you would have a dozen or more monuments to government stonewalling obscuring the skyline of this nation's capital.

When you take into account that as many as half of those new secrets don't deserve to be secret, as a federal official conceded in congressional testimony not long ago, then you have monumentally darkened the landscape of our open society.

These thoughts are provoked by the release of a new report, "Secrecy Report Card 2005: Quantitative Indicators of Secrecy in the Federal Government," by OpenTheGovernment.org, a coalition of public-interest, consumer and press groups.

This report fairly crackles with damning data.

Government workers made 15.6 million classification decisions in 2004, a stunning 81 percent more than the year before the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

American taxpayers forked over \$460 each time a government worker wielded the secrecy stamp last year, shelling out a total of \$7.2 billion to keep all of those secrets secure; that compares to \$3.8 billion in 1997.

The government spent \$148 making new secrets for every dollar it spent unmaking old ones; for comparison, the government spent \$20 on classification for every \$1 spent on declassification from 1997 to 2001.

The shadowy Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court granted every single one of the 1,754 requests for surveillance orders on foreign nationals in the United States, and the number of such requests has doubled in the last five years.

The White House and federal agencies invoked the "state secrecy" privilege 33 times more often in the last four years than during the height of the Cold War. This legal tactic allows the government to brush off court cases by asserting that going to court would put foreign policy or national-security concerns at risk. Used only 55 times from 1953 to 2001, the state-secrecy privilege has been used to derail legal action against the government 23 times since.

These statistics on classified material form the tip of the controlled-information iceberg.

Letter Policy

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from other pens

- commentary

Restrictions have been placed on access to more massive amounts of material that do not qualify as secret but instead are described as "sensitive but unclassified."

The report card identified 50 different ways to label government information "Sensitive But Unclassified" and thus deny public access.

"The federal government has greatly expanded its ability to control unclassified, public information through vague restrictions that give government officials wide latitude to declare information beyond the public's reach," wrote the report's author, Rick Blum, Open The Government director.

As for open meetings, nearly two-thirds of the 7,045 governed by the 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act, which explicitly endorsed the idea of openness in expert scientific and technical advice to policy makers, were nevertheless closed to the public.

The record at the state level was equally dismal. At least 62 new laws putting public information behind closed doors were passed by states last year.

Ironically, while the government is placing more restrictions on access, the report documents a 25 percent increase in public requests for federal information — 4,080,737 during 2004. Spending to accommodate those requests rose only 5 percent, however, to \$336.8 million, and only 14 of the 90 agencies surveyed by the Department of Justice were able to respond to those requests as required by law.

There is a lot more, of course, but these examples are enough to paint a picture of a highly disciplined, if vaguely desperate, policy of



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