



**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS** (from right) Ralph Unger, Doyle Brown and Pat Glenn, and County Attorney Steve Hirsch, showed off their "Govern in Sunshine" wrist bands during a meeting last week. — Herald staff photos by Steve Haynes



**Letter from Topeka**  
By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer  
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## Senator reports on district tour

Much of the last month was spent touring the 40th Senate District with our six House members. The main thing people wanted to talk about was money for our schools and making sure we approved a multi-year plan.

Both the Senate and House plans address at-risk, bilingual, and special education funds, which were concerns listed by Kansas Supreme Court. This past week, Senate leadership appointed a special committee to identify revenue to fund the second and third years of a school plan.

I realize that either package only helps cut losses to most districts. I'm hearing of new interest in gambling to help pay for schools. This would be a mistake.

The Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee began hearings on a bill on city and county consolidation, and another aimed at joining Topeka and Shawnee County.

SB 262, the Efficiency in Local Government Act, would allow county commissioners and governing body of a city to create a reorganization study committee to plan reorganization of the city and county.

HB 2083 would establish a five-member Consolidation Commission for Topeka and Shawnee County. The bill calls for a vote of approval of those living inside the city of Topeka and those individuals living outside the city limits.

The bill calls for the governor, Senate president and minority leader, speaker and minority leader

of the House to each appoint a member to the commission. This bill reminds me of the consolidation efforts of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, when the governor appointed the five members of the Consolidation Committee. There is an effort to combine both bills and then pass it out of committee. I don't have a lot of problems with HB 2083, but SB 262 needs some work before I would support it.

**Wildlife and Parks**  
Senate Bill 87 is lurking below the line. The measure would provide money to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and to local parks. The bill, as amended by committee, would add a \$4 annual outdoor recreation registration fee to be paid with motor vehicle registration or renewal. The department would receive 80 percent of the fee, and 20 percent would go to the Local Government Outdoor Recreation Grant Program Fund.

The measure would generate \$8.7 million for state and local parks. Part of current parks budget is generated through user fees collected at state park entrances. Passing this measure removes entrance fees for vehicles with Kansas tags. The original bill set a \$5 fee and allowed for a refund. The amended bill reduced the fee to \$4 and removed the refund option.

Contact me by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 128-S, Topeka, Kansas, 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us.

## Sun shining here, at the Capitol



**REP. JERRY MORAN** got his orange bracelet in the House reception room, and later signed on to co-sponsor the Open Government Act.



**Along the Sappa**  
By Steve Haynes  
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The Sunshine movement is gathering steam, in Congress and at home.

Rep. Jerry Moran announced Monday that he had signed on as the first House co-sponsor for the Open Government Act, a bill to strengthen the Freedom of Information Act.

And while, as editors, we usually confine ourselves to comments on this page, once a year, we go to Washington to lobby for the National Newspaper Association and the Kansas Press Association.

There, we got an update on Sunshine Week and the Government in Sunshine Initiative, a coalition of press and civic groups backing the Open Government Act. Supporters were passing out orange "Govern in Sunshine" bracelets, and we picked up a few bags.

This is one of those issues where editors come out from behind our desks. One of our first stops on Capitol Hill was the Rayburn Building office of Rep. Moran. We gave him a bracelet, which he quickly put on.

At our next stop, Rep. Dennis Moore of Olathe donned a bracelet. When you can get a conservative western Kansas Republican and a liberal eastern Kansas Democrat to agree that quickly, it says something about the issue.

In fact, the Open Government Act has been endorsed by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, and the American Civil Liberties Union, which many feel is about as liberal as you can get.

But it's the people's right to know if an issue that cuts across the usual party and ideological lines. Its Senate sponsors are John Cornyn, a conservative Texas Republican, and Pat Leahy, a liberal Vermont Democrat.

It's an issue that attracts good guys, and Reps. Moran and Moore fall into that category.

By the time we got to the Senate side, we found Pat Roberts wearing an arm band. He grinned when we asked him where he got it.

"As chairman of the Intelligence Committee," he said, deadpan, "I can't tell you my source."

As long as he supports the bill, we probably won't dig too much.

Back home, we handed out bracelets at a Decatur County Commission meeting last week. The commissioners, Clerk Marilyn Horn and County Attorney Steve Hirsch had their picture taken with the arm bands on, too.

Later in the week, we passed out presents to the Oberlin City Council, and the four council members and mayor (one was absent) donned theirs, too.

This really is an issue we can all agree on: The right of taxpayers, citizens and voters to know what their government is doing. Sure, there are exceptions. They are, for the most part, reasonable.

But the bottom line is, taxpayers are the stockholders, the owners of our democratic government. The government shouldn't have many secrets from them.

When the average person goes to a government agency and asks for information, they're often met with lack of cooperation, refusal, hostility or questions about "why" they want the documents. Sometimes it's ignorance of the law on the part of a poorly trained clerk. Sometimes, the government has something to hide.

But it just shouldn't happen. That's what Sunshine Week and the Open Government Act are all about. That's why we had no qualms about going to Washington, or to the meetings here, and boosting this cause.

This is a basic right in a democracy, something we should all believe in.



**AFTER THEIR MEETING** on Thursday, city councilmen (from left) Patrick Pomeroy, Ray Ward, Stan McEvoy and Jay Anderson, and Mayor Ken Shobe, wore their "sunshine" wrist bands at The Gateway.

## Livestock issues tops in Washington

Livestock issues took center stage in Washington this month.

The House Agriculture Committee held hearings with Secretary Mike Johanns over the Canadian border issue.

I was able to question Secretary Johanns about the decision to reopen the U.S. border to Canadian beef imports, and he discussed the ramifications of that decision on agriculture trade policy.

The Senate also took up the Canadian border issue, narrowly passing a resolution of disapproval to keep the border closed to Canadian beef imports. This legislation will now come to the House, after which, if it passes, it will go to the President for his signature. However, President Bush has already said that he will veto the measure, and its fate in the House is still unclear.

The administration believes that keeping the border closed with Canada hurts our position when negotiating on other trade issues like opening the Japanese beef markets.

**Japanese Sanctions Sought**  
Later, I held a press conference in Washington to introduce a resolution calling on Japan to reopen its markets to U.S. beef. The press conference was attended by Japanese journalists and that has resulted in the Japanese Embassy requesting a meeting to discuss this situation.

We have waited long enough for our borders to be reopened with Japan. This resolution calls on Japan to reopen its market to U.S. beef or face immediate retaliatory economic sanctions. Its time for the Japanese government to understand that there are consequences if they continue to deny access to U.S. beef.

In December of 2003, the U.S. discovered a single case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, or Mad Cow disease, in a Canadian dairy cow imported to this country. Since that time, the Department of Agriculture has implemented additional safety checks in the beef system to guarantee the safety of American beef. U.S. standards now exceed international beef safety standards.

Japan cannot have it both ways. They cannot benefit from exports to the U.S. while denying our imports. With no valid scientific evidence to support Japan's decision to keep the border closed, the delays must end. The U.S. has done its part to meet an agreement that was reached on Oct. 23 with Japan but Japan has not, and they stand to lose much more than the United States.

The American beef supply is among the safest in the world. However, losing access to a valuable trading market like Japan has cost the U.S. cattle industry an estimated \$2 billion.

### From the Bible

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Matthew 16: 15,16

### Photo Policy

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If interested, send resume to Judy Carlson, HR Administrator, Martin Tractor Co., 1737 SW 42nd Street, Topeka, KS 66609 by April 1, 2005. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer.