

Taxpayers have the right to see financial records

The issue: A tax-funded lobbying group refuses a newspaper's request to open its financial records

Our Views: It's the taxpayers' money and they have a right to know how it is being spent

Lawyers representing a lobbying group that uses tax dollars to leverage more money out of taxpayers' wallets seem to epitomize everything that is wrong with government these days.

Government always works best when it is conducted in the open. Backroom dealings almost always breed scandal. Even when government actions are kept secret for the best of intentions, the results rarely build public confidence.

The Topeka Capital-Journal sued the group Schools for Fair Funding to gain access to its financial records under the Kansas Open Records Act.

But lawyers for the group, formed by medium-size school districts to sue the state for more money, urged a judge to drop the lawsuit and penalize the newspaper for "harassing, humiliating and intimidating" the organization and "driving up its legal expenses."

Since when is demanding open government "harassment, humiliation or intimidation?"

If the school districts believe what they're doing meets with the approval of taxpayers, why set up a "shell corporation" to hide how money was spent to sue for more tax money.

Schools for Fair Funding, funded by 19 public school districts, bankrolled a lawsuit that resulted in \$800 million in increased state education money during the last legislative session.

The Capital-Journal believes the organization is subject to the Kansas Open Records Act, requiring tax-funded agencies to show the

public their receipts and expenditures.

But the group refuses to open its books for the newspaper, claiming that it is a private organization.

We agree with *The Capital-Journal*.

So does Attorney General Phill Kline.

Any organization that subsists entirely on public funds should be subject to the open records law.

The Capital-Journal is doing a noble job in holding this group's feet to the fire. What could these lawyers be hiding?

If they are so proud of the work they are doing on behalf of tax-funded school districts, why not open their books to the public?

Although *The Capital-Journal* hasn't been privy to all of the group's finances, it learned that its 19 member school districts have contributed at least \$3.2 million to the organization since 1999.

Guess who reportedly received the bulk of the money?

That's right — the lawyers. They got about \$2.2 million. And they are concerned about *The Capital-Journal* "driving up legal expenses?" Yeah, right.

Another \$475,000 went toward lobbying. That's a drop in the bucket compared to the attorneys' take, but still more tax money spent to get — you guessed it — more tax money.

We believe that using tax dollars to lobby for more tax dollars is not only unconstitutional, it's morally reprehensible.

Shame on Schools for Fair Funding and their arrogant attorneys.

Taxpayers' decisions should not be circumvented through tax-funded lobbying, lawsuits and arrogant attorneys.

Taxpayers — voters — should have the ultimate decision-making authority.

— Gardner News

Beloved editor remembered

A lot of nice things have been said about Bill Meyer, a much-beloved figure among Kansas editors, the last couple of weeks.

Oh, he'd hate that.

Bill was our curmudgeon, fit and feisty at 81 until he fell at his home earlier this month. He was gone within a few hours.

Bill was many things.

He was fearless. Devoted to his job. Crusty — that one fits pretty well.

He loved his adopted home town, Marion, where he edited the paper for 57 years. He loved his wife, Joan, and his family, his state and his college, the University of Kansas.

At his funeral, self-scripted along with a three-page obituary, Bill asked for three songs, "Home on the Range," "America the Beautiful," and the KU "Alma Mater."

At least a dozen of his fellow past presidents from the Kansas Press Association lined up to pay respects, along with hundreds of townsfolk and friends. There were few dry eyes as the strains of the hymn faded away, "Far above the golden valley, glorious to view..."

Beloved, Bill Meyer?

He never backed away from a fight. He lost his last big one, to bring a regional landfill to Marion County



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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for economic development, but he won more than a few. He was proud of the bullet hole in his office window, pointed it out to visitors ... until someone smashed the glass.

But at 81, he's outlived a lot of his enemies. Those who knew him respected his honesty and his keen sense of right and wrong. He edited a good newspaper and he fought for what he saw as right. He was fond of this saying, "Show me a beloved editor, and I'll show you a lousy newspaper."

OK, he didn't say lousy.

Bill somehow became an honorary Kentucky Colonel, fitting, since with his white hair, rotund figure and goatee, he looked a lot like that other famous Kentucky colonel, Harlan Sanders. Harlan could be crusty, too.

He'd not only been a newspaperman, but president of both the Kiwanis Club and school board in

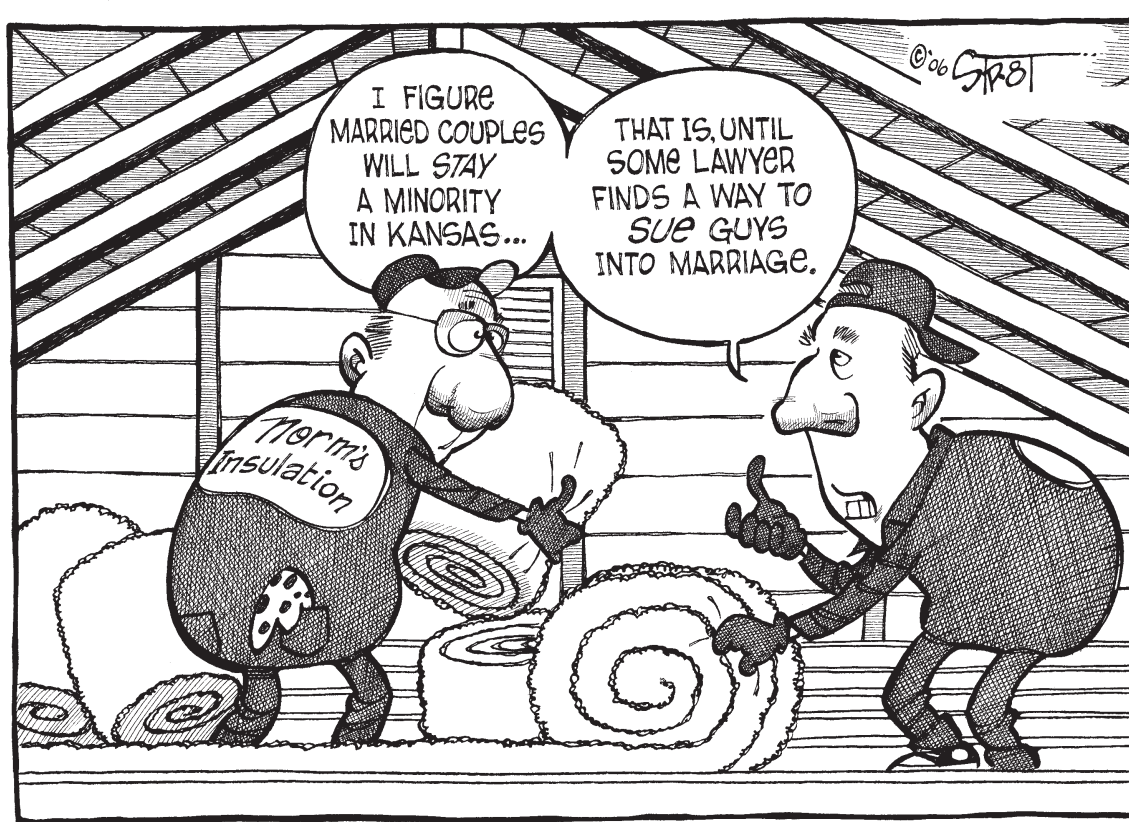
Marion and editor of the 99th Infantry Division newsletter. He helped establish the county hospital district and the judicial reform plan that led to appointment of many Kansas judges rather than election.

He claimed to be no hero, but suffered severe frostbite when his unit was pinned down by Nazi troops during the Battle of the Bulge. The Army thought enough of him to offer a commission if he'd come back for the Korean War, but he declined.

Decorated soldier, loving father, devoted editor. He was a hero to a lot of us in the business, and to many at home who knew him during six decades of leadership, courage and care.

A character? Sure. An original? Absolutely.

They don't make many like Bill Meyer, darn it. We'll miss him.



Chilly weather follows group

Everything's up to date in Kansas City — except the temperature, which is in the mid-20s and feels more like below zero.

You forget how cold it gets when the temperature falls in humid places — like eastern Kansas and darn near all of Missouri. Add a little wind, and it's bone chilling.

We're in Kansas City for a couple of meetings. First there was the annual winter meeting for the National Newspaper Association. The president decided to hold it in Kansas City this year instead of Columbia, Mo., where the offices are, because Columbia was too hard to get to by plane.

Well, that's all well and good — in nice weather.

When a blizzard sweeps through the country, all bets are off.

We made it to the city just fine Wednesday, with just a fine, icy mist falling.

Jerry got in safely from Texas. Liz made it from New Jersey, but her plane couldn't land in Chicago as planned and was detoured to Denver. She thought it was just wrong to go from New Jersey to Kansas City by way of Denver. I agreed.

On the way home, she made it to Chicago, then got stuck in that airport for most of a day. Lucky for her, Liz is an intrepid traveler, or she might not return to the Midwest again.

Merle made it from Colorado. They had had the bad weather a day



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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earlier than us, so was able to get out just fine.

The lawyer from Washington made it only because she had come in a day early. The executive director skidded in from Columbia, but everyone else in Missouri begged off — they had some wimpy excuse like a foot of ice and snow and the St. Louis airport being closed.

Cheryl from Michigan and Reed from Minnesota made it.

"What ice? What snow?" they asked.

Mark called from Oklahoma City with the news that they had closed his airport also. We already knew that.

Bill from Mississippi e-mailed that he'd been promised some interesting experiences when he joined the board (and this would have been his first meeting). His plane landed in Oklahoma City in a blizzard.

"I didn't know a plane could slide that far," was his comment.

He turned around and went back south.

Chip and his wife Karen made it in from Kentucky but I could tell that

she wasn't sure why. (She found out the next day when she discovered shopping on the Country Club Plaza, and I think it turned out to be an expensive trip for Chip.)

Actually, several of us enjoyed the Plaza. I didn't buy much — a couple of regional cookbooks from which I'll never cook anything — but I spent a lot of time looking at pretties, admiring the Christmas decorations and scarfing the free hot cider being offered everywhere.

The second meeting is the Associated Press' annual get-together for Missouri and Kansas editors.

I was sure glad there was a whole different set of people at that, because I only brought one sweater and I wore it every day. Luckily, I brought along a heavy coat, hat and insulated gloves. I spent my time on the Plaza looking like I was ready to haul in firewood.

This week, I'm headed south to Augusta, Ga., and Norfolk, Va., where the cold front is hitting now. I may have to burn that sweater by the time I get home.

Club dedicated to having fun

I am a second-generation member of The Liberty Star Club. Founded in 1934, it has always been what The Red Hat Society is now: a club dedicated to the sole purpose of having fun.

Last year at the club's Christmas party, I committed to host the Christmas 2006 party at my house. That was the first of many deadlines we (I) set for ourselves to get the remodel job finished.

Well, here it is December, and it's my month for "club." Any woman who has ever hosted a group of women at her house knows what that means. It means pull out all the stops, drag out your best dishes, and clean like your life depends on it.

Now, I would love to clean, but we're still dealing with sawdust here. This house is a construction zone. I've got power tools, paint cans and sawhorses in the front room. Real cleaning is an impossibility. Dusting is even questionable.

Right now, I'm just worried about having places for everyone to sit. All I have in the front room is a recliner and a wobbly piano bench held together with furniture clamps.

Thank goodness my friends aren't the "snooty" kind. They'll just come in, dust off a box, a bucket or a chair and sit down. We always have so much fun together, the decor is irrelevant.

Now that Jim and I are actually in the house, I'm making priority lists. My first priority is to get drapes up. At the moment, we have a set of old white curtains stapled to a one-inch piece of wood about 8 feet long propped up on three screws in the wall above the front room windows.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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I consider them dual-purpose curtains. Not only do they cover the windows but I can quickly take them down and they double as a drop cloth while I paint.

—ob—

The cats (they're almost out of the kitten stage) enjoy the house. It's a great adventure to them. This weekend I had taken a long, soaking bath in the Jacuzzi tub, and was ready for bed. I sat down to read for a while, in the recliner, when what looked like a drowned rat jumped onto my lap.

Closer inspection revealed it was Sammy the Siamese, soaked to the skin. The tub was still draining and he must have been curious. He either slipped and fell in or leaped over the edge from the floor.

Either way, he was one wet, shivering cat.

—ob—

I've been on the phone today with my oldest daughter, Halley, who called to tell me she passed her Texas real estate licensing test. She is affiliated with a Dallas firm and is ready to get out there and sell a house.

So, I'll make an unabashed plug for her. If you need to buy or sell a house in the Dallas metroplex, call

Halley Roberson. She might not be the greatest real estate agent yet. But, I guarantee you she is the funniest agent you'll ever meet. I still think she should try stand-up comedy.

—ob—

A call from Jennifer, mother of baby Annie, informs us that Annie has discovered her toes and also rolls over by herself.

By the time we see her again, she might very well be walking. Oh, my. I wish time would slow down just a little. They don't stay babies long enough.

From the Bible

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. ... behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Matthew 18, 20b

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