

## Enforcing open meetings and record laws

Legislation that calls for more government and more government spending isn't exactly popular in many parts of the country these days. But a bill that would allow Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt to create an open government unit within his office is something that is long overdue.

Officials at the attorney general's office – which proposes to create a two-person unit to investigate complaints about violations of the Kansas Open Meetings Act and Kansas Open Records Act – say the initiative would cost about \$160,000 a year. It would be money well spent.

The AG's office now investigates complaints it receives, but assistant attorney general Lisa Mendoza says the office doesn't have the resources to give those complaints the focus they deserve. The open government unit would change that and provide resources for an intermediate level of administrative review and enforcement of the law, a step that could avoid the need for a lawsuit.

Citizens who think public officials have violated the Open Meetings Act or the Open Records Act also can file a complaint with their local county attorney or district attorney or file a civil lawsuit.

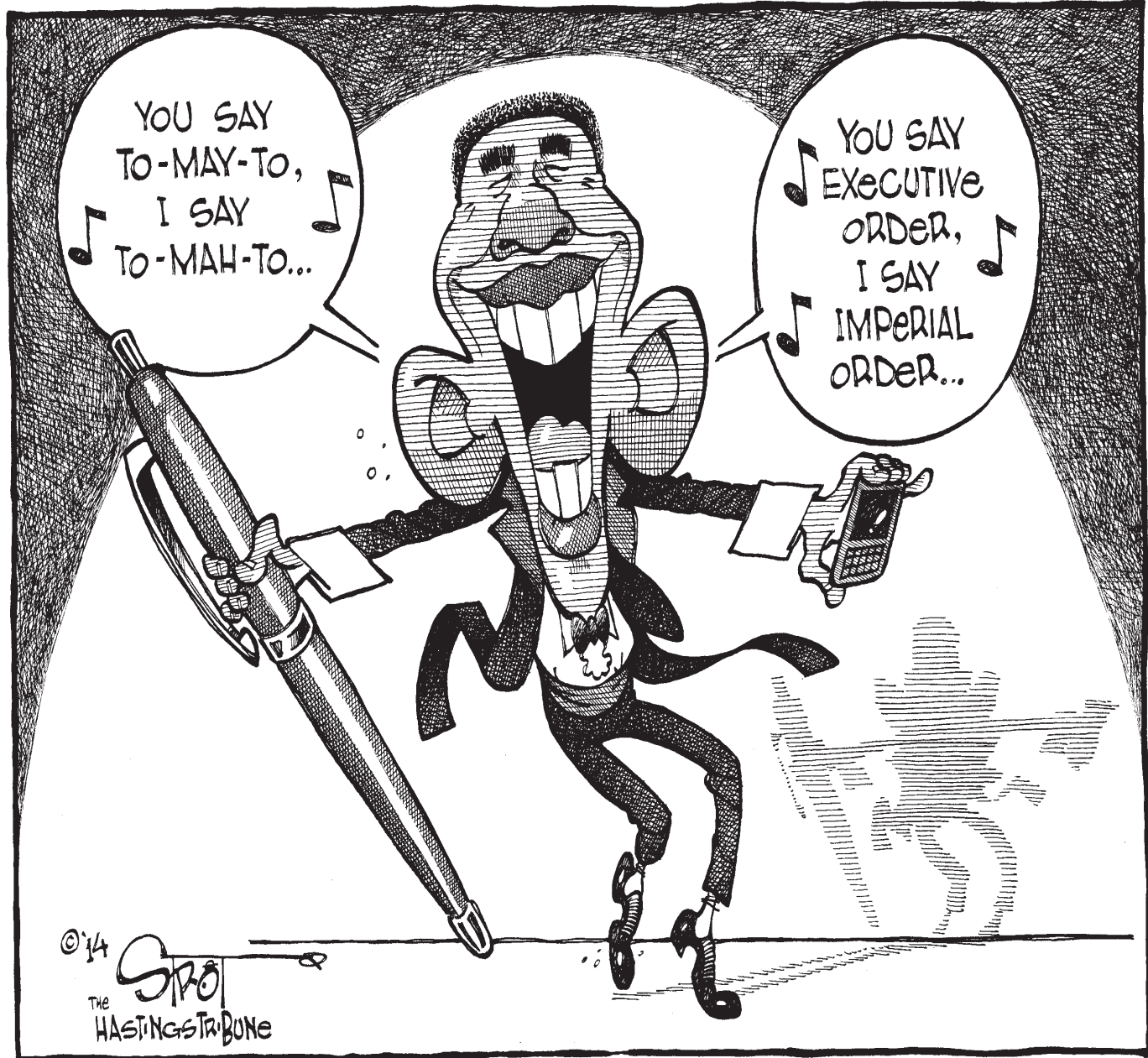
The problem is many individuals can't afford to file a civil lawsuit and some local prosecutors don't take violations of the Open Meetings Act or the Open Records Act as seriously as they should.

Shawnee County District Attorney Chad Taylor has proven to be a staunch supporter of the state's open meetings and open records acts – his office devoted the necessary resources to thoroughly investigate Open Meetings Act complaints against legislators and the Kansas Corporation Commission – but prosecutors in some other jurisdictions don't have the resources or inclination to give such complaints the attention they deserve.

As Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association, told members of the House Judiciary Committee last week as they reviewed the attorney general's proposal, prosecutors may be reluctant to investigate complaints against the county officials who hold the purse strings to their budgets.

It is to Schmidt's credit that he has detected a need for more participation by his office and is willing to make it happen.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*



## Dip, chicks and a bit of dry snow

I'm sorry my team didn't win the Super Bowl, but the thing I really hated about the game was the amount of time and money I spent on, what I thought would be, killer dip.

Jim and I both really like a spinach and artichoke dip served as an appetizer at a famous restaurant chain. When I found a recipe that sounded just like it, I was determined to make it for the gang that was assembling at son James' place to watch the game.

Ingredients included cream cheese, sour cream, baby spinach, artichoke hearts, crab meat, white wine, Italian bread crumbs, garlic and chili sauce. Cha-ching! And, of course, I made a double batch.

It is to be served hot and I eagerly dished up a helping for Jim with a side of chips. He brought it back to me, half-eaten, with the words, "I don't really care for it."

What? You're kidding me, right? No. Guess he wasn't cause I brought most of it home.

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



Oh well, I liked it and I bet everyone at the office will like it. Although my co-workers may not be the best judges. Because, just like Mikey, they'll eat anything.

-ob-

Saw a cute cartoon that I hope my old hens don't see.

Two neighbor ladies were talking over the backyard fence as one neighbor's old hen scratched in the dirt. The hen's owner said, "Yes, she lays us eggs, and when she doesn't lay any more, we'll eat her."

The next shot is of the hen going through the check-out line at the grocery store with a dozen eggs

under her wing.

If my old hens hear me talking about the "noodle bath" they may make a trip to town. And that will be why the chicken crossed the road.

-ob-

Snow fell Friday. Just not enough. And it is a dry snow - fluff, really. Doubtful there is much moisture in it at all. And that is what this part of the world needs in the worst way. Farm ponds are all but dried up. I haven't heard any official reports about how the wheat is faring, but it can't be good.

-ob-

Little Johnny came home from school and announced, "We learned how to make babies today."

"Really," Grandma said, keeping her composure, "how do you do that?"

Without batting an eye, little Johnny answered, "By changing the 'y' to 'i' and adding 'es'."

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## The general store, gone but not forgotten

Years ago every town had one. They served as a meeting place for friends and neighbors. You could catch up on local news and wet your whistle at the same time.

This long-gone establishment was the general store. It carried candy, soda, cigarettes, gas, hardware and a few clothing items like gloves and hats. Some were even run by a "registered" pharmacist and carried medicine for what ailed you.

In the small northwestern Kansas community where I grew up, Albert Dreese owned and operated the general store. Mr. Dreese would take your shopping list, grab a brown paper bag and grope through dimly lighted aisles and the maze of store items carefully selecting and filling your order.

When Mr. Dreese returned he'd hand my mom the bag and me a sucker or balloon before bidding us good-bye and returning to his cronies and the pitch game at the small table in the center of the store.

Mr. Dreese never rang up your bill on a computer or cash register either. He figured everything in his head, wrote it down on a small note pad and made change out of the front pockets of his trousers.

While a card game was in progress, it was up to individual players to serve themselves a soda or beer

### Insight

John Schlageck



and deposit the correct change on the counter top. No interruptions please – the game was all-important. Peanuts to munch on while playing cards were weighed out on a scale and poured into a small brown bag.

During the winter, no one stoked the pot-bellied stove except Mr. Dreese because a cherry red stove would melt all of his chocolate bars, or that's what he told all the youngsters who visited his store. Why, he even ran old Mr. Reinhart out of the store one day for tampering with his stove.

Another source of entertainment in the general store was a one-armed bandit – yep, right in the little community of Seguin. Farmers around home didn't need to travel to Las Vegas to gamble – they farmed for a living and dropped by the back room of Mr. Dreese's store. The sheriff never knew about this one-armed bandit, or so I thought.

Every so often when I had a few

coins burning a hole in my pockets, Davey Thummel and I would walk down to the store and plunk down a dime for a Coke and fill it with a nickel bag of Planters peanuts.

Albert Dreese isn't around anymore. Neither is the store. His business and others like it couldn't compete with the giant supermarkets and box stores offering lower prices and modern conveniences all under one roof.

No, Mr. Dreese's store didn't have air conditioning for those hot, northwestern Kansas summer days. It didn't have air pudding (elevator) music, coupons or anything you could want, or didn't need, to entice customers from Norton, Colby, Oakley and the rest of northwestern Kansas.

All Mr. Dreese had to offer was himself, a smile and dedicated service to his friends and neighbors who dropped by his small general store.

Yes, Albert Dreese is dead and a part of history died with him. We don't have general stores anymore. His personal touch and sincere interest in his neighbors, friends and customers has been replaced by whirling blue lights, swarming shoppers and cars, screaming kids and aisles and miles of consumer items.