

Kansas 'Sunshine Law' is fine without change

Since it's Sunshine Week, it's a good time to talk about the Kansas Open Meetings Act, sometimes called the Sunshine Law, which requires public meetings in this state to be announced in advance and open to the public.

Maybe the most important section of this law is the first, which declares open meetings to be "the policy of the state."

Oddly enough, this law is and has always been unpopular with some elected public officials. You'd think as our representatives, they'd want the public to know what they are doing — and many do — but there's a strong undercurrent among those few who'd just as soon we didn't.

The law comes under attack from officials who chafe at its restrictions. One that's often cited is the basic rule that a "meeting" includes any gathering of a majority of a given commission, committee, council or board where public business is discussed.

Because a majority of a county commission is two, commissioners are particularly sensitive to this rule, which also includes telephone calls and e-mail discussions.

One claim, being repeated in the wake of Gov. Sam Brownback's ill-starred meeting for legislators last year at the governor's mansion, is that members at a "social gathering" such as a party or wedding might be breaking the law if they talk. That's just not true; they would have

to be discussing public business with a majority capable of making a decision (together or in a "serial meeting") to break the law.

Besides, the governor's meetings, where he invited the members of whole committees, then talked about his policy goals, were hardly social events. He's not covered by the law, however; he's not a member of a board or commission. And the legislators were OK as long as they did not discuss what he said during the sessions.

Still, it was one of those times where the appearance of impropriety could have been avoided by just inviting a few reporters — or some taxpayers.

This year, however, the Sunshine Law is under attack in both houses of the Legislature, with bills aimed at easing the definition of a "meeting." One (SB200) would soften the definition to require "substantial discussion" of issues and even votes. HB2336 would change the definition to exclude "social gatherings," even, apparently, if the purpose is public business. Neither bill has moved so far, but there's always the danger they might.

The law, as it stands now, works, and we see no reason to weaken it. It's not about inconveniencing elected officials, but about allowing voters to see and hear what's going on. So, for Sunshine Week, we say, just let the sun shine on Kansas government. — Steve Haynes



Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



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Sometimes I wonder if anyone out there ever bothers to read this column. But then I write about a topic, say chai tea for instance, and my wonder is soon put to rest.

I made the unforgivable mistake of stating that "chai tea is simply tea that has been spiced" last week. Fortunately I have been corrected by a couple of local chai tea experts.

One claims that the ultimate chai tea experience can be captured at Starbucks. But since the

closest one of those is over an hour drive away in Colby we must improvise.

I would never call out one of my critics in this forum, but I must give thanks where thanks are due. My good friend, Betty Jean Winston, gave Lezlie and I a carton of liquid blend chai. When this product is mixed with milk and heated, it does make something worth trying.

The drink is a nice combination of the flavors similar to all spice.

That, with the elements of tea and creamy milk, which is served hot, made for a special treat on a snowy day in Northwest Kansas.

I owe a debt of gratitude for being set straight and knowing that my written words are indeed being read. And I do promise to venture more carefully in the future.

Group organizes fund raiser

Letter to the Editor:

On Saturday April 27, The Kansas Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Awareness group is organizing the first Kansas Walk, Run, and Rock for a Cure to benefit The Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome Association of America at the Cheyenne County Fairgrounds in St. Francis. The association is an international not-for-profit organization. Our mission is to provide, support, education, and hope to everyone affected by the pain and disability of Complex Regional Pain Syndrome also commonly known as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy while we drive research to provide better treatment and a cure.

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome is an incredibly painful disorder that commonly follows a fracture, sprain, or surgery, which can become debilitating and profoundly disabling. People are often diagnosed late, misdiagnosed or disbelieved by people who would otherwise be well meaning. Care delayed is care denied. This phenomenon is primarily due to a lack of knowledge, awareness, education and experience among health care professionals as well as among policy makers, insurance carriers, employers and even

Honor Roll

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Letter to the Editor

the sufferer's family and friends. The average person with the syndrome must see four or more practitioners to receive the proper diagnosis and to receive appropriate and necessary treatment.

Today, the importance of self-advocacy is essential. Many people with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome experience anxiety, depression, alienation and loneliness. Almost 40 percent of people with the chronic syndrome, who were formerly well employed, never return to work after the onset of the disease. The rate of suicide is 2.5 higher than any other painful condition. It places enormous strain on personal relations and can lead to financial hardship. Therefore, people with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome and their loved ones require knowledge, tools to cope with with the disease, reassurance and an experience of certainty - The certainty of hope. They must be capable of understanding their disease and of finding strategies to control the chronic, painful symptoms associated with this horribly debilitating disease.

Our ultimate goal is to help those with the disease to cope, to adapt and to flourish in spite of it. That is, to lead healthier, productive, and satisfying lives.

The Kansas Walk, Run, and Rock for a Cure will be a fun,

remarkable, and hope-filled day. The day will begin at 8 a.m. with an 8K run on the shortest maintained highway in America, in Wheeler to the fairgrounds. The vendors and the local 4-H groups will open at noon selling an array of items along with tons of food. At 1 p.m. the grandstands will open and host eight bands from Kansas, Nebraska, Indiana and California. Children and adults struggling with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome will meet others with the syndrome for the first time and will exchange e-mails and telephone numbers to stay in touch and support each other. Individuals will learn of new treatments and physicians who were "thinking out-of-the-box."

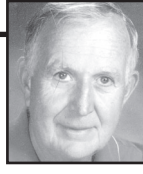
Revenue from these events allows the organization to: host a toll-free number for patient assistance and support; daily update our website, which attracts more than 29,000 visitors monthly; provide information packets to those who are newly diagnosed and who are desperate for immediate direction and hope; and provide brochures for health fairs, schools, and professional medical meetings to help reduce the time spent chasing this diagnosis.

Thank you. Please also help us spread the word.

Joe Caldart
St. Francis

Legislative News

By Ward Cassidy



120th State Representative

Taxes

Last session, the largest tax cut in state history was signed into law. The bill dropped the top state income tax rate from 6.45 percent to 4.9 percent and the low rate from 3.5 percent to 3.0 percent.

Until last session, Kansas had the highest rates of any of its surrounding states. The plan might be working, as there were 1,500 more business filings in 2012 than in 2011—and surrounding states, such as Nebraska, are scrambling to lower rates to remain competitive with Kansas.

This year, the Governor has called on the legislature to cut income taxes further so as to glide to zero state income tax. The latest proposal is to drop the top rate from 4.9 percent to 3.5 percent by 2017.

The bottom rate would be dropped to 2.5 percent in 2014 and then to 1.9 percent in 2016. Rather than expanding government, the governor has asked that any revenue that comes in above 4 percent during this time be used to buy-down the tax liability of Kansas. The plan would leave the current sales tax rate in place and

eliminate the state home-mortgage deduction.

Although the state home-mortgage deduction would be eliminated, the deduction for charitable contributions and the earned income tax credit would stay in place. I received countless e-mails to keep the earned income tax credit in place when it was being considered last year.

There are 70 percent of Kansans that do not claim the home-mortgage deduction; instead, they claim the head of household deduction that is \$9,000. Most taxpayers do fall under the standard deduction. The federal mortgage interest deduction will still be available.

There are still many questions, and the top one might be: how do we replace the revenue if the sales tax does come off?

The two-year budget plan is also being proposed by the Governor. I personally like this proposal as it will allow the state more time to heal from the recession and to plan for the future.

What has been overlooked in this year's tax plan proposal was an

elimination of the state individual income tax deduction on property tax paid on homes. This deduction would be worth \$68.5 million for the upcoming fiscal year.

What happens next? There will be a tax plan from the Governor; there will be a House tax plan, and a Senate tax plan. There will be agreement and disagreement and in the end we will see the amount of revenue we have to work with.

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GOD SAYS
Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. James 1:12

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