



Other Viewpoints

Open meetings law to be taken seriously

Shawnee County District Attorney Chad Taylor and his staff have determined any violations of the Kansas Open Meeting Act by legislators who attended dinners hosted by Gov. Sam Brownback at Cedar Crest were "technical" in nature and "borne of ignorance."

No legal action will be taken in the wake of Taylor's investigation.

In essence, that means legislators violated the law by discussing public business at the dinners but will not suffer any consequences because they didn't know any better.

Maybe some of them didn't know any better, but some did. And Kansans now must be wondering how long their elected officials will be able to wink at, or turn a blind eye to, the act and receive nothing more than an admonishment and a recommendation they become more familiar with the law's particulars.

We really didn't expect Taylor to prosecute all the offending legislators — more than 90 Republicans were invited to the dinners — and seek the maximum fine.

We did expect more than a report citing "technical" violations "borne of ignorance" and tough-sounding language about what may happen the next time.

The Open Meetings Act was adopted to ensure elected officials at the local and state level conduct the public's business in full view of the public. The law prohibits a majority of a quorum of a legislative body from meeting behind closed doors to discuss business. Multiple local governing bodies have violated the law, and many legislators did so during the dinners at Cedar Crest.

Allowing some elected officials to violate the law without consequence sends a signal to all that the open meetings act need not be taken seriously and that they can get away with conducting the public's business behind closed doors.

Our form of government requires an informed electorate, but voters can't become informed if plans and decisions are being made without their knowledge.

It's time all our elected officials begin taking the law more seriously.

Many of the legislators who attended the Cedar Crest dinners said they viewed them as social gatherings, which is difficult to believe.

House Speaker Mike O'Neal, R-Hutchinson, said he was pleased with Taylor's report and "had nothing but confidence that our legislators adhered to the guidelines laid out in KOMA while at the governor's residence."

That statement must have been borne of ignorance of what was in Taylor's report, because the report makes it plain violations did occur. And a violation is a violation, whether it be technical or substantive.

Taylor's report also noted most of the legislators questioned during his investigation were represented by the Kansas attorney general's office and many legislators couldn't remember the substance of much of the discussion at the dinners.

What Taylor's report didn't say is that in law enforcement circles that's known as "lawyering-up" and "dummying-up." The prosecutors on Taylor's staff are familiar with the tactics, but they aren't in the habit of allowing ignorance of the law as an excuse, or defense.

It's time Taylor and other prosecutors across the state begin treating these violations more seriously.

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

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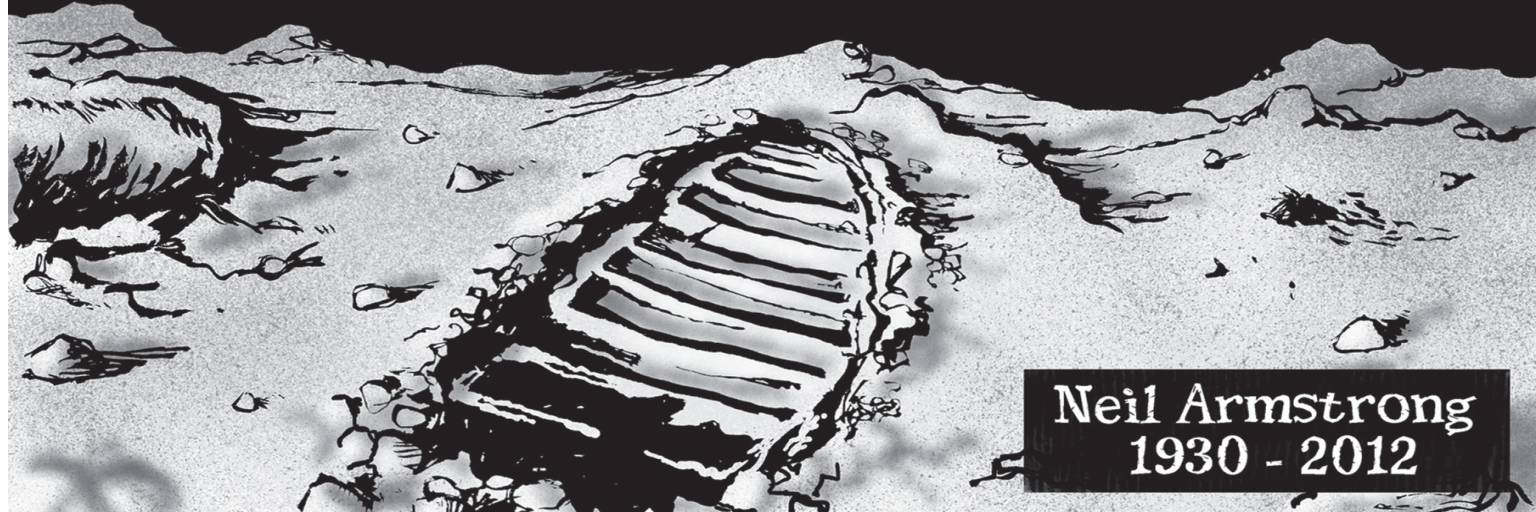
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Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime. And departing, leave behind us footprints on the sands of time.

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Neil Armstrong
1930 - 2012

Eating fresh still leaves lots of leftovers

Peaches, watermelon, honeydew, cantaloupe, tomatoes and Bing cherries, plus onions, zucchini, yellow squash, sweet corn and green beans — between our garden, a roadside fruit stand and a 4-H sale, we had more produce than we knew what to do.

It was vacation time. Time to go for a nice, relaxing 10 days in Colorado. So I asked a friend to come by and check the garden while we were gone. Then I picked all the squash, beans and tomatoes that were anywhere near ready to go.

As we were ready to leave town, I got the call that the half case of peaches I had ordered several months ago from a 4-H'er had arrived. We took those with us, along with some cherries we had been eating on and hadn't finished.

At Rocky Ford we passed — or rather didn't pass — a fruit stand, and loaded up on more fresh Colorado produce. The car was beginning to look and smell like a vegetable cart, and I expected us to get fruit flies any time.

We ate fresh every day, but there are only two of us. Despite having melon for breakfast, peaches for lunch and stir fry for dinner most days, we still had some leftovers.

I grated the rest of the squash and zucchini and packed it in freezer bags — two cups of squash to a bag. That handles most recipes requiring shredded zucchini, including zucchini bread and zucchini brownies.

The leftover sweet corn got chopped off the



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

cob and frozen. It will go good in soups and corn bread later in the year.

The few leftover tomatoes went to the neighbors. Out there, the growing season is too short to grow tomatoes, and they always enjoy the fruits of our garden in the fall.

Then there were the peaches, watermelon and a cantaloupe. The watermelon would just go back home with us. I cut up the last cantaloupe to eat on the way.

The peaches were a problem. We had eaten a bunch of them with sandwiches on picnic walks and in the mornings over shortcake, but there were still about a dozen of the smaller, less pretty ones left.

I rummaged around and found a recipe for peach bread in an old cookbook put out by the American Cancer Society in 1981. "The High Country Cookbook." To spice things up, I added a little ginger and cloves to the original recipe.

It was delicious and used up seven of our leftover peaches. The rest I cut up to go with

the cantaloupe on the trip home. Here is the recipe:

Peach Bread

- 1 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup shortening
- 2 cups mashed fresh peaches
- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp. each ginger and cloves (optional)
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts.

Cream sugar, eggs and shortening. Add peaches and mix. Add dry ingredients and mix lightly. Add vanilla and nuts. Pour into two greased and floured loaf pans and bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes.

Now, that's a good way to use leftover produce, and I'm ready for the 4-H sale next year. I may get a whole case of peaches.

I just wonder if that cookbook has a watermelon recipe I can use.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Retirement questions haunt reunion

My Lamar High School class of 1967 held a 45th reunion in Colorado.

Most of my classmates are either retired or getting close, as we were born in 1949, near the beginning of the post-World War II Baby Boomer generation, and most have reached age 63.

About a third of the class attended the weekend events, where we said hello after many years of being apart, and for some, it was the first reunion they had attended. A reception Friday evening was held at Big Timbers Museum on the hill north of Lamar, with the city in the background. Saturday evening, the class spent the evening at Lamar Lanes, the bowling alley, where we learned to bowl, a familiar hang out more than 45 years ago.

The same weekend was the Prowers County Sand and Sage Roundup, featuring a parade along Main Street on Saturday morning for more than a mile, from the south end of Main through the business district and across the old Santa Fe main line. The class decided not to have a float in the parade, but many did go downtown to watch.

Some of the class continue to live in the Lamar area, while others have moved back to help care for their parents.

Over the years, the class has held other reunions. With a large number of classmates living in the Denver area, a summer party has



Tom Betz

• Mountain Time

been held almost every year. Many of my class gathered three years ago at a classmate's house near Denver to celebrate turning 60.

When we greet each other, one of the first questions is "what are you doing," and for more than three-quarters, the answer is they have retired or are planning to retire in the next year or two. Some of the classmates have found themselves having to retire for medical reasons. Some had to move from mountain homes to the flats of Arizona. Three live on the same block in a Phoenix suburb.

At least one came back for his first reunion in 45 years. He retired from the U.S. Army after 20 years and works for the Postal Service in the northwest. His mother continues to live in Lamar, and he spent part of the weekend with her before he had to fly home.

Many of my classmates have reconnected over the past several years, thanks to the new social media, at first through a contact list set up for Lamar High classes, and more recently

through Facebook. As with most high school class reunions, many of those who live the closest did not attend.

Most of the class are either collecting Social Security by taking early retirement or are planning to stay on the job until they turn 65. I found those who have retired — as I have — at age 62 found themselves in a conundrum about health insurance because of the three-year gap before we qualify for Medicare. Insurance companies continue to make it hard to get reasonable health coverage.

When I decided to take early retirement, I began searching for insurance and had lots of companies willing to give me a quote until I said I have Type II diabetes. After months of searching, we did find a "short-term" insurance program that gives us limited coverage for the next year, and hopefully can be extended by another six months to a year to cover the hole before we are eligible for Medicare.

I enjoyed seeing my classmates, and hope to see them and possibly more when we celebrate the 50th.

Tom Betz, retired editor of The Goodland Star-News and a longtime editor and publisher, still lives in Goodland. He formerly was editor and publisher of the old Lamar Daily News in Colorado.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

