

# The perfect prescription for disaster

Most of us are fed up with the doldrums of winter, so why not celebrate the sunshine that comes with the advent of spring by also celebrating Sunshine Week.

What is Sunshine Week, you ask?

It's an annual observance – this year it's March 10 to 16 – that seeks to promote a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information in our democracy.

Is the fact that Sunshine Week is set smack dab in the middle of the Kansas legislative session happenstance – or providence? Anyone who has observed the recent behavior of some public officials in our state could be excused for leaning toward the latter.

After all, we've had more than our share this session of blatant attempts to close the curtains at the Statehouse.

Legislators, who have more freedom than other elected officials in Kansas, want even more.

It's not enough that they can "legally" caucus their entire party delegation behind closed doors.

It's not enough that they can meet in small groups out of the public's view and discuss the public's business – just so long as they assemble just one less than a majority of a committee's membership in the same room.

It's not enough that they can be wined and dined by lobbyists, who can bend their ears for hours, most of the time without any public scrutiny.

No, they want more.

They've floated bills that would allow them to get together during "chance" meetings at social events and discuss the public's business.

Under one bill, if they were invited to a wedding and took advantage of the situation to discuss business, they wouldn't be breaking the Kansas Open Meetings Act. After all, the "central purpose" of the get-together is to celebrate with the bride and groom.

Under another, the act would not be broken even if a majority of a public body discussed pending legislation behind closed doors, as long as their conversations didn't rise to the level of "deliberation."

That's a far cry from what the law requires today.

In other words, they already have the gold mine, but they want to give the public the shaft.

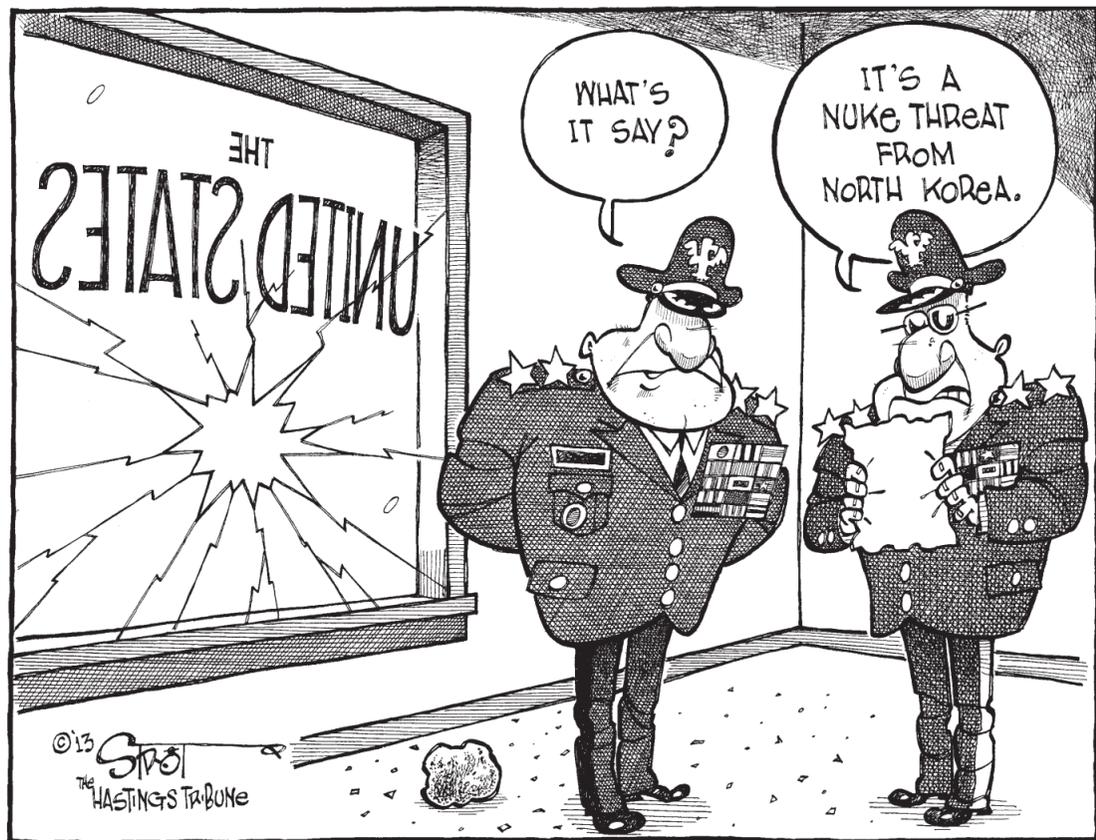
If they just applied to the Legislature, these bills would be bad enough. The problem is, they would free up all public bodies to do the same – city commissions and councils, county commissions, school boards and all the rest covered by this law.

Is this any way to run a government?

Not if you're interested in the sunshine illuminating your public officials.

If, however, you prefer they operate in the dark, it's the perfect prescription ... for disaster.

Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association in Topeka, is a former Kansas publisher and an award-winning editorialist.



## It's a bird, it's a plant, it's a trip

"What is a chicken doing in my bedroom?"

No kidding, that was what I thought as I awakened one morning last week. We have a bank of windows on the south wall of our bedroom and as I awakened, there he was. A rooster standing on the back of a recliner sitting at an angle in front of the windows. As the fog of sleep lifted, I had to laugh at myself. My "rooster" turned out to be the upper leaves of a rubber tree plant I've had for years. In the early morning dawn the silhouette of those leaves looked just like a rooster, tail feathers and all, about ready to crow his "Get up you sleepyhead" morning call.

-ob-

Now, about that rubber tree plant. I've known it longer than I've known my husband. It was given to me as a little six-inch start by my sister-in-law, Bert, the late wife of my brother, Bob. I had admired one she had, so it wouldn't do until I had one too.

Over the years, as it grew, so did the pots I put it in. In fact, I can't find a pot any bigger. It has grown so tall that we've cut it off, stuck the topped off part in the soil and grew another one. I've cut off chunks and given friends starts.

It seems to thrive on neglect. It will go weeks without water. When it looks a little droopy, I give it a drink and it

## Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



perks right back up. It seems to be indestructible. Its theme song could be one that was popular when I was a kid, "Oops, there goes another rubber tree plant."

-ob-

Before we leave for Guatemala we made a goal of finishing the remodel of the last apartment at the non-profit we help operate. Jim was really pushing himself and I tried to help by cleaning up after him, painting and making curtains.

Wouldn't you know, we both went down in the back almost simultaneously. His came on more slowly from overworking and too much lifting; mine from a slight turn the wrong way. I "felt" it slip and by the end of the day was walking sideways, almost dragging my right leg.

A trip to our local chiropractor and massage therapist had us both upright and tracking again. Think I'll have her "tweak" it one more time before we leave.

-ob-

Ah, yes! Leaving. We are about to embark on the biggest and longest trip we've ever taken in less than 24 hours and do you think either one of us have packed a thing? The answer would be, "No."

Jim at least has his suitcase sitting in the middle of the living room floor. Mine is still on the shelf. Laundry has to be done, refrigerator cleaned out, mail stopped, the cat and chicken "sitters" briefed, bird feeders filled, extra medications ordered, recipes left for the breakfast casseroles to be served after Easter sunrise services, and on and on. What doesn't get done, just won't.

Since we can't carry the tools we normally take with us on the plane, it seems like we're not really taking that much. Tool wise, it's just a hammer, tool belt, tape measure, and carpenter's pencil. Oh, yes. Jim has to remember the blueprints. Although, he probably doesn't need them. He studied them and has already built the house in his mind.

I've been told there will be a laptop available to me at the school where we will be staying. So I'll be able to dispatch this column from a remote village in Guatemala. Isn't technology amazing?

My mother would have never believed it.

## Are you ready to meet deadlines and requirements

Kansas farmers, ranchers and landowners the deadline to file a Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures Plan (SPCC) looms just around the corner. As of May 10, any farmer, rancher or landowner who has petroleum products of 1,320 gallons or more, in above-ground tanks 55 gallons or greater, must have a spill prevention and countermeasures plan in place as required by the Environmental Protection Agency.

A plan is not required if storage is less than 1,320 gallons.

Petroleum-based products include typical farm and ranch fuels and lubricants including gasoline, off and on-road diesel fuel, hydraulic and crop oil. This does not include fertilizers, herbicides or insecticides.

Farmers and ranchers who do not implement with these EPA containment requirements and have no plan if a spill occurs, would be in violation of the law, says Steve Swaffar, Kansas Farm Bureau Natural Resources director.

"Such action could lead to violations and the potential for financial penalties," Swaffar notes. "Fines could amount to \$10,000 per day, per violation."

The rule for containment of petroleum spills dates back to the Clean Water Act of 1973.

## Insight

John Schlageck



"Today we're looking at the requirement of a spill plan as well, and that's the newest part of the rule," Swaffar says.

The intent is to ensure petroleum products do not reach surface water, wells or other water resources. Spills could also impact a farm or ranch's profit margin.

There is no specific blueprint for the ideal containment system. Some farmers, ranchers and landowners enlist the help of engineering firms to help them implement a plan for their individual operation.

"What you typically see in rural areas are earthen berms made of compacted soil with some sort of crushed rock or shavings on top of the compacted soil," Swaffar says.

Other products used for containment include concrete or metal.

"It simply has to hold the petroleum in should you encounter a natural disaster or an accidental spill," Swaffar

notes.

Should a farmer or rancher experience a petroleum spill and have it contained, what is their responsibility for removal of the product?

In the case of such spills, it is up to the farmer or rancher to dispose of the product properly, Swaffar explains. Local authorities must be notified and the petroleum product along with any contaminated soil must be removed.

The deadline to file a Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures Plan is fast approaching. The Environmental Protection Agency can come out to farms and ranches in Kansas, and across the country, to conduct inspections.

"You have to ask yourself, 'Do I want to be that farm that's inspected and not in compliance?'" Swaffar says. "'Do I want to deal with the civil penalties and the publicity associated with not being in compliance?'"

Attempts have been made to exempt agriculture from the SPCC rule without success. The deadline has been extended three times.

The reality is that the containment aspect of the rule has been in place for almost 25 years, Swaffar says. As producers look at future petroleum storage projects they should factor in compliance with SPCC.



Thumbs Up to Mary B. for chairing the Daffodil campaign. This is a lot of work and we appreciate the work she does to carry on this tradition. Emailed in.

I would like to give a Thumbs Up! to the Physical Therapy Department at Norton County Community Hospital for their excellent care. The care I have received has been outstanding, given with sincere concern and compassion. They are always courteous and friendly. It is a very pleasant each and every time. Thank you all so much! Emailed in.

Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up:  
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or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave.

Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community. Also remember all Letters to the Editor must be signed.

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