

Transparency is good for a democratic process

I found Beth Fouhy's article in March 13 edition of the Daily News, "AP survey shows obstacles to openness," to be informative as well as a little troubling.

In case you missed it, Fouhy summarized a recent Associated Press survey concerning how states vary with respect to transparency in the legislative process.

This is the particular passage that caught my eye:

"Even when there seems to be progress in some states, governors and legislators routinely exempt themselves from open records laws or defy them altogether."

Take Kentucky, where lawmakers long ago excluded themselves from the provisions of the open meeting law. They've used that exclusion to the fullest in recent budget negotiations, the AP found, closing themselves into legislative conference rooms with state police troopers posted at the door as they figure out how to make up a \$1.5 billion shortfall.

As events in Wisconsin demonstrate, some elected officials are becoming increasingly brazen with political maneuvering. In the past, you could count on most politicians to at least try to create the illusion they were acting for the common good.

But those days seem to be quietly slipping away in favor of a paradigm designed to cater to special interest groups and appease Big Business.

The reasons we have open meeting laws are compelling and, as such, our representatives should consider them sacrosanct.

Those who are most affected by the legislative process – you and me – have an inalienable right to know how our government operates. How tax dollars are spent is everyone's business.

But I am optimistic. There are many similarities between what's happening in the Middle East and America's heartland. The degree to which secrecy can be maintained is being significantly eroded by sophisticated technologies and social networking.

Transparency is intrinsically good for the democratic process.

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