



# Bulletin

Issues of interest to the newspaper industry from the Iowa Newspaper Association

Guest Editorial

## How government keeps you in the dark

*Editor's Note: The following editorial first appeared in the April 2, 2010, edition of the Des Moines Register. Any INA member newspaper is welcome to republish the article if: a) they do not edit it; and b) credit is given to the Des Moines Register.*

There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth during the just-completed legislative session about the Iowa Association of School Boards executives' apparent misuse of tax dollars. Yet lawmakers who call for transparency in government once again flinched when presented with an opportunity to provide it.

*The taxpayers of Iowa - the people who make government possible and who are supposed to be served by government - end up paying for the privilege of having government officials and lobbyists work against their interests in the Legislature.*

A bill on the agenda for four successive legislative sessions, which the Senate passed for at least the third time, was killed at the last minute in the House. The bill would have created a new Iowa Public Information Board to enforce Iowa's open-meetings and open-records laws.

This might have been the last gasp of a legislative effort dating back to a 2007

bipartisan, bicameral legislative study. It is evidence of the lamentable failure of legislators, the governor and public officials at every level to do more than talk about transparent government.

The irony is that government officials are handmaidens to the repeated failure to put in place stronger open-records and open-meetings laws in Iowa.

Here's why this is ironic: The taxpayers of Iowa - the people who make government possible and who are

supposed to be served by government - end up paying for the privilege of having government officials and lobbyists work against their interests in the Legislature. Think about that: Your money is spent by your government to prevent you from knowing more about what government supposedly does on your behalf.

The list of government leaders who want to have this issue both ways includes Gov. Chet Culver, who talks a good game about open government, but whose first instinct in response to a records request is to lock up his office files.

It includes the associations that represent cities and counties, which live off taxpayers' money but oppose at every turn stronger enforcement of "sunshine" laws.

It includes the three state universities, which quietly lobby lawmakers to kill legislation that would open more university records or meetings to the public.

It includes Attorney General Tom Miller, whose office pretends to be all for more "sunshine" in state and local government, but in fact is more worried about protecting his office's turf than supporting a new state board to enforce the open-meetings and open-records laws.

There are exceptions, including Democratic leaders in the Iowa Senate who have long supported the open-government bill that died this week. They include Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal and Sen. Pam Jochum, both of whom have fought for a better law. Unfortunately, those efforts have been consistently frustrated in the House under the leadership of Speaker Pat Murphy and Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

The arrogance of state and local government leaders that government knows best what the public should know is especially hard to understand in the current environment where people at the grassroots level are increasingly angry about government. So perhaps this year, as politicians ask for the support of voters, they will be asked: Which side are you on when it comes to transparent government, the people or the bureaucracy?

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### Coming Events:

▲ **InDesign Intermediate Workshop**  
Thursday, April 15  
INA Office, Des Moines

▲ **Intro to Photoshop Webinar**  
Friday April 16  
via Web

▲ **Mauck-Stoufer Writer Improvement Workshop**  
Thursday, April 22  
Iowa State University, Ames

▲ **Selling Against Your Competition Webinar**  
Friday April 23  
via Web

▲ **Midwest Regional Agriculture Workshop**  
Tuesday, May 4  
Comfort Suites, Urbandale

▲ **InDesign Advanced Workshop**  
Thursday, May 13  
INA Office, Des Moines

### Inserts:

▲ CNA Networks Newsletter

▲ Intro to Photoshop Webinar registration

▲ Mauck/Stoufer Workshop registration

▲ Advertising Sales 201 Webinar registration

▲ InDesign Advanced Workshop registration

▲ Midwest Regional Agriculture Workshop registration

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