



800 Editorial

Giving Sunshine Law support

by the Columbia Daily Tribune

Missouri has a reasonably good Sunshine Law, but as is true everywhere, the main problem lies in implementation.

Compliance in Missouri is better than it has been in the past, but through a combination of willful malice and innocent ignorance, government records and meetings sometime escape the public notice they deserve.

A new organization has sprung up to help improve the situation. The Sunshine Coalition intends to expand the effort beyond the media attention government secrecy traditionally has received. The new organizations had its initial get-acquainted meeting recently, welcoming public officials, lobbying organizations, non-for-profit groups and anyone willing to help.

The idea of an expanded front is important. State legislatures and law enforcement agencies will pay more attention to a broader lobbying group. Such coalitions are being formed all across the country. Perhaps a combined effort will be able to shed more light at the federal level, where the most opaque branch of government operates.

The Missouri Sunshine Coalition is off to a good start with healthy first-session attendance from around the state and an appearance by Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster, who promised an active interest within his office to help advise and mediate disputes. Koster says he is willing to assign officers to receive complaints.

If this becomes an effective service, it can bring substantially improved compliance without the need for lawsuits. Advice from the attorney general of law violation almost always will have the same effect as a judicial finding. Contrary advance to a plaintiff will have the same effect, ending the complaint.

Maybe the new coalition will be able to push for this and other reforms, making Missouri's Open Meetings and Records Law even more effective. Nothing is more essential to the

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operation of our system of governance by and for the people, to use a phrase not fully found without Sunshine.

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