



Cross Country Times
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ALDERMEN FIRE COMMUNITY RELATIONS OFFICER

The Willard Board of Aldermen fired Willard's Deputy City Clerk and City Community Relations Officer Kate Gould in a closed meeting July 26.

When contacted by the Cross Country Times, aldermen said they could not disclose anything about what happened, because the action was in a closed session of the board.

Stuart Haynes of the Missouri Municipal League said the board does not have to reveal any more information than its vote in this situation.

All aldermen voted to fire Gould.

Mayor Jamie Schoolcraft, who was not present at the closed meeting, did not return the Cross Country Times' call.

Gould, who was not present at the closed session, said she believes her firing was the result of her speaking out about what she believed was the board of aldermen's breaking of the Sunshine Law.

She says the Missouri Attorney General's office told her that a city survey of employees, asked for and voted for by aldermen, violated Missouri's Sunshine Law.

The Missouri Sunshine law sets out the specific in-

stances when a meeting, record or vote may be closed.

"There's no point of me appealing," Gould said. Any appeal would have to go before the aldermen, who already voted her out. "But it's unfortunate for the people of Willard, who will have more closed government. I don't believe I left on bad terms with any other employees."

Reporter's note: In 30 years as a journalist, I have worked with many public relations representatives - those for government, businesses and other agencies.

From a journalist's perspective, Kate Gould was one of the finest I ever worked with. I'd ask her a question and she'd return my call immediately, and I believe she gave me the best answer she could give in her role. Her response was fast, and she was always on top of her game when it came to researching laws and public documents.

Yes, there was a city policy that city employees could not talk to me directly. I didn't like it, but that's not unusual in any city, company or other agency

We journalists expect it.

It's a double-edged sword: a company or government entity has employees who may not really know what's going on in their government agency or company, but they will talk about an issue as they perceive it. Their perception may be right, it may be wrong. I've heard so much gossip from em-

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ployees who know only what somebody who heard it from somebody else said.

On the other side of the sword, the journalist doesn't get to talk to the hourly wage earner, and has to go through the company representative.

But Kate Gould knows how to research documents, and so much of reporting depends on it. She responded quickly, she helped me find legal information and presented all the facts her employers would allow her to tell.

Gould says she doesn't know where she'll land next, but it may be back to school for more education. She will be an asset wherever she goes.

