

Capitol tapes ⁸⁰⁰ deserve release

Be open with camera footage of who possibly entered Nixon's office.

It started as a controversy over a little germ. But it's growing faster than fungi in a locker room.

The flap over dangerously high levels of E. coli at Lake of the Ozarks continues to fester, and sickeningly so.

Gov. Jay Nixon and the higher-ups in his administration need to realize that the antidote is some good old-fashioned Sunshine. But, instead, officials in Jefferson City seem more interested in trying to keep this mess under wraps.

It's bad enough that state officials with the job of protecting the environment have admitted withholding the E. coli reports to protect tourism.

Now, e-mails have raised questions over whether staffers for Nixon, or the governor himself, were complicit in the secrecy.

The electronic messages, obtained through a Sunshine request, clearly show that an offi-

cial with the state Department of Natural Resources planned a meeting in the governor's office to discuss the E. coli levels June 4.

Nixon and his staff deny that discussion took place at that date, and they contend they didn't know of the high levels — or that they were withheld — until weeks later.

News-Leader reporter Chad Livengood has filed another Sunshine request asking to view footage from security cameras outside Nixon's office to try to either confirm or refute the governor's claims. But that request has been denied.

The reason?

Showing tapes could be a threat to the security of the Capitol Building, Capitol Police have decided.

Ridiculously citing a post-9/11 exception in the Sunshine Law designed to thwart terrorists, police contend: "More specifically, showing areas which are covered by our cameras would reveal areas, (if any) which may be blind spots, thus compromising security..."

There's no further explanation. Like why the police can-

not simply show the footage requested and then move the cameras, or at least adjust angles to keep potential intruders — or terrorists — guessing about coverage areas.

The police also do not offer any possible compromise, like releasing all frames of the footage containing faces, so it can be clear who met in Nixon's office without revealing the full range of the camera's coverage.

Already the state attorney general has said he doesn't see why police cannot reach a compromise to release the footage.

And legislators who helped draft the anti-terrorism exception have scoffed at its use in this case.

Nixon and his staffers ought to urge police to reconsider. Questions about whether the governor or his staffers allowed concerns for tourism to trump public health aren't going to just go away.

The governor ought to do his best to encourage openness on all fronts before this infection spreads and does irreparable damage — to his credibility and that of his top staff.

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Nixon

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