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Savannah
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Savannah, MO
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*Ponder
The
Thought*



GUY SPECKMAN

Sunshine and Such

Someone decided that this was the week to celebrate the Sunshine laws of the State of Missouri. It's probably a good idea, even if Charlie Sheen doesn't recognize the celebration. But a better idea is that each of us remember daily that the Sunshine Laws of the State of Missouri are one of our last protections from government gone awry. The State of Missouri has passed laws that have established public policy to have open meetings, records, votes, actions and deliberations of public governmental bodies.

This newspaper and readers have utilized these laws to sometimes force and sometimes nudge public officials to provide us information regarding our government. While government organizations like city and county governments pay their lobbyists with your money to try to limit the public's view of government, newspapers and other media fight for the continued right for government to be in plain view of the people footing the bill.

Over the course of the last couple of years, this lowly newspaper has revealed information to our readers that would have never seen sunshine, if not for these laws. With much prodding, this newspaper was the first to report that the Missouri Department of Conservation paid a huge settlement to an agent that was deemed to have been wrongfully discharged because of the actions of school board member Roger Wolken. The Conservation Department, one of the wealthiest of all state government departments, balked at providing the information until Missouri Press Attorney Jean Maneke presented the Conservation with little choice in providing the information.

Over the last two years, the readers of this paper have been fully informed about the perilous financial position of the City of Savannah. Do you think the City would have posted that information on their facebook page? I think not. This newspaper, almost exclusively, has detailed the financial developments for the viewing of the public. That is important to all of us.





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Would the Savannah School District have announced that they pay their Superintendents in the high range of the salaries, had it not been reported here? I think not. It's important to our community that you know these things. When a board and its minions plead poverty all year long, it's important that you know that they didn't think saving money on the Superintendent salary was necessary. They would not have made that public, had the laws of the state allowed them.

County government is required to print their entire financial statement in the newspaper each year and it is one of the most read issues we print annually. People throughout the county read what businesses and people have earned from county funds, including the amounts paid to this newspaper. The funny thing is that this is the best protection the county can buy from its constituents. No arguing when it is laid out in black and white. Nothing to hide when you release ALL the information.

Sunshine celebration week doesn't invoke much passion in most of us. Unless Charlie Sheen is rocking some porn stars, it kind of pales in comparison to real celebrations like St. Patrick's Day and the *Savannah Reporter's* 135th birthday party. Do take a moment to think how things would be without these important laws. Government continues to grow at all levels. Government continues to find new ways to hide their activities and these are our last protections.

I am pleased to report that I have recently returned home from a short vacation to Arizona. I am also pleased to report that the Duncan Hills Golf Course DID NOT pay for my trip. I have yet to turn receipts into the *Savannah Reporter* Comptroller, but will reveal complete expense reports when they are released following a Sunshine Law request.

Hopefully you had a chance to read Jesse Murphy's piece last week on soldier Josh Veraguth. I got an enlightening email from Jeannie Snapp who reports that her son Caleb Snapp is also stationed in Afghanistan where he is part of security forces and a canine handler. He and his canine partner, Emor, search for bombs and bomb making ordinances. He is also stationed at FOB Azizullah with Veraguth, confirming that this is a small world when two young men from Andrew County find themselves protecting our freedom a few thousand miles away, but within shouting distance of each other.

The Snapp family have also decorated their properties with yellow ribbons, like many of you, awaiting the return of these brave young men.

Guy Speckman can be reached at publisher@stjoelive.com or sending out sunshine law requests.