

TALK AROUND TOWN

Why we push for open records

You likely read a short story in Friday's paper about how Ashland County Board members seem to think Administrator Dan Grady is doing a pretty good job — so much so that they gave him a 5% raise every year for the next four years.

He might have some communication problems with a few board members, and maybe hasn't seen a project or two through to the end, but overall they gave him high ratings.

If you're wondering why Grady fought so hard to keep residents from reading about his performance, well, you're not alone.

A little background: We filed an open-records request for the evaluation in April, when it was administered. Grady first refused us access to the review because, he said, the document was part of a closed-session board meeting and thus was not open to the public.

When we showed him that that was a wrong interpretation of the law and renewed our request, he denied it a second time, saying that revealing the review would harm the county in its negotiations with him over renewing his contract. That also is no exemption to the law. He then denied a third request by saying personnel records are not subject to public scrutiny.

When we showed him the law that explicitly says top public officials' personnel records are subject to open-records law — and that those officials should expect scrutiny — Grady referred the matter to the county's attorney, Max Lindsey, who promptly gave us the records.

My intent here is not to beat Grady up

for not knowing or following open-records law. A lot of public officials don't know the law very well; it's a pretty narrow and specialized segment of the state's statutes.

My intent instead is to remind him and all other local officials that the documents in question are called public records because they are owned by the public, not the government.

There are exceptions. We can't get access to records that reveal public-security secrets, for example. Or the personnel records of low-level public employees. And we can't require the government to create a new record giving us information we seek.

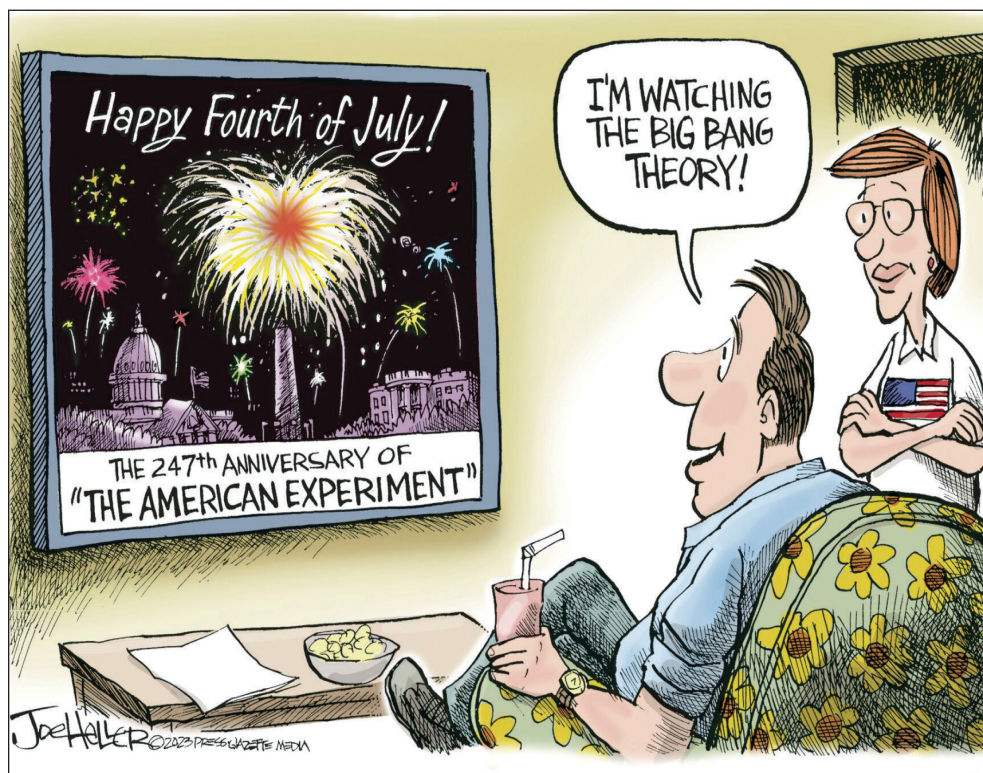
But lawmakers clearly stated, in the first sentence of the open-records statute, that:

"In recognition of the fact that a representative government is dependent upon an informed electorate, it is declared to be the public policy of this state that all persons are entitled to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those officers and employees who represent them. Further, providing persons with such information is declared to be an essential function of a representative government and an integral part of the routine duties of officers and employees whose responsibility it is to provide such information. To that end, (the law) shall be construed in every instance with a presumption of complete public access, consistent with the conduct of governmental business."



PETER J. WASSON

More RECORDS | A5



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Pride organizers thank supporters

EDITOR: I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped make the June 11 Chequamegon Pride fundraiser at The Alley on a success.

Chequamegon Pride is trying to put on the best Pride event for 2023 that we can and that all costs money. We have Saturday, Aug. 12 reserved at the Band Shell for a day of music, food, vendors and fun for all ages celebrating Pride in the Chequamegon Bay area. We have a sense of urgency about this year due to the prejudice and violence erupting all over our country against those who are considered "different."

Pride started when those who were "queer" got tired of being ridiculed, abused and killed for who they were, and that is the whole message of Pride — we need to let those who are LGBTQ know that there are people and places that are safe for them.

I would especially like to thank those who donated to the raffle: The American, Time Warp Tattoo, Kwik Trip, Ashland Family Restaurant, Moores on Main, Breakwater Restaurant, You Make Me Ink, Play Unplugged, Stagecoach, Black Cat, Chequamegon Food Coop, Spinster Books, Bay Theatre, L&M Supply, Superior Framing and Gallery, New China Restaurant, United Dreams, Scissors Edge, Huhn Drugstore,

Super H Foods, Culvers, Kraven, Bay City Cycles, Lakeshore Products and The Deepwater Grille. Also thanks to The Alley for having the great pizza buffet, and the Daily Press and reporter Tom Stankard for the article.

We will be doing more fundraising prior to the event and would also would like to hear from anyone who would like to be part, whether as a performer, vendor or donor. There is a Facebook page for Chequamegon Bay Pride 2023 if you want to get in touch with anyone working on this. We and the LGBTQ community appreciate your support.

JoAnne Dormady, Ashland

What do you think?

Email Letters to the Editor to pwasson@ashlanddailypress.net



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