

Protect the light

BY TOM STANGL

FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

*"Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."*

Poet Dylan Thomas penned those lines as part of his poem, "Do not go gentle into that good night," written in 1947. Thomas was referring to death in this work. It is among the most famous of his poems.



Publisher

Tom Stangl

The poem had a revival of sorts when it was part of the 2014 film "Interstellar."

These words bring many images to mind for me. The struggle for life and death and the battle of good and evil are similar in many ways. The light is often seen as positive and good, darkness as negative and evil.

Sometimes, life can be viewed in rather absolute terms. One of the ways I see the difference between light and darkness centers around our government.

Entities who practice openness and transparency in the way they conduct business are seen as good stewards of the public's trust, operating in the "light of sunshine." When elected officials keep secrets and try to obfuscate their dealings for whatever reason, they are viewed as being in the dark. It's scary in the dark. The dark is unknown, the opposite is true of the sunny outdoors.

This week is National Sunshine Week, a time to celebrate open government and advocate for fair and timely access to public records. It's also a time to hold all governments accountable for their actions. Taxpayers always end up paying the bills and having to deal with the messes created by government, it's vital that elected officials be accountable for their words and actions.

It's not a partisan issue, it's a matter of wrong and right. Black and white. Night and day.

It seems like the more technology evolves, proliferation of ways to hide multiply. Tasks that should be made much easier, such as collection of public records, can easily be hidden or delayed. Laws meant to ensure the public's right to know can be circumvented or changed in the name of advancing technology, resulting in a step backwards for openness.

The pandemic has created opportunities for more openness as governments gathered virtually for meetings. In theory, more people could participate because they didn't need to leave their homes. Bad technology resulted in people not being able to hear speakers and a leap of faith had to happen that discussions weren't held before the cameras went on and after they went off.

Sunshine Week is a great time to contact your elected officials and thank them for ensuring their meetings and dealings are as open as the law allows them to be. It's also a good time to get up to speed with proposed legislation that could possibly limit access to records or proceedings of governments. It seems like every few years there is an effort undertaken to weaken public notice laws and allow governments to self-report proceedings.

As well intended as some governments are, allowing anyone to self-regulate more often than not will result in something bad happening. You don't have to look very far to find examples of people taking short cuts to limit debate or oversight for what they believed was a good idea.

In the end, every single one of us are stakeholders in government. It works better when everyone knows what is expected and what is being done.

We should rage, rage against any attempt to kill the light.

As always, I welcome your comments. You can reach me by email at tstangl@theameryfree-press.com, telephone 715-268-8101 or write me at P.O. Box 424, Amery, WI, 54001.