

Officials should want to obey Sunshine Law

By LINDA BREWER
Editor

"It's just politics."

I've heard that pitiful excuse reported so many times from officials in relation to the Knox County Sunshine Law trial I'm about ready to scream. What did these politicians think? Just because they are "officials" they can skirt the law?

Thank goodness they didn't get away with it. Although none of the accused commissioners represent me and I have no ties to the daily newspaper that filed the lawsuit, I've remained very interested in this case because I believe it could have - or at least it should have - far reaching consequences.

Hopefully, elected and appointed officials everywhere will sit up and take notice. Hopefully, they will all realize open government is not just an ideal for others to dream about, but a reality they should embrace themselves. Hopefully, they will all finally accept the cold, hard fact they are breaking the law when they make decisions behind closed doors.

Some of the politicians involved in the Knox County lawsuit wanted us to believe backroom deals by elected officials are a normal part of the political process. They wanted us to believe all politicians do it, so why not just accept it and let it slide?

If we bought into this train of thought, we should believe any of us could break laws we've seen others break. How many people have been stopped by a law enforcement officer for driving over the speed limit? Even if several cars ahead of you were traveling just as fast as you were and you believe everybody drives a little faster than they should on that particular road, does the cop let you slide? No, he or she gives you a ticket because you were breaking the law.

Ignorance of the law is not an acceptable excuse for us, and it shouldn't be acceptable for office holders, either.

That's the way our system works - if you break the law, you should expect to pay the price. If you don't like the law, you should take steps to try to change it but continue to follow it while it remains on the books.

Those who are elected or appointed to official positions within our government are held to high standards. Especially since they have the power to make or enforce laws the rest of us are expected to follow without question, we rightfully expect them to follow the laws themselves.

It is a grave disappointment when a government representative breaks the law of the land. We lose respect for them personally and distrust of politicians collectively increases.

Taxpaying citizens everywhere should be sorely offended that politicians want us to accept the good ol' boy network that would allow them to make decisions affecting us behind closed doors. That's exactly why the state open meetings act was passed - to put an end to the practice of officials meeting with each other and making decisions before a public meeting is even called to order.

I also disagree with the notion of the newspaper being the only winner in the Knox County case. The way I see it, the people were the winners. After all, the open meetings act is designed to make the public aware of government deliberations. While newspaper representatives enjoy being included in the loop of how government decisions are made, their joy only comes with being able to share that information with the public.

The Sunshine Law was passed with the best interests of citizens in mind, not the interests of the media. News people are merely a tool to get the information to a larger number of citizens.

So if you hear somebody talking about how backroom decisions are a longstanding way of politicians doing business and people should just accept it as common practice, don't buy it.

It's against the law and this Knox County case proved it.

in your opinion

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Why suggest Pilot move to Philadelphia?

Editor,
News-Herald:

This is an open letter to Earl Ridenour in response to his open letter to the Haslem family concerning their lawsuit against the city of Loudon and the planning commission.

I find it interesting that you are accusing the Haslems of attempting to force a truck stop in Loudon. How many citizens in the city of Philadelphia and surrounding community did

congestion and dirt created by the trucks" that the citizens of Philadelphia would? You plea to the Haslems to "Please don't force it into our neighborhood where our family and children would have to endure all the bad things that go with a truck stop" and then in the next paragraph you want them to "take it to Philadelphia."

It was as if you thought Philadelphia was some barren land that no one lived in and the