

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Your right to know

The Minnesota Legislature is in full swing with no lack of high-profile issues. How high will the minimum wage be raised? Will the sales taxes enacted on business-to-business transactions be repealed? Should marijuana be legalized for medical purposes? How these are resolved will have an impact on Minnesotans' daily lives.

Minnesotans should add another piece of legislation to their watch list – the “Timberjay bill.” It may not be capturing the headlines, but its significance goes to the heart of government accountability. The bill would clarify that citizens have a right to information about contracts between private businesses and government entities.

The Minnesota Newspaper Association supports this bill on the premise that open government is good government. That's our message during this week's recognition of “Sunshine Week: Your Right to Know.”

The legislation is rooted in the legal efforts of the Timberjay, a newspaper that serves Ely, Tower and Orr, to get information on a school project. Publisher Marshall Helmberger, concerned about costs and other troubling aspects of a project to build and renovate St. Louis County schools, approached the school district for details about one of the subcontracts with the general contractor.

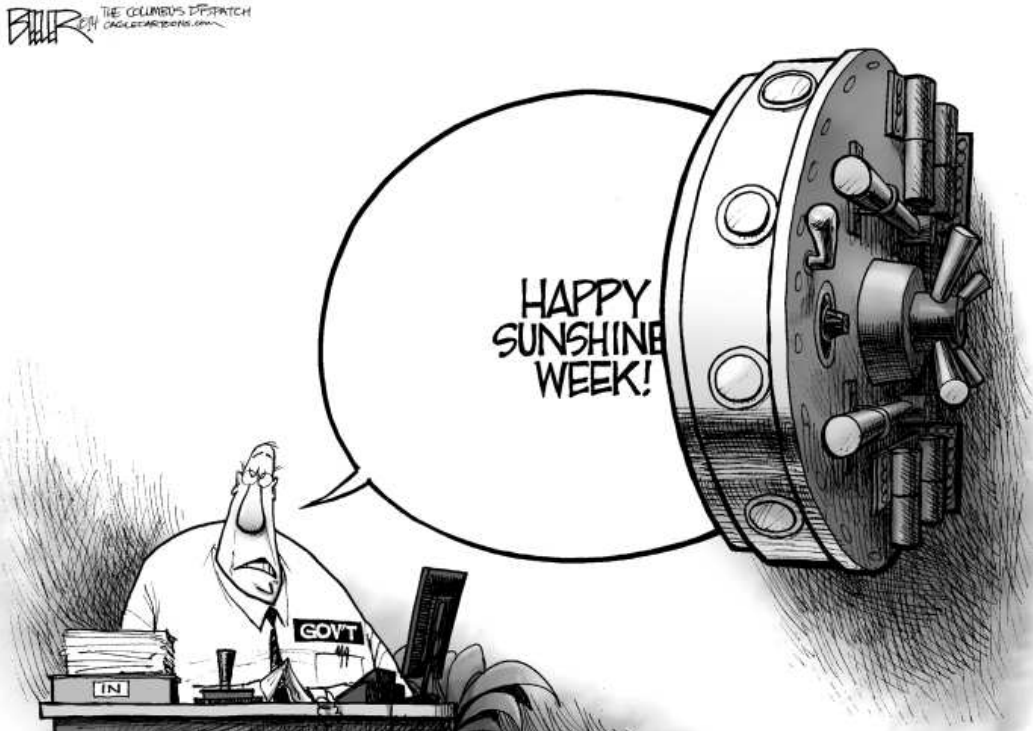
The district had not obtained a copy of the subcontract. The general contractor, Milwaukee-based Johnson Controls, denied access based on the claim that its subcontract with Duluth-based Architectural Resources

Inc. was proprietary. The Timberjay sued and won its case before the Appeals Court, only to have the ruling overturned by the state Supreme Court.

The legislation seeks to clarify the state's Data Practices Act so there's no question that the public has access to access to details about the performance of contracts between private companies and government entities. Early signals are promising. The bill cleared its first three legislative committees on unanimous votes. Chief authors are Rep. John Lesch, DFL-St. Paul, and Sen. Kari Dziedzic, DFL-Minneapolis.

The casual observer may dismiss the Timberjay dispute as an isolated episode of an aggressive small-town editor challenging a large corporation. Nothing could be farther from reality. Look around any community, and there are numerous examples of private companies doing business with government. The Timberjay wrangle, at its core, epitomizes the everyday efforts of editors and reporters across the state to ensure that public business – in this case, the spending of public dollars – is open to the scrutiny of taxpayers.

Minnesota has some of the strongest laws in the country regarding open government. And the public and the news media must never let down their guard in defending those rights. Advancing the Timberjay bill is a significant step toward ensuring that government operates in a transparent and accountable way.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Too late for city council

To the editor,
 The Koochiching Economic Development Authority and Director Paul Nevanen want to know why Menards chose to expand in International Falls. It's not that hard to see, Paul.

Over 50 percent of the parking lot is Ontario plates. The materials go hundreds of miles into Canada. Look at any parking lot. Canadians are what keep this town going along with the tourists going to Canada to keep the hotel business up.

You want to know how people view us in terms of business attraction? They look at us as a place to crash before going up into Canada.

How do you even have business attraction when the (International Falls) city council has turned down many, many people who have wanted to start a business. This has always been a one-horse town — Boise.

The only expansion I have seen for work in this town is the (U.S. Customs and Border Protection) border patrol prison camp — what an eyesore. Thirty-plus border patrols. Five to eight were plenty for the past 90 years at I. Falls. The only other expansion — don't forget the (Voyageurs National) Park headquarters and the many more customs officers we

needed.

Law enforcement will soon be 30 percent to 40 percent of this town. The rest — elderly people in nursing homes, CNAs (certified nursing assistants), LPNs (licensed practical nurses), and nurses.

The city council has done nothing to let a business come into this town in years and years or even let people in town start a business. All they did was depend on Boise and let them control most things. All you have done to let new businesses in was dig a huge hole. I'm sure if ya jump in many of us will cover ya up.

Cody Christensen
 International Falls, MN

Flag is effort to increase awareness, involvement

Every year in Minnesota more than 20 people are murdered as a result of domestic violence. Each death is a tragic loss for that person's family, friends, co-workers and community. Each person's death is also a loss for each of us, an indication that domestic violence is still an integral part of our society.

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women tracks and documents each murder and annually publishes a femicide report. The Live Violence Free flag campaign is a project that was created to increase community awareness and to promote community involvement around domestic violence focusing on the femicide report. The Live Violence Free Flag Campaign will be used in conjunction with the femicide report that MCBW releases each year. Each time a domestic violence homicide occurs in Minnesota, Friends Against Abuse will display the flag for one week to honor the homicide victim and to raise awareness across that state.

Domestic violence homicides do not just impact the individual family where violence occurs but it impacts everyone — friends, extended family, co-workers, neighbors, full communities.

Every time there is domestic violence homicide, there is a short time of media attention and a community feeling of helplessness. The flag campaign is a way to give domestic violence homicides more meaning, to give individuals and community groups a way to take action. The core of the flag campaign is that each time there is a domestic violence homicide in Minnesota, organizations will display the flag for one week. Flags will be displayed across Minnesota at the same time to bring awareness of the domestic violence homicide and to start a local community conversation about ending domestic violence.

Friends Against Abuse is an active participant in the Live Violence Free Flag Campaign and implores our community to



LeeAnn

MEER

GUEST COMMENTARY

become an active participant as well.

The history of the flag campaign goes back to Nov. 25, 1960, when three Mirabal sisters were murdered in the Dominican Republic by military intelligence after months of torture. The sisters were active in the underground and took part in activities against the dictator. The courage of the Mirabal sisters is now regarded worldwide as a symbol for women to develop the necessary force for advocacy against any injustice.

In 1981 at a meeting of Latin American and Caribbean feminists in Bogota, Colombia, the participants paid tribute to the Mirabel sisters and the date of their death as a memorial for all the victims of violence against women and girls. In 1999, the United Nation's General Assemble designated Nov. 25 as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Terre des Femmes, a womens' rights nongovernment organization in Germany developed a flag campaign to promote awareness of violence against women and recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The Live Violence Free (frei leben ohne gewalt) flag was designed and distributed to towns and cities throughout Germany.

Since 2001 the flag has been distributed to more than 800 organizations in approximately 90 countries. Each organization

uses the flag to increase awareness, deciding on exactly how they will use the flag.

Some talking points for us after a domestic violence homicide Friends Against Abuse would like to share with you are: Safety is a basic human right. Yet, batterers deprive one in three women in Minnesota of that fundamental right. Batterers use a pattern of tactics to denigrate, dominate and endanger their intimate partners and children – to deny them safety in their own homes, workplaces, schools and communities.

Murder is on the extreme end of the spectrum of tactics that abusers use to exercise power and control over their intimate partners. In 2013, 37 Minnesotans were murdered in domestic violence incidents. Even more startling is that in 2012, 63,267 victims sought services from domestic violence programs. This represents only a small portion of the victims in the state since only about one of every five victims seek services.

Contact that may appear non-threatening from the outside can actually be a marker for increased risk and lethality. A batterer is most dangerous when his victim leaves him. There are resources available at your local domestic violence program to help you do safety planning before you leave an abusive relationship. If you or anyone you know is looking for assistance, please contact Friends Against Abuse at 218-285-7220.

Domestic violence is a public safety issue. Keeping victims of domestic violence safe and holding batterers accountable are responsibilities of the entire community. We must all work together — battered women's programs, law enforcement, the justice system, the Minnesota Legislature, the entire community — to promote justice, provide safety, and prevent future harm for all Minnesotans.

Domestic Violence is everyone's business. Together we can make a difference.

How to contact your lawmakers

FEDERAL OFFICES

President Barack Obama
 Democrat
 The White House
 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
 Washington, D.C., 20500
 202-456-1111
 Website:
 www.whitehouse.gov
 E-mail:
 president@whitehouse.gov

U.S. Rep. Rick Nolan
 2447 Rayburn House Office Building
 Washington DC 20515
 202-225-6211
 Website: www.nolan.house.gov
 Facebook: US Rep Rick Nolan
 Twitter: @USRepRickNolan

Duluth Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
 11 East Superior Street
 Suite 125
 Duluth, MN 55802
 Phone: 218-464-5095
 Fax: 218-464-5098

Brainerd Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
 Brainerd City Hall
 501 Laurel Street
 Brainerd, MN 56401
 218-454-4078

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar
 Democrat
 302 Hart Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510
 202-224-3244

Minnesota Office:
 1200 Washington Avenue

South, Suite 250
 Minneapolis, MN 55415
 612-727-5220
 Website:
 www.klobuchar.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Al Franken
 Democrat
 Senate Hart Building 320
 Washington DC 20510
 202-224-5641
 Website:
 www.alfranken.com
 E-Mail:
 info@franken.senate.gov

STATE OFFICES

Gov. Mark Dayton
 130 State Capitol
 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
 St. Paul, MN, 55155
 800-657-3717
 E-mail:
 Mark.Dayton@state.mn.us

Rep. David Dill
 571 State Office Building
 St. Paul, MN 55155
 651-296-2190
 800-339-0466
 rep.david.dill@house.mn
 Assistant: Joan Harrison

Sen. Tom Bakk
 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
 Capitol, Room 226
 St. Paul, MN 55155-1606
 Capitol Office phone:
 (651) 296-8881
 Email:
 www.senate.mn/
 senatorbakkemail

The Journal welcomes letters from readers

Letters should be limited to 500 words or less. Longer letters may be edited. Letters must be signed and include the telephone number and address of the letter writer. Only the author's city address will be published.

Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifallsjournal.com.