



Chris Danou's Capitol Report
Sunshine Week Highlighted Strong History of Open Records

Last week, lawmakers, news organizations, schools, libraries and other civic organizations across the nation celebrated Sunshine Week. At first mention one might be inclined to think it has something to do with recognizing there's more sunlight with the start of Daylight Savings Time, but it is actually a national initiative to promote a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information.

Now in its 11th year, Sunshine Week is a time for us to remember that open government is good government and public records belong to the taxpayers and members of the public, not lawmakers or the government. I was proud to co-sponsor a resolution with my Democratic colleagues in the State Assembly that highlighted Wisconsin's proud history of transparent government as well as pointed out recent attempts by the Governor and majority party to make sweeping changes to our strong open government and records laws.

Wisconsin is known for its high ethical standards for lawmakers and legislative staff. While state laws vary and the federal government has its own standards, Wisconsin sets an example that is considered to be one of the best. For example, lawmakers and staff cannot accept anything valued at \$1 or more from a registered lobbyist, their organization or a person from a group, organization or business that is represented by a lobbyist. This standard not only insures public trust and protects taxpayers, but it also keeps all personal gain and motivation out of the legislative process.

Open government goes beyond lawmakers and staff not being able to accept anything of value. It also extends to other day-to-day operations in state service through open records and open meetings policy, government oversight, as well as campaign finance and donor contribution reporting. Any member of the public can request and see records from a lawmaker's office, government agency and campaign finance reports. These reports show who is donating and how much they give to a political campaign, as well as what lawmakers and candidates purchase with their campaign accounts.

While the vast majority of the population supports open and transparent government along with the freedom of information, there is a clear difference between Democrats and Republicans on this issue. The Governor and majority party have used their positions of power and influence to keep the public in the dark and make major changes to open government policies. These changes not only go against the sentiment and desire of the public, they also go against our proud traditions here in Wisconsin. That's why my Democratic colleagues and I introduced a resolution that highlighted our efforts to enshrine open meetings and open records laws in the state constitution, as well as our efforts to fight back GOP attempts to gut open records laws.

It's my firm belief that we need to always find ways to make our open records laws stronger. There is absolutely no reason to dismantle our proud tradition of transparent government, let alone make changes that make our open records weaker. Our laws work well, and anyone who doesn't understand or agree with their importance doesn't understand the people of Wisconsin believe in open, transparent government and freedom of information.

