

(605) 665-0484
308 Douglas Ave.
Yankton, S.D. 57078



**Kathy Church
& Kristy Wyland**
Publishers

Kathy Church
Managing Editor

Dave Wyland
Production Manager
Staff Writer

Jim Anderson
Advertising Manager
and Cartoonist

Brian Hunhoff
Contributing Editor

The *Observer* is the legal newspaper for Yankton County, Gayville-Volin School District, the Towns of Gayville, Mission Hill, Utica and Volin.

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In all signed editorials, cartoons or columns, the opinions expressed are those of the writer or artist, and not necessarily of *The Observer*. We also want our subscribers to make their opinions known. We will publish letters to the editor from *Observer* subscribers as space allows. Letters must be signed and include the writer's phone number.

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Deadline is Tuesday at 5 p.m. each week. We reserve the right to refuse any advertisement.

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EDITORIAL

It's okay to make closed government personal

Editor's Note: This editorial by *Observer* staff writer Brian Hunhoff was featured on the *National Sunshine Week* website as part of a nationwide campaign for freedom of information. Hunhoff's article was published last week in more than 100 newspapers from at least 42 different states.

Don't take it personally? That's usually good advice, but today we urge the opposite reaction to government bodies operating in the shadows, purposely avoiding public scrutiny and genuine transparency.

In other words, take closed government personally. Please!

- Take it personally when a reporter is kicked out of a city council meeting so members can hold an illegal or unnecessary executive session.
- Take it personally when public access to government records is refused, limited, or attached to excessive fees.
- Take it personally when a judge jails a reporter for refusing to reveal a confidential source.
- Take it personally when government fails to limit political contributions, and ignores ties of mutual benefit between private business and elected officials.
- Take it personally when a governor issues secretive pardons.
- Take it personally when a presidential administration works vigorously to identify and criminally prosecute government whistle-blowers.
- Take all of this personally because it directly affects the quality and scope of government information you get from the press.

Wouldn't it be great if more people understood a reporter's exclusion from a meeting also excludes them, the general public, from learning details that are being hidden?

Wouldn't it be great if everyone embraced the notion that government openness is an essential pillar of democracy?

Wouldn't it be great if more people remembered the press serves as their eyes and ears in the halls of government?

Wouldn't it be great if more people became aware that jailing journalists not only intimidates the press, but also chills the public's right to know?



Wouldn't it be great to see thousands of citizens press Congress to pass a federal shield law protecting reporters from being locked up for doing their job?

There is a moving scene in *Return of the King* where a resurgent monarch inspires his small army to stand against overwhelming odds by delivering a stirring cry to arms.

Wouldn't it be great to see people everywhere show that kind of passion and unity in the fight for freedom of information and the battle against government secrecy? With apologies to J.R.R. Tolkien, that speech might go something like this:

"A day may come when the courage of men fails and our freedoms die; when speech and religion are governed; when we forsake our reporters and break all bonds of fellowship with the Fourth Estate ... **but it is not this day!**"

"There may come an hour of darkness, wolves and shattered shields that bring our First Amendment crashing down ... **but it is not this day!**"

"On this day, we battle for our Bill of Rights! This day, we join with journalists everywhere in the war against government secrecy, corruption, and waste.

"This day, the press and public stand ... **together!** This day, we fight ... **together!**"

Wouldn't that be great?

Brian Hunhoff is a two-time winner of the Golden Quill award for editorial writing from the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors.

Debt equals Future consumption denied

To Sen. Thune, Sen. Rounds, and Rep. Noem...

Please stop spending money that the Federal Government does not have. Please balance the budget! The U.S. economy is not growing fast enough to keep up with the current government spending. I, for one, am not interested in leaving \$18+ trillion of debt for my children and grandchildren to repay. Either raise taxes, or stop borrowing money, and cut spending.

If you do not believe the government statistics about the "strength" of the recovery, the low rate of inflation, and the falling unemployment rate, then fix the problem. If you do believe the government statistics, then raise taxes, as you seem incapable of reducing spending.

The economy recedes, neither Congress nor the Federal Reserve have any monetary or fiscal tools with which to fight the next recession. When will congress start deleveraging? Do not tell us you are conservatives, and then vote to borrow another \$500 billion to balance this year's budget.

Dan Stone