

Good news at City Hall

Last night the Watertown City Council, on a second reading, passed an ordinance change which requires all city meetings to be open to the public.

That may be a bit of surprise to those of you who thought all city meetings were open. Not true.

Editorial

Public Opinion

Views expressed are the opinions of the P/O Editorial Board

Mark S. Roby ■ Roger Whittle ■ Chris Carter ■ Bob Mooney ■

At issue: Our city's committee structure and state laws allowed city committees to meet in secret. With passage of ordinance 13-25 last night, secret meetings at city hall will be a thing of the past.

However, this new ordinance represents great news for all taxpayers of this fine city, and kudos to the mayor and council for finally addressing an issue of openness that has caused problems in the past and more importantly, created a trust-gap between city hall and the citizens.

Also, this measure — ordinance 13-25 — because of our home rule charter, puts Watertown's level of city government openness ahead of state law when it comes to city meetings.

Prior to last night, the city's finance and public works committees, established by city ordinance, were not required to post a public notice of upcoming meetings, capture the minutes of those meetings and provide them to the public when asked. These committees consisted of less than a quorum of the full council, and therefore by state law were not required to act in the open.

In 2007 the citizens of Watertown were confronted with the stark reality of not having these committee meetings open to the public. At that time the city finance committee met in secret, with no public notice and to this date, no known minutes of that meeting were ever captured for subsequent review by the public. On a 5-1 vote, they created a plan to raid \$4 million a year from our city-owned independently operated Municipal Utilities. This represented a four-fold increase over the \$875,000 annual transfer by the utilities to the city's general fund.

This newspaper, the Municipal Utilities and many others cried foul and the plan eventually was scuttled by the full city council. They realized homeowners wouldn't stand for a hidden 15-20 percent increase in their utility bills to fund general expenses of the city.

And that incident brought to light our city government could be run behind closed doors, without proper public notice and with no records kept.

This newspaper challenged this secret meeting to the state's Open Meetings Commission, but lost because less than a quorum of the full city council was present (state law). After that decision the only recourse was to change state law or adopt a new ordinance locally.

Earlier this year a new law from the Governor's and Attorney General's Task Force on Open Government to do just that failed. However, this summer, after getting elected Mayor Steve Thorson decided it was time the city council examine the issue under our home rule charter and from that effort ordinance 13-25 was drafted, debated and now approved by the council.

We couldn't be happier with this result and would suggest all citizens of Watertown should be the same. All future city committee meetings will now be noticed 24 hours in advance of the meeting and minutes will be kept. Kudos to the mayor and council!

Today in History

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 17, 1862, more than 3,600 men were killed, many more wounded, captured or left missing, in the Civil War Battle of Antietam in Maryland.

On this date:

In 1787, the Constitution of the United States was completed and signed by a majority of delegates attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

In 1908, Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge of the U.S. Army Signal Corps became the first person to die in the crash of a powered aircraft, the Wright Flyer, at Fort Myer, Va., just outside Washington, D.C.

In 1911, Calbraith P. Rodgers set off from Sheepshead Bay, N.Y., aboard a Wright biplane in an attempt to become the first flier to travel the width of the United States. (The 49-day journey required 69 stops before ending in Pasadena, Calif.)

In 1937, the likeness of President Abraham Lincoln's head was dedicated at Mount Rushmore.

In 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland during World War II, more than two weeks after Nazi Germany had launched its assault.

In 1962, U.S. space officials announced the selection of nine new astronauts, including Neil A. Armstrong, who became the first man to step onto the moon.

In 1971, citing health reasons, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, 85, retired.

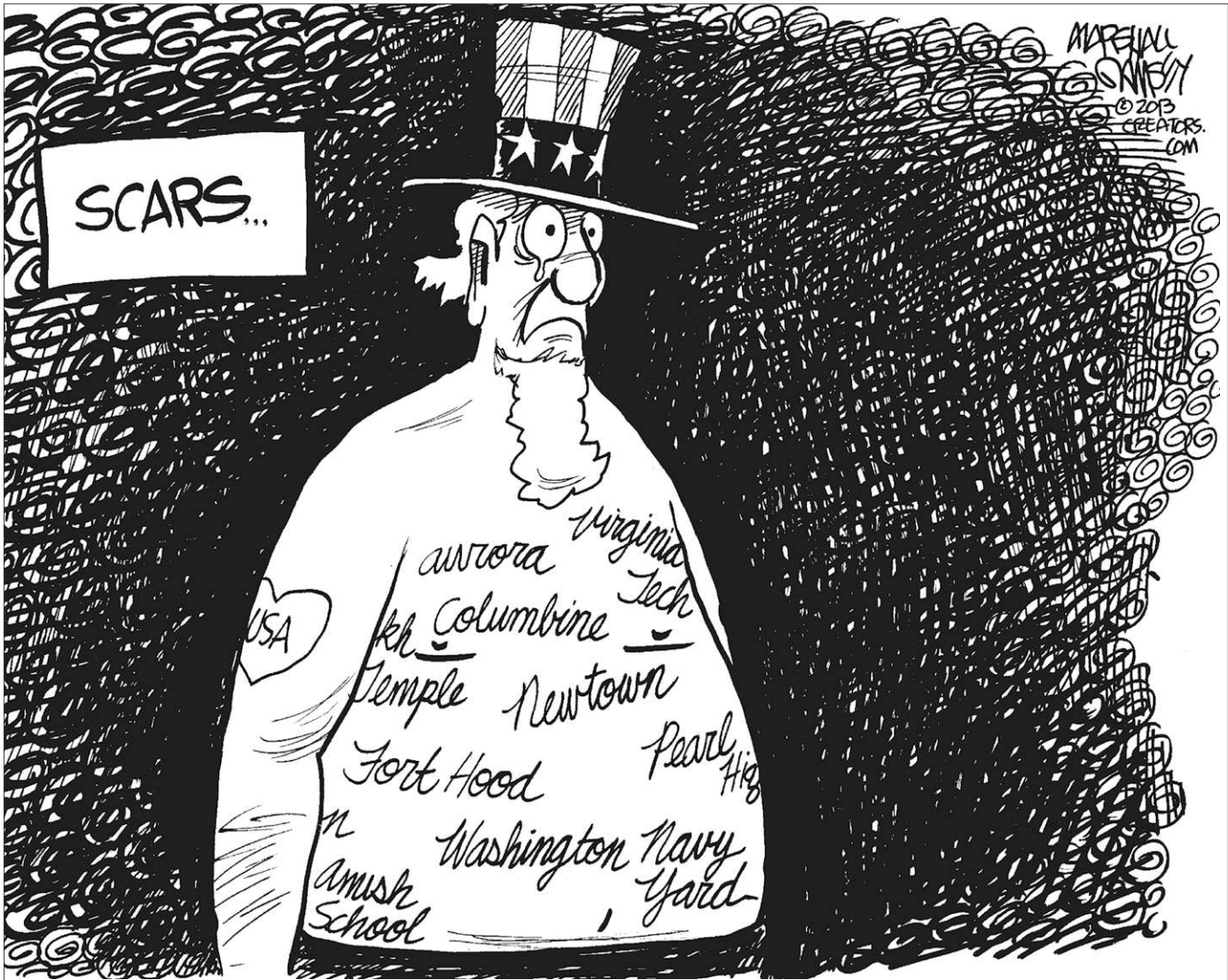
In 1972, the Korean War comedy-drama "M-A-S-H" premiered on CBS.

In 1978, after meeting at Camp David, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed a framework for a peace treaty.

In 1986, the Senate confirmed the nomination of William H. Rehnquist to become the 16th chief justice of the United States.

Five years ago: A suicide attack on the U.S. Embassy in Sanaa, Yemen, killed 19 people, including an American woman and six militants.

One year ago: NATO said it was scaling back operations with Afghan soldiers and policemen to lower the risk of insider attacks and reduce local tensions



Clinton. Christie. Cringe.

On Jan. 20, 1981, Michael Deaver, a political aide, peered into a bedroom in Blair House, across from the White House, and said to the man still abed, "It's 8 o'clock. You're going to be inaugurated as president in a few hours." From beneath the blankets, Ronald Reagan said, "Do I have to?"

Some are so eager to be inaugurated in 2017 that the 2016 campaign has begun 28 months before the 1.4 percent of Americans who live in Iowa and New Hampshire express themselves. It is, therefore, not too soon to get a head start on being dismayed. Consider two probable candidates.

Hillary Clinton comes among us trailing clouds of incense, so some acolytes will call it ill-mannered, even misogynistic, to ask: What exactly is it about the condition of the world, and about America's relations with other nations, that recommends the former secretary of state for an even more elevated office?

Granted, neither she nor any other U.S. official can be blamed for the world's blemishes. To think otherwise is to embrace what Greg Weiner, an Assumption College political scientist, calls "narcissistic polity disorder." It is the belief that everything everywhere is about us. Today, it is the delusion that, although events in Egypt and Syria look like violent clashes between Egyptians and Syrians concerning what those countries should be, the events really are mostly about what America has or has not done.

That said, however, this also should be said: Clinton's accomplishments are not less impressive than those of many who have sought, and some who have won, the presidency. But the disproportion between the thinness of her record and the ardor

George Will Columnist



of her advocates suggests that her gender is much of her significance.

That contemporary feminism is thin gruel is apparent in the fact that it has found its incarnation in a woman who married her way to the upper reaches of American politics. There her wandering husband rewarded her remarkable loyalty by allowing her the injurious opportunity to produce a health-care proposal so implausible that a Democratic-controlled Congress (56 to 44 in the Senate, 256 to 178 in the House) would not bring it to a vote. Still, the world's oldest political party might not allow a contest to mar the reverent awarding to her of its next nomination.

Republicans seem destined not for a staid coronation but for an invigorating brawl, and brawling is Chris Christie's forte, even his hobby. Americans sometimes vote for the opposite of what has disappointed or wearied them, so they might want to replace Barack Obama, who is elegant but hesitant, with someone who is conspicuously neither. Christie, who is evidently cruising to gubernatorial reelection in blue New Jersey, can then say:

"Eighteen states and the District of Columbia, with 242 electoral votes, have gone Democratic in six consecutive elections. Unless the Republican nominee breaks this 'blue wall,' the Democratic nominee will spend autumn 2016 seeking 28 electoral votes and will find them. My

brand of politics is entertaining and, perhaps for that reason, effective with people who considered Mitt Romney robotic."

There can, however, come a point at which the way a politician acts becomes an act, a revival of vaudeville, and a caricature discordant with the demands of the highest offices. Christie, appearing recently on a sports talk radio program, erupted like Vesuvius when asked about a New York sportswriter who had criticized Christie's friend Rex Ryan, coach of the New York Jets:

"Idiot. The guy's a complete idiot. Self-consumed, underpaid reporter. ... The only reason he's empowered is because we're spending all this time this morning talking about Manish Mehta, who, by the way, I couldn't pick out of a lineup, and no Jet fan really gives a damn about Manish Mehta."

Mehta's tabloid, the Daily News, filled a page with the words, "Who you calling an idiot, fatso!" Great fun. But who wants to call the person "Mr. President" who calls a sportswriter an "idiot"?

Americans want presidents to understand and connect with ordinary people, but not to be ordinary. Because presidents are incessantly on view in Americans' living rooms, decorum is preferable to drama. Americans want presidential toughness, which Christie has demonstrated admirably in confrontations with government employees' unions. But because he has demonstrated it abundantly, he does not need to advertise it gratuitously.

He should heed another politician who had a flair for fighting. "Being powerful," Margaret Thatcher said, "is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't."

Help wish S.D. a happy birthday

"Where horses travelled dusty trails, fancy cars now drive on super highways. Where one-room cabins used to stand, modern high-rise buildings line the skyways. Where there once was just a mountain, today there are faces carved in stone and they represent the freedom of this South Dakota land we can home."

Those words are the first verse of the "Celebrate the Century" song written by Kyle Evans for South Dakota's 100th birthday in 1989.

In 2014, our state will be 25 years older and recognizing that milestone provides us an opportunity to learn about South Dakota history and be inspired to create an even better South Dakota for the today, tomorrow and generations to come.

In 1989, over 300 cities and towns formed local committees to sponsor special Centennial celebrations that often included parades, all-school reunions and lasting legacy projects like restoring historic buildings, creating veterans memorials,

Jim Larson Chairman, South Dakota 125th Anniversary Commission



upgrading local museums, planting trees, creating new community centers, renovating libraries, burying time capsules, writing histories of their town or county and building new swimming pools, parks and playgrounds. Some even erected street signs – a first for their community.

Statewide organizations and associations also did special projects, such as sponsoring history books, giving grants to local and state projects, honoring 100 year old businesses, and creating historic themes for their annual meetings.

Many schools emphasized South Dakota history during the school year by upgrading curriculums and holding

special assemblies.

To seek ideas for possible activities for 2014, Governor Daugaard appointed a nine-person commission to brainstorm ideas and accept public input.

So far, people have suggested art and photography exhibits and books, daily postings of South Dakota history on social media, joint events and projects with North Dakota, creating a commemorative coin, promotion of cowboy poetry, and having a wagon train from Yankton to Pierre.

I invite everyone to submit more ideas by visiting the 125th Anniversary of South Dakota Statehood website at www.125.sd.gov or by emailing your ideas to 125info@state.sd.us. People can also testify at the commission's second meeting, September 18th in Pierre, or call 605-773-5689 any time during the business day.

If you have any ideas, please don't hesitate to send them. They will be welcomed and appreciated.

On the left... Doonesbury Flashbacks

Doonesbury - by Gary Trudeau

Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley

On the right...

