

## **Open government is the best government (Sept. 20, 2002)**

Those six words are a simple statement of fact. An honest philosophy of openness, and a basic guideline for good government. It explains how public officials can maintain the trust of the people who elect them to office. It also serves as a way for people to be knowledgeable about and involved with government.

Elected officials who prefer little public debate and closed sessions hurt themselves. They foster suspicion and distrust. Public access to government meetings and records nurtures confidence in the decisions made by officials. At the grassroots level, people support their leaders when they are informed about officials' debate that leads to decisions. Members of school boards, town boards and county commissioners alike benefit from open government when openness establishes a bond between a community's leaders and residents.

On Sept. 16, the Colorado Press Association launched "Operation Sunshine -- We Support Open Government in Colorado." This is more than a catchy slogan. It's a campaign to help ensure that you have access to public records and meetings. That's why *The Flume* supports this practice of open government.

Some may argue that only the press wants access to meetings and records. After all, how many people attend school board or county commissioner meetings? The answer, usually, is very few. But it's not because the public isn't interested. It's because people have jobs, family activities, errands to run, houses to clean, social obligations. The press represents the public. Reporters attend meetings because residents are juggling too much. Reporters write news stories so the public can be informed and make decisions, when required, based upon detailed and factual information.

The news stories carried in this newspaper are the product of hours of research and interviewing to bring you the most important facts. Any reporter will tell you this can become problematic when we are barred from doing our job by elected officials who do not believe it is their responsibility to be accountable to the press.

An informed citizenry is a vital ingredient for a strong democracy. Open records and meetings laws that protect public access represent the second element of good government. Public officials who adhere to those laws and advocate open government are the third part of the recipe. You don't elect people to keep secrets from you.

Take a moment to read the article by Nancy Nemec of *The Greeley Tribune*. Both of our coverage areas are rural, and both are experiencing unprecedented growth. Both have a similar mission. This week was chosen for the Operation Sunshine project because the U.S. Constitution was adopted on Sept. 17, 1787. Each week, *The Flume* is working to ensure your right to know is protected.

Open government will always be the best government.

-- Lora Abcarian