

It's Also Time to Celebrate the Pillars of Open Government, Watchdog Reporting

By Jeremy Speer, Gaylord Herald Times

The beauty of a 150-year anniversary is in its longevity. Certainly, most things don't live to see 150 years.

In a world of the "the next big thing," it's worth celebrating the Michigan Press Association's 150 years of serving newspapers and their readers in Michigan.

It would be a safe assumption that many of our publications have already celebrated or will soon celebrate 150 years. So goes it in a line of work that has withstood the test of time by covering its communities with care.

One of the pillars of the staying power of news organizations is their commitment to open government and transparency, a mission our members share with the MPA.

And while this pillar has been and continues to be challenged, the MPA has been a champion in defending the Freedom of Information Act, the printing of public notices in our publications and open government in general. We have had success advocating and educating legislators on the benefits of open government, and each year the MPA awards deserving legislators the Peter Pettalia Memorial Sunshine Award.

For their part, publications in this state continue to devote resources toward quality watchdog journalism, making a difference by shining light upon unexposed situations, making a difference in the lives of many. The Flint water crisis and the Larry Nassar sexual assaults are just two large-scale Michigan stories that benefited our state and its people from hard, dogged reporting.

On the eve of MPA's 150th anniversary, I wanted to share some of my favorite of the many quotes about the need for open government I found on a compilation put together by Huntingdon College:

"A nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is afraid of its people." — President John F. Kennedy

"Government ought to be all outside and no inside." — President Woodrow Wilson

"Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful ... and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." — George Orwell

Let's celebrate our 150 years, and while we're at it, let's celebrate the strides we've seen in open government during that time. It is my hope the First Amendment continues to stand as a pillar of our country, and that we continue to serve as the watchdog for our readers by shining light to areas where some would rather us not see.

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