**Sunshine Week: Transparency builds trust with constituents**

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There are plenty of recent examples of why we’re all fortunate to live in the United States. This past week, Russian legislators changed their laws to punish anyone who publishes what the state considers "inaccurate information" about their military operations in Ukraine. When someone posts on social media platforms categorizing Russian actions as an “invasion” or “war,” they can face stiff financial penalties and much worse.

The government propaganda machine is in full speed mode in Russia ensuring actions are characterized “properly.” We have our own problems in the U.S. with propaganda and some government activities shielded from public view. But nothing compares to what is going on in Russia these days. We are comparatively blessed but that doesn’t mean we don’t have to work relentlessly to keep our own government entities focused on transparency and openness in all they do.

This week is Sunshine Week in Michigan. This is the week we celebrate and appreciate open government and government organizations that make transparency a premium value in its operations.

It’s a simple principle, really. When using taxpayer money, politicians and public officials should be completely transparent in their actions and communications. This ensures that the people funding the government can see how their money is being invested.

Unfortunately, Michigan consistently polls toward the bottom of any ranking of states that are the most transparent and open in their governments. We the people are ultimately in control of this situation and it takes non-stop attention to the matter to improve it.

The beautiful thing about transparency and open government is that it’s one of the only things that isn’t a partisan subject. Reasonable Republicans and Democrats agree that we all should have access to all things going on in government, nearly without exception.

It’s a little funny that once in office, some public officials get the feeling they are in a James Bond movie, cue the music. They think everything they do is double-secret; no one should know what the lowest bid was on the sewer project. They think the public can’t handle the truth about any given problem. But the truth is, we can handle it. We can handle all of it. The truth puts us on the path to fixing whatever ails us.

The best public officials understand the importance of full transparency and how it actually protects them by revealing the inner workings of government activity.  Full transparency protects government officials by building trusting relationships between officials and their constituents.  We all feel better when we trust the people we turn the keys over to.

The best leaders know and understand that the principles of transparency and open government allow troubles to be corrected quickly and efficiently. They understand that transparency heals, and provides paths to solutions of our biggest problems. Open government is government in the sunshine. Open government is when we’re at our best.

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