

Sun-e Briefs • April 2010

Sun-e Briefs are a service of the Sunshine Center made possible through a grant from the Knight Foundation. This monthly news update will keep you in the open-government loop by bringing you news about access issues from across the state and updates on the Sunshine Center and North Carolina Open Government Coalition. Coming to you from Elon University, home of the Sunshine Center, we think you'll find **Sun-e Briefs** a valuable addition to your inbox. If you would like to contact us to let us know about a story or to remove your name from our list, please write ncopengov@elon.edu.

In this edition ...

- **Sunshine Week generates articles statewide**
 - **Sunshine Day examines access, investigative journalism**
 - **Elon Poll finds public education of sunshine laws is working**
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Special Sunshine Week 2010 Report

Articles and editorials around the state tackle open government issues with calls for transparency in personnel records, warrants and meetings

- Transparency explored by the North Carolina League of Municipalities executive director

In recognition of Sunshine Week, the executive director of the state's municipal organization calls on cities and towns to consider a review of their public records compliance policies with an eye toward transparency. [Click here to read the full article.](#)

- **Wilmington Star-News Sunshine project: General access to search warrants inconsistent**

Although search warrants are public records under state law, a Wilmington Star-News Sunshine Week project met with mixed results in accessing these important documents. [Click here to read the Star-News report.](#)

- **Fayetteville Observer: Case shows risks of hidden employee records**

A teacher's questionable record was hidden from public review until a high-profile incident led to her pleading guilty to the charge of taking indecent liberties with a minor. The Observer examines how effective public records laws regarding personnel records might have avoided the pain and embarrassment caused by the incident. [Click here to read the story.](#)

- **Greenville Daily Reflector: Let the sun shine on government meetings, documents**

“Office holders can be intoxicated with power and fail to uphold their duty to serve, concealing things that should be in the open,” writes The Greenville Daily Reflector. The Reflector calls on public officials to “respect the men and women who elevate them to office” — and for citizens to be “vocal and relentless” about pressing for access to meetings. [Read the full Reflector editorial.](#)

- **Gaston Gazette: Concealment doesn't make society safer**

Recent court orders involving possible criminal acts do not promote public safety, reports the Gaston Gazette. Those orders involved sealing a 911 emergency call in the death of Kathy Taft, a State Board of Education member, and blocking search warrants and other documents related to the death of a missing woman who was last seen jogging. [Read the Gaston Gazette editorial.](#)

- **Fayetteville Observer: Worker records are outrageously secretive**

“When it comes to public employee personnel records, North Carolina's sunshine is in full eclipse,” writes the Fayetteville Observer. An editorial in the Observer examines the “nearly impenetrable veil” that covers the work records of public employees. [Read the editorial.](#)

- **News & Record: State must examine worker privacy rules**

All but the most basic information about public employees can be withheld under current North Carolina Law. “Excessive secrecy,” writes the Greensboro News & Record, “makes it next to impossible to root out nepotism, patronage and cronyism.” The News & Record examines these issues, including the “glaring example” of the hiring of North Carolina former first lady Mary Easley. [Read the story.](#)

- **Asheville Citizen-Times: Sunshine outlook is a bit cloudy**

“Keeping tabs on government is not a liberal issue, or conservative or libertarian; it's everybody's issue,” writes the Asheville Citizen-Times. The “decidedly mixed record on government openness” in North Carolina has the Citizen-Times calling for cloudy skies. [Read the editorial.](#)

- **News & Observer: Special series on transparency in North Carolina**

Reporter Dan Kane investigated open government in North Carolina with a special three-part series for Sunshine Week. Read about Kane’s special project at the [following link.](#)

Access Kane’s three investigative reports at the News & Observer’s site:

http://www.newsobserver.com/tags/?tag=+keeping_secrets

Sunshine Day 2010

Sunshine Day 2010 starts with honoring 'Sunshine Hero,' winds up with lecture by NPR's Totenberg

Sunshine Day 2010 began March 16 in downtown Greensboro by honoring Sandy Semans as North Carolina's "Sunshine Hero." Semans is managing editor of the Outer Banks Sentinel and has been instrumental in gaining access to government records and proceedings in North Carolina. The day continued with a luncheon at the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, followed by several compelling panels and presentations on public access and government. NPR legal correspondent Nina Totenberg closed out the day with a lecture at the Carolina Theatre, sponsored by the Elon University School of Law. Read about all the day's events at the following links:

Semans honored as state hero for open government:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=944103>

Attorney offers insights into prospects for transparency in North Carolina:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=944113>

State's journalists tell how access helped them get the "big stories:"

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=944106>

City of Greensboro explains public records policies:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=944105>

National panel explores public access and investigative journalism:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=944107>

NPR's Totenberg takes a up-close look at the Supreme Court:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=944119>

Elon Poll finds increased awareness of open government

Findings from Elon Poll suggest public education on sunshine laws is working

The latest Elon University Poll conducted during Sunshine Week found 46 percent of residents were aware of the laws that guarantee citizen access to public meetings and records, which is up from 35 percent last year — that's an increase of 11 percent in just one year. "Citizen awareness of open government laws is indispensable to good government and the continued health of our democracy," said Hugh Stevens, president of the NCOG coalition. "The fact that this number continues to grow is a positive sign."

See a full report in this important poll at:
<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=944160>

Please Support Sunshine in N.C.

With your help, the NCOGC and Sunshine Center promote transparency in government throughout North Carolina and raise public awareness of access laws and issues. Your support makes the work of the NCOGC and Sunshine Center possible — and there has never been a time when support has been more essential. Every dollar you give will be matched by the Knight Foundation. Please provide your crucial support and make gifts payable to the “North Carolina Open Government Coalition.” Mail your gift to:

The Sunshine Center, North Carolina Open Government Coalition
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2850 Campus Box
Elon, NC 27244-2010

(336)278-5506
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Not ready to give yet? Please see this appeal from NCOGC Board President Hugh Stevens:

<http://www.elon.edu/e-net/Note.aspx?id=942099>

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