

Web Search powered by YAHOO! SEARCH



HOME NEWS OBITUARIES OPINIONS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT FEATURES PHOTOS/VIDEO BLOGS THE DOME BE HEALTHY

OUR TOWNS



Please Vote on April 5
Elect Dan Holden Chatham Village Trustee



Our Opinion: Don't weaken revised FOIA

THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

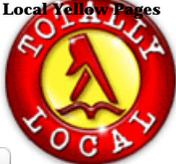
Posted Apr 27, 2010 @ 12:04 AM

Social Media



Yellow Pages

Find whatever you're looking for with Totally Local Yellow Pages



Search

Search provided by local.com

Featured Business »



"We're trying to open things up."

— House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, May 27, 2009, on Senate Bill 189, the overhauled Freedom of Information Act that passed his chamber.

116-0

— The House vote on the revised FOIA law, May 27, 2009.

58-1

— The Senate vote on the revised FOIA law, May 28, 2009.

"The events of the last year underline the importance of openness in government in Illinois."

— Gov. Pat Quinn, Aug. 17, 2009, on the day he signed the new FOIA law.

LAST YEAR in the wake of disgraced former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's arrest and indictment, Illinois lawmakers, with the state's attention focused on them, set out to start repairing the damage and restoring our trust in government.

One of the bills they passed revised the state's Freedom of Information Act. The law was designed to make it easier and faster to get public records and to clarify what was subject to public scrutiny.

This week, the Illinois Senate will vote on whether to gut a major part of the law and bar the release of public employees' personnel evaluations. Despite Attorney General Lisa Madigan's opposition, the Illinois House already has approved the bill, so this is a pivotal vote.

Every lawmaker talks about wanting transparency in government. Only those who vote "no" on House Bill 5154 will be able to say that their actions matched their rhetoric.

AS THE QUOTES above show, legislators passed the FOIA revisions and Gov. Pat Quinn signed them with much back-slapping and self-congratulation.

In an editorial board meeting with this newspaper, House Minority Leader Tom Cross, R-Oswego, cast passage of the bill as a no-brainer, no big deal. "Low-hanging fruit," he called it.

In an opinion piece in this newspaper, Senate President John Cullerton, D-Chicago, listed the revised FOIA as one step "on the road to reform" and one of the "best ways to stomp out corruption."

NEWSPAPER ADS

HOOGLAND CENTER FOR THE ARTS



PUBLISHED ON 3/17/2011

BULLOCK GARAGES



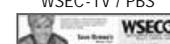
PUBLISHED ON 3/17/2011

PONTIAC RV



PUBLISHED ON 3/17/2011

WSEC-TV / PBS



PUBLISHED ON 3/16/2011

VIEW MORE

Then, just weeks into the law's effective date on New Year's Day, lawmakers cynically began trying to gut the law for which they just voted and took credit.

House Bill 5154 is a sop to public employee unions who took a beating during this legislative session when the General Assembly reduced pension benefits for future teachers and state workers. The bill contradicts another part of the law, which says, "the disclosure of information that bears on the public duties of public employees and officials shall not be considered an invasion of personal privacy."

We suspect some senators will calculate that voting "yes" is an easy way for them to soothe damaged relations with angry unions and possibly shake loose some campaign contributions from them.

But approving this bill will only fuel public cynicism about lawmakers' willingness to pass laws that benefit powerful public employee unions, who in turn, provide the manpower and money to get them re-elected.

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNIONS cast this as a battle between hardworking employees and nosy reporters who want to go digging around personnel records, nitpicking at small mistakes they find.

Recession-impacted media organizations barely have the manpower to cover all the big stories, let alone carp on the minor details in a low-level employee's evaluation. FOIA is about finding and documenting big mistakes, such as State Journal-Register stories last year about a Sangamon County deputy who had 42 complaints filed against him in 13 years.

This isn't just about reporters' access to documents. Senators should keep in mind that members of the public — their constituents — file far more FOIA requests than the media. They want to know what the government they pay for is doing.

The proposition that members of the taxpaying public have no right to see the performance evaluations of their employees whose salaries they pay is outrageous. The Illinois Senate should reject it.

Copyright 2010 The State Journal-Register. Some rights reserved

Popular Videos



U.S. fighter jet crashes in Libya



Japan Quake Serves As Reminder for California



Presidents honor George H.W. Bush



Massive Shark Jaw for Sale in Texas



Captured NY Times Journalists Released in Libya



McCain on no-fly zone: "It's been very effective"

Breaking News: GTSO Stock

GTSO JV Looks to Ship New Rare Earths out of Mongolia Next
www.RareEarthExporters.com

Mom is 55 With 0 Wrinkles

Mom Reveals Shocking \$5 Trick For Erasing Wrinkles.
www.LifestyleHeadlines.com

RealAge Official Site

Time is running out to get in shape for the holidays.
www.RealAge.com

Ads by Yahoo!

Comments (6)

artful dodger 11 months ago Report Abuse

If the democrats in the state legislature will stop the slavish bidding of the teacher's unions, then maybe the FOIA would work. The ink wasn't even dry and the democrats were tripping over themselves to ammend teachers from being included. The LAST thing we need is to have teacher accountable to anyone, for any reason, ever.

There, I said it.

curiosity KTC 11 months ago Report Abuse

Is the SJR gonna run this claptrap every Tuesday? You are doing your readers NO favors, merely pounding your own drum. artful dodger, when YOU agree voluntarily to make every aspect of your life open to public perusal, then the teachers should agree also. Not before. And just so you know, I don't care where the revenue originates, just because someone goes to work for an entity that pays with tax revenue does NOT make them in perpetual servitude to taxpayers. Those hiring should be the accountable ones, to taxpayers,

the hired accountable to the ones hiring. The general public has no special need need to know, & micromanaging is a recipe for disaster.

Naughtius Maximus 11 months ago  Report Abuse

Curiosity, you continue to post your misguised comments on this and I continue to rebut them. The SJ-R is not a public, taxpayer-funded orgaization, why would there be a need to see their employee records? Would you say the same thing if it was the WSJ investigating corruption in the Obama White House? I doubt it. All public employees are subject to the same laws, not just superisors.

And teachers should not be given special treatment. Don't weaken the FOIA law, which truly gives power to the people, the democracy.

Sainter 11 months ago  Report Abuse

IMO personnel documents should be confidential.

Parent33w 11 months ago  Report Abuse

Trust in government? The Founding Fathers and others NEVER trusted government, not even the one that they, themselves, put into place. I doubt their opinions on 'modern' government would be any less cynical. Funny read; not only should FOIA not be curtailed, people should start a movement to curb, via an amendment, the use of the congressional secrecy clause in the Constitution and similar utilizations in the executice branch. So much power has been delegated by government it might be nice to at least know who is running things and what they are doing every trillion dollars or so.

Bookworm 10 months ago  Report Abuse

Of course taxpayers have the right to know how their money is being spent. However, I seriously question whether making employee evaluations public will do any good in this regard.

First of all, because as everyone knows, evaluations are subjective and largely based on the OPINION of the person doing the evaluating. A bad employee who sucks up to his/her boss can get glowing evaluations while a good employee who for some reason isn't favored by the boss can get a bad or mediocre one.

If an incompetent or crooked state employee is hired purely due to political or family connections to the agency head or whatever, do you really think they will receive honest evaluations that expose how incompetent they are? Especially if the evaluator KNOWS it could be made public?

Also, as pointed out by some posters yesterday, there are clauses in state rules and union contracts that mandate raises based on levels of performance -- x percent for 'excellent,' y percent for 'good,' etc. This may lead to otherwise good employees getting poor or mediocre performance ratings simply to avoid having to be given a raise. So the effect of making evaluations FOIA-able will likely be to make them even less meaningful than they are now.

Salary and benefit levels, formal disciplinary citations and grievances are objective criteria that can be easily compared. Employee evaluations don't work that way.

Login or register to post a comment:

Login

Username:

Password:

 [Forgot password](#)

Register

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

I agree to the terms of use

I am over 13 years of age

NOTE: Your inbox must accept emails from "no-reply@gatehousemedia.com"

Site Services

- [Contact Us](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Place Ad](#)
- [Online Forms](#)
- [Archives](#)

Market Place

- [Jobs](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Homes](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Newspaper Ads](#)
- [Boats Magazine](#)

Sports

- [Preps](#)
- [College](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [AP Sports](#)
- [Pro Football Weekly](#)

People

- [Bernard Schoenburg](#)
- [Dave Bakke](#)
- [Chris Britt](#)
- [Kathryn Rem](#)
- [Brian Mackey](#)

Other Sites

- [Behealthyspringfield.com](#)
- [The Dome](#)
- [SO Magazine](#)
- [Drive Illinois](#)
- [Prairie State Outdoors](#)

Features

- [Health](#)
- [Voice](#)
- [Food](#)
- [Arts & Entertainment](#)
- [Outdoors](#)

[Contact us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [About our Ads](#)

The State Journal-Register | Springfield, IL 62701

Copyright © 2006-2011 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons license](#), except where noted.

SEO by [eLocalListing](#) | [Advertiser profiles](#) | [RadarFrog Merchant Directory](#)