

EDITORIAL Sunshine Week

Every year about this time, there is a week that probably doesn't get nearly the attention it deserves, but it absolutely should. It's called Sunshine Week, observed this year March 15-21, and its purpose is simple: to remind Americans that government works best when it operates in the open.



Jill M. Friesz

Sunshine Week is an annual initiative that promotes open government and transparency between government officials and private sector groups who all share a common belief — the public has a right to know what its government is doing.

It sounds like common sense, but transparency isn't automatic. It only works when people are paying attention.

And that's where local newspapers come in.

In communities across North Dakota and across the country newspapers are the people sitting in those meetings. We're in the chairs at city council meetings, county commission meetings, school board meetings where decisions are made that directly impact our neighbors. Sometimes those meetings are packed with residents. More often than not, they're not.

But the discussions still matter.

When a school board debates budgets or policies, when a county commission considers road projects or taxes, or when a city council weighs new ordinances, those conversations shape the future of the community. Local newspapers are there to listen, take notes and report back so residents know what's happening, even if they weren't able to attend the meeting themselves.

In many ways, local newspapers serve as the community's eyes and ears.

Sunshine Week is also a good reminder of another responsibility voters have this year.

Across North Dakota, ballots will ask residents to designate an official newspaper for their county. It may seem like a small question tucked among larger races, but it carries real importance.

The newspaper chosen as the official newspaper is responsible for publishing legal notices — the public announcements governments are required to make about meetings, hearings, budgets, ordinances, foreclosures, elections and other matters that directly affect citizens.

When you go to vote, make sure to select the Morton County News Journal as the official paper.

Local newspapers are uniquely equipped to provide that service. We already serve as the historical record of our communities, documenting the decisions, milestones and challenges that shape the places we call home.

Sunshine Week reminds us that democracy doesn't just happen in Washington, D.C., or even in the state capitol. It happens in school gyms, courthouse meeting rooms and small-town city halls every day.

So this week, as we recognize Sunshine Week, it's worth remembering that open government only works when someone is watching — and when citizens stay engaged in the process.

That's exactly what local newspapers are here to do.

THE WORLD around us

War Intensifies

Fighting between Israel and Iran continues to escalate as new airstrikes and drone attacks hit multiple locations across the region. Iran has targeted infrastructure in the Gulf, including a drone strike that caused a fire at Dubai International Airport and temporarily halted flights. The conflict has also disrupted shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for global oil transport, pushing oil prices above \$100 per barrel and rais-

ing fears of a worldwide energy crisis.

Major Storm System

A massive storm system is sweeping across parts of the United States, bringing blizzards, strong winds, and the possibility of tornadoes. The storm has already caused power outages and dangerous travel conditions across several states. Meteorologists say the system could impact millions as it continues moving east with heavy snow, ice, and severe weather.

PUBLIC MEETINGS (BEHIND CLOSED DOORS)



LITTLE PASTURE ON THE PRAIRIE Just Enjoy

I enjoyed hearing from quite a few of you about my column a few weeks back concerning the "fog calendar," and its predictive abilities! Apparently, this knowledge has also proven useful to some of you over the years and has been shared and passed down through your families, as all good folk wisdom should be. (For those that missed the column, the fog calendar predicts that 84 days—or 3 lunar cycles—after a significant fog event, there will be precipitation in the form of either snow, rain, or more fog. Consequently, it is very handy for advanced forecasting!)

If you, Dear Reader, still doubt or dismiss the fog calendar, here's some more evidence to sway you: The precipitation event predicted by the epic fog I wrote about in that earlier column arrived right on schedule. After months of dry, unusually warm weather, a blizzard rolled its way across the prairie this weekend, carrying (and depositing) great piles of snow along with gusts of wind and bitterly cold temperatures.

The timing was not great. When I first counted forward from our January fog, I thought whatever precipitation came our way would hit before calving started. "It'll be close, though," I told my husband.

Then last week, he had a surprise, slightly premature calf. And then another. "I guess we are calving early," he said.

Usually, nobody is very excited about a blizzard, but "We need the moisture," was repeat-

ed in every household across the region as the wind howled and the snow fell.

Thursday, the day before the storm, I took the kids to Rapid City to run errands, and we'd ended up stripping down to t-shirts by mid-afternoon because it was so warm. High winds, the precursor to the storm, were whipping through the city's streets, and the whole region was under "red flag warnings" because extended drought, heat, and wind are a recipe for wildfires.

Sure enough, before evening, there were two separate wildfires blazing in the Black Hills, one already covering over 7,000 acres with no signs of slowing. Driving through the city streets, the sound of distant sirens blaring,

I felt chilled despite the unseasonably warm weather. It's only been a few years since we had to evacuate from our ranch when a prairie fire raged nearby. The fire jumped the highway a mile west of our house, but I still remember packing to leave, then seeing the bright line of flame in the rearview mirror as we drove east.

All of which is to say: When people around here shake their heads and intone, "we need the moisture," they aren't speaking hyperbolically. Even without the danger of fire, the destruction wrought by drought is unassailable and wrench-



Eliza Blue

ing. Looking out across the dried, gray grass last week, the wind pulling dusty clouds of soil around in swirls, it was hard not to feel dread welling up in my body.

Today, the same ground is covered in soft, sparkling whiteness. The storm has passed, and though it is still cold, the sun is shining. It feels like a gift.

By the time you read these words, the temperatures will have soared back up into the "unseasonably warm" category again. The kids are looking forward to the potential of wearing shorts by the end of the week. They were also ex-

cited about playing in the snow with their friends at recess. What a wild shift in a very short amount of time!

Meanwhile, though my husband has been up around the clock for the past 96 hours, he's not complaining either. The babies born during the storm are doing well, as are their mamas. By tomorrow, the herd will be spread across the pasture, resting and meandering as they please, while the melting snow seeps softly into the soil. The birds who migrated back early will be singing their spring songs, no longer regretting their life choices. The kids and dogs will be covered in mud, and my husband will hopefully be taking a well-deserved nap. For now, we can set aside some of our worries and just enjoy, and I hope you can too.

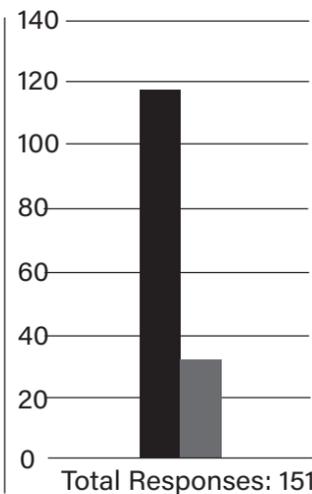
Question of the Week

Do you sort clothes before washing them?

Yes - 13
No - 73

Next week's question...
How many times do you use a bath towel before washing it?

A. Once
B. 2-4
C. 5-7
D. 8-10



Submit answer to:
jill@gspublishing.net or answer on our Facebook page.
This is a weekly feature seeking public opinion. It is not a scientific poll.