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Dixon Award Winner Makes Painful Points

Oct 13, 2016

We thoroughly enjoyed reading Steve Terrell's acceptance speech at the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government Dixon Award luncheon Oct. 5. It was published in the Santa Fe New Mexican Sunday.

Terrell made two painful points we all must face. Transparency in government is at an all time low. In this election season all candidates are talking transparency. It is our experience that once elected, none of them mean it. They're all too busy trying to cover their own and their buddies' behinds to even make an attempt to do their jobs nominally and fake transparency.

His second point is a sore one with us. He closed his remarks by suggesting in these trying financial times the state is suffering, if it eliminated all the mouthpiece (our word, not Terrell's) positions it would save taxpayer money and actually make government more transparent. Would it solve the deficit problem? No, but it would help and it would be a step toward returning government to the people.



We looked back through 10 years of editorial archives and we've written three previous editorials on the waste of taxpayer money on "public information officers." And we reiterate that fabricated title is an oxymoron, at best. They don't serve the public. They serve whoever hired them. They don't disseminate information, they gate-keep it, massage it and spin it. And an officer is a title held for someone doing something honorable. Flaks are far from that.

The attorney general is supposed to be the big hammer when it comes to transparency. We've elected an increasingly apathetic A.G. in New Mexico when it comes to public access. Patricia Madrid was bad. Gary King was awful. Hector Balderas is making them look like rookies when it comes to ignoring public meetings and records violations.

The two worst flaks we've had to deal with are Phil Sisneros, under King and James Hallinan, under Balderas. State Police flaks work pretty hard at not serving the public too.

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Most flaks return calls slowly or not at all. They will fight you at every step of a request for information and make a reporter's life miserable as he or she pursues public information. Not only do most not know the law regarding open records and meetings, they rarely know the subject matter a citizen or media person may be inquiring about. How much more cumbersome could government at all levels make it?

Talk about a lot of useless information. We received a press release Monday from the flak in the Office of Superintendent of Insurance. It was two pages that warned people that when a lot of cars get stolen insurance rates go up. Has anyone ever had their car insurance rates go down? The exciting piece of information in the release was the flak asking us to inform readers to lock their cars, don't leave valuables in your car and park in lighted areas. We wonder what that cost taxpayers.

Terrell is one of the few print people out on the front lines fighting for important information and writing stories that matter to readers. We were happy to hear he was chosen to receive the Dixon award and hope to see many more years of good reporting from his state beat.

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