



COMMENTARY

Government must learn that people are watching

What the citizens of Cherokee County witnessed over past three weeks was grass-roots democracy at its best.

When the Galena City Council, on July 7, voted to annex 160 acres for a landfill without discussion or debate, it knew (it HAD to know) that it was going to get blowback. I don't think that to a man and woman the Council knew how big that blowback would be.

Within days, people in neighboring, unincorporated Riverton began to get together and discuss what they could do to stop this project. And it just wasn't a case of good, old-fashioned NIMBY, either. These folks had a problem with the way it was being done.

The landfill's most savvy op-

ponents asserted from the get-go that the Council must have violated the Kansas Open Meetings Act. How else could such a body tackle complex topics such as annexation

and contracts without having tossed it around a little? How could they not have had a public discussion or voted

to go into executive session under a legal allowance covering such a deal?

It was a little like fish or relatives after a few days. It was starting to stink. And they called the Council on it.

Did the Galena city government

violate KOMA? I don't know. And the investigation by County Attorney Nathan Coleman ended without a yes or no determination. But the Council un-rung the landfill

bell in one special meeting, attended a public forum on the matter and, in a second special meeting, put a stake through

the landfill's heart. The Council and Mayor Dale Oglesby say they didn't violate the law. And as it stands now, that is correct. But they ended up doing exactly what they would have had to do if Coleman had ruled that they had violated KOMA.



RUNNING MY MOUTH

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And the mayor went one step further. He apologized.

It was the correct and courageous thing to do. Galena could have put the issue on hold for a time and hoped the scrutiny would end. Instead the mayor said, "we're sorry" and pledged to be better neighbors and stewards of open government.

Online and in person, I have heard views that it wasn't good enough. Those people need to sit down and shut up. Be good winners. You showed Cherokee County and everyone watching how democracy works. You killed the landfill. The Council gave your representatives a seat at the table when the five-month moratorium on even discussing a landfill ends. And they apologized for being

stupid, er, "zealous." This isn't a half-loaf. It's a whole loaf of prime French bread with butter and a free toaster.

And, even if the Galena City Council or others (I guarantee that they were watching) try a similar bit of shenanigans/poor judgment, they know it will be while groups like the Cherokee County Citizens Action Group are watching.

Sunshine is the best disinfectant for government. And public bodies in Cherokee County are about to get a tan.

But, then again, I am probably just running my mouth.

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