OMNI SUNSHINE/FOIA WEEK NEWSLETTER #1, MARCH 11-17, 2012. Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace.
Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/ For a knowledge-based peace, justice, and ecology movement and an informed citizenry as the foundation for change.
For Democracy to be possible, many other institutions are necessary, including free information transparency; secrecy is the enforcer of totalitarianism.

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Proclaim it Sunshine Week

Since Sunshine Week was launched in 2005, many city and state officials have recognized and committed to open government through official proclamations. Some have also held hearings on open government issues or scheduled special events such as open government training sessions for public employees and the launching of a special webpage.

To mark Sunshine Week 2012, we urge citizens and civic organizations across the country to again press state and local officials to find meaningful ways to participate in Sunshine Week to demonstrate that they, too, are committed to true transparency in government.

One way this can be done is by adopting a meaningful open government proclamation that pledges specific steps to enhance the public’s right to know.

Association of Alternative Newsweeklies
Center for Democracy & Technology
Center for Public Integrity
Center for Responsive Politics
Collaboration on Government Secrecy
Electronic Frontier Foundation
First Amendment Center
Investigative News Network
League of Women Voters
http://www.sunshineweek.org/
The National Freedom of Information Coalition protects our right to an open, transparent and accountable government.

A nonpartisan coalition, we count as members coalitions, organizations, and individuals from all across the country.

We award grants that support the growth of state organizations that work for open government.

We administer the Knight FOI Fund, which exists to offer financial support in open government lawsuits and important FOI cases.

Established in 1989, NFOIC and the FOI Center are housed in the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism.

Abraham Lincoln said: "Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe." Join us in our fight for open government.

NFOIC is a nonpartisan alliance of state open government groups and freedom of information supporters.

We work to enhance government transparency through education, advocacy and litigation.
We award grants, publish FOI and FOIA news and help gain access to open meetings and public records.

FOIA Litigation News

NFOIC supports lawsuit challenging new CIA charges
In a federal district court lawsuit supported by NFOIC and the Knight FOI Fund, a Virginia organization is challenging a new CIA regulation that obstructs citizen challenges to government overclassification by imposing excessive charges in the review process. More > >

Open government lawsuit forces revote by county supervisors
The San Diego County Board of Supervisors has done an about face on a controversial land development vote, after a Californians Aware lawsuit claimed the Board violated California's open meeting law. More > >

Judge orders Kentucky state agency to pay legal fees for illegally withholding public records
In a sharply critical decision, a judge has ordered a state agency to pay $16,550 in fines and $56,663 in legal costs to three newspapers for illegally withholding public records involving child-abuse deaths and serious injuries. More > >

Knight FOI Fund

The Knight FOI Fund exists to offer financial support in open government lawsuits. It was established to fuel and assist the pursuit of important FOI cases. The need arose from the realization that the economic crisis and the evolution of the news media has resulted in declining levels of FOI advocacy.

More about the Knight FOI Fund here.

Open Government News and Blog

NFOIC’s FOI Friday
Open Data Handbook 1.0 introduces open data ... NASA to open source web operations ... Homeland analysts told to monitor policy debates in social media ... NYC makes internal ratings of 18,000 public school teachers available ... Bill adding teeth to Iowa’s open-records law has new life ... More > >

Court ruling keeps federal mugshots secret
The federal government is under no obligation to release mugshots of accused criminals under the Freedom of Information Act, even though many states and localities routinely make such booking photos public, a federal appeals court ruled Wednesday. More > >

White House refuses to reveal ties with Monsanto
Despite requests made under the Freedom of Information Act for correspondence out of the White House, the Obama administration is refusing to comply with calls to disclose discussions with Monsanto-linked lobbyists. More > >

Public records requests are hit and miss in Jackson, Mississippi
The city of Jackson fails about four times in 10 to respond to public records requests within the time limit set by state law. A Clarion-Ledger analysis of open records logs identified around 225 requests that weren't fulfilled within seven business days since the law was changed in July 2010. More > >

More from our open government blog here.

Join the conversation

More news from NFOIC and the Web here.
Let the Sunshine In!

FOI Activities for Chapters, Classrooms and Newsrooms

Sunshine Week

- Sunshine Week Web site
- Sunshine Week 2009 Survey of State Government Information [PDF, 52 KB]
- Chapter FOI program ideas
- Campus FOI resources
- FOI activities for newsrooms
- Writing about FOI
- Quotable expert sources
- FOI studies and reports
- Curriculum and classroom ideas for teachers
- FOI resources
- Sunshine Week Logos

New in 2011: The SPJ Black Hole Award: The Society of Professional Journalists launched the Black Hole Award this year to highlight the most heinous violations of the public’s right to know. By exposing examples of unnecessary and harmful secrecy, we hope to educate the public to their rights and hold government accountable. The Freedom of Information Committee accepted nominations for 2010 violations, coordinated by committee member Mike Farrell of the University of Kentucky, and selected the winner along with five runners-up. This award will be handed out annually during national Sunshine Week. Click here to read about this year’s winner and the five runners-up.

Reporter’s Guide to FERPA: Navigating the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act: Ever have a tough time getting public records from schools or universities? We feel your pain and are here to help you. The federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act has been twisted beyond recognition, keeping school lunch menus, graduation honors and athletic travel records secret. Take back your right to information with this guide, produced by the Society of Professional Journalists in conjunction with the Georgia First Amendment Foundation.

Fostering FOI

It’s our duty as journalists, and a key mission for SPJ, to shine light into the dark recesses of government secrecy. To that end, this SPJ Web site provides ideas for chapters, newsrooms and instructors to promote and further freedom of information in their communities. We’ve gleaned the best of chapter FOI programs from recent years as well as great Sunshine Week projects. We’ve gathered tips, facts and quotable expert sources for writing stories or editorials about FOI. We’ve provided classroom activities for instructors and ideas for newsroom brown-bags. These ideas can be applied during National Sunshine Week, which is March 13-19, or any time of the year. Let the sunshine in!
Sunshine Week

National Sunshine Week has been celebrated every March since 2005, thanks to the hard work of the American Society of News Editors. Participants include print, broadcast and online news media, civics groups, non-profits, schools and libraries. The activities are funded from a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to enlighten the public about their right to government information and strengthen their communities.

Click here to contact the Project Sunshine Chair in your state.