

EDITORIAL: From high-speed rail to NSA secrets, let sun shine in



Open government needs more protection than ever, which is the focus of the 10th annual Sunshine Week.

This shouldn't be the case.

Taxpayers in Fresno and the nation have paid handsomely for digital technology to facilitate the flow of information. Politicians, more than ever, promise to bring more transparency to their offices. And the explosion of social media has unleashed a torrent of instant communication.

But public officials often forget or don't acknowledge that their bosses are the people who elected them. Officials erect barriers to public information to spare themselves being second-guessed.

For years, they have stretched response times to turning over information in the hope that whoever filed the request would give up and move on. Another time-honored tactic is to go to court to block their release of information.

The latest trick is to charge exorbitant fees. As The Bee's Tim Sheehan reported Sunday, if you wanted to examine the online court records in lawsuits filed since last summer against the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the tab would be in excess of \$1,100.

Courts are established to do the people's work. They are paid for with tax dollars. Any charges to examine public records online should be minimal. Same for copying court records.

Some public officials resist just because they're confused. The Center for Investigative Reporting sought state citations for patient abuses in long-term care facilities controlled by the state. When state regulators initially released the records, they were so heavily redacted as to be useless.

To the benefit of everyone, including people with vulnerable loved ones who are mentally ill or disabled, the California Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the state had to release the records with minimal redactions. It shouldn't have

required a Supreme Court decision. The state should have complied, embarrassing though the documents might have been.

This is the 10th anniversary of Sunshine Week, a national initiative to highlight the importance of safeguarding the public's access to information. You're forgiven if it's not on your calendar.

But transparent government isn't something to take for granted. From NSA surveillance to Hillary Clinton's emails as secretary of state to how much your school district spends on legal fees, democracy depends on everyone having all the information.

So read a paper. Support a First Amendment nonprofit. Don't think your government doesn't need your attention and participation. Working together, we can let the sun shine in.

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