

From: redfieldrh@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, January 6, 2016 5:18 PM
To: DOA Public Records Board Comments
Subject: Electronic records belong to Wisconsin's citizens

As a Wisconsin resident, I am commenting on the disturbing trends to block access to key political information.

I would like state officials obsessed with conducting their business in private know that drawing the curtains on open government is unacceptable. Citizens are becoming increasingly aware of the behind-the-scenes efforts to hinder a democratic process by blocking access to political activity. If this continues, there will be consequences in this election year for those who try to curb access to government.

A policy revision was recently made in August by the Public Records Board, which oversees the preservation and handling of government records. Quietly, with no public notice or reporting, the board changed the definition of "transitory records" — those deemed to have only temporary significance.

Make no mistake, we the people of this state KNOW that the board's action will be used by people in power to limit access to text messages, emails, Facebook posts and other electronic communication by public employees. It would also encourage them to conduct the public's business in the shadows. When government employees conduct the public's business and spend the taxpayers' dollars electronically, citizens have an interest in those communications and a right to see them.

That point was made crystal clear just one day after the board's quiet decision to redefine transitory records. Gov. Scott Walker's administration hid behind the board's action, saying it didn't have text messages requested by the Wisconsin State Journal and adding that officials didn't have to retain such messages.

Those text messages about a pet corporate welfare project belonged to the public just as surely as written notes from the administration would have belonged to the public. Walker's administration demonstrated in this instance, as it has time and again, that it has little regard for open government while claiming that it follows the law. It has done so multiple times in the past year under the state's current system of one-party rule.

After the board's action came to light, open records attorneys and advocates accused the Public Records Board of violating the state's open meetings law with its notice for the August meeting, which did not specifically mention the transitory records issue, and also with its minutes, which failed to provide details of the board's action or of any vote. They also raised questions about whether the board had [overstepped its authority](#) and stepped into the Legislature's territory by attempting to redefine public records.

The Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council [filed a complaint](#) Dec. 14 with the Dane County district attorney against the state board, alleging open meetings law violations. Matthew Blessing, chairman of the board, said the August vote was aimed at clarifying existing policies for handling transitory records. "I thus do not believe that the minor clarifying language ... was substantive enough to warrant inclusion in the August 24 agenda," Blessing said in an email to the Journal Sentinel.

What the board did has proved to be substantive already. What that meant is that they wanted to curb the public's ability to know what their elected officials were doing with their money.

We are on to these and many more political shenanigans. They are a direct threat to the well being of the residents of this state. Do not do this.

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