



Carmage Walls Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.) Led by the editorials and columns of Publisher Steve Stewart, The State Journal's persistent calls for transparency in state and local governments got the attention of public officials – and, in a couple of cases, led to important actions on behalf of open government. In the case of a major redevelopment of government land in the core of downtown Frankfort, Kentucky, two groups involved in the decision-making process were holding secret meetings until Stewart and The State Journal protested. One group voluntarily opened its meetings; the other was forced to do so by an opinion of the state attorney general. In another case, Stewart and The State Journal persistently challenged the board of directors of a municipal utility for keeping secret its analysis of a controversial electricity contract. The leading advocate of secrecy was eventually removed from the utility board by the city commission.

Mike Pence for president?

President Mike Pence. The words do not trip lightly off the tongue. But as special counsel Bob Mueller dives ever deeper into the murky waters of Trump family enterprises — and the campaign's possible collusion with Russia — a Pence presidency must be contemplated.

Donald Trump's journey from abrasively transformative to annoyingly ineffective would not have been enough to make the president's impeachment or resignation much of a probability. But recent developments kindle thoughts of Vice President Pence in the top job.

Now, Pence would not be my first or 10th choice for president. Even among Republicans, he scores well below Ohio Gov. John Kasich and Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska, both of whom have taken steps suggesting a challenge to Trump in 2020.

Good luck to them, but this presidency may not last that long. Consider how far Trump has fallen in only six (can't call them "short") months. Congressional Republicans who once quaked at his nutty tweets now shrug. Foreign leaders openly mock him. And though Trump can still find 12 rapturous faces in West Virginia to pose in front of, his national approval numbers grow more pathetic by the week.

Many liberal friends don't see Pence as much of an improvement over Trump. Pence, they say, is as hostile as Trump to reproductive rights and the Affordable Care Act (although, as governor of Indiana, he did expand Medicaid). He called global warming a "myth," said condoms don't protect against sexually transmitted disease and insisted "smoking doesn't kill."

And while Pence seems to have majored in junk science, he minored in double-moral book-keeping. The ease at which he delivers falsehoods under a smooth mask of piety is most unpleasant. Pence likes to preface his lies with "Let me be clear" — as in his tweet, "Let me be clear: The Senate health-care bill strengthens and secures Medicaid." Actually, the Senate bill would have

knocked the stuffing out of Medicaid, slashing \$800 billion over 10 years.

Some may see propriety in a man who asserts he won't dine alone with a woman not his wife. I see a man lacking basic self-control.

Despite these reservations, a Pence presidency would offer welcome relief in the years before the 2020 election. That's because Pence has one significant advantage over Trump. He is sane.

He would not insult our closest allies for the heck of it — and is highly unlikely to have accepted favors from Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Few believe that mere affection for the strongman prompted Trump's shocking remark that the U.S. might not help defend the Baltic States should Russia attack them. This happens to be our obligation under NATO.

Pence is now on cleanup patrol, recently reassuring Baltic leaders, "We are with you." And he told the prime minister of Georgia that the U.S. stands by his country's wish to join NATO, a prospect Putin abhors.

Pence is, in effect, telling friends, "Ignore the crazy man with the Twitter account." This is cause for hope.

During the campaign, Pence did object to some of Trump's more disgraceful outbursts, however meekly. When Trump smeared Indiana-born Judge Gonzalo Curiel over his Mexican heritage, Pence called the remarks "inappropriate."

Those opposed to the Pence agenda can argue with reason that he'd probably be more adept at furthering it than Trump has been. They take solace in seeing little getting done so far.

But the nation has yet to face an international crisis under its erratic, ill-informed leader. For Americans concerned about their safety and standing in the world, three years is a scary long time.

So, strange as it seems — and I choke saying it — Mike Pence for president.

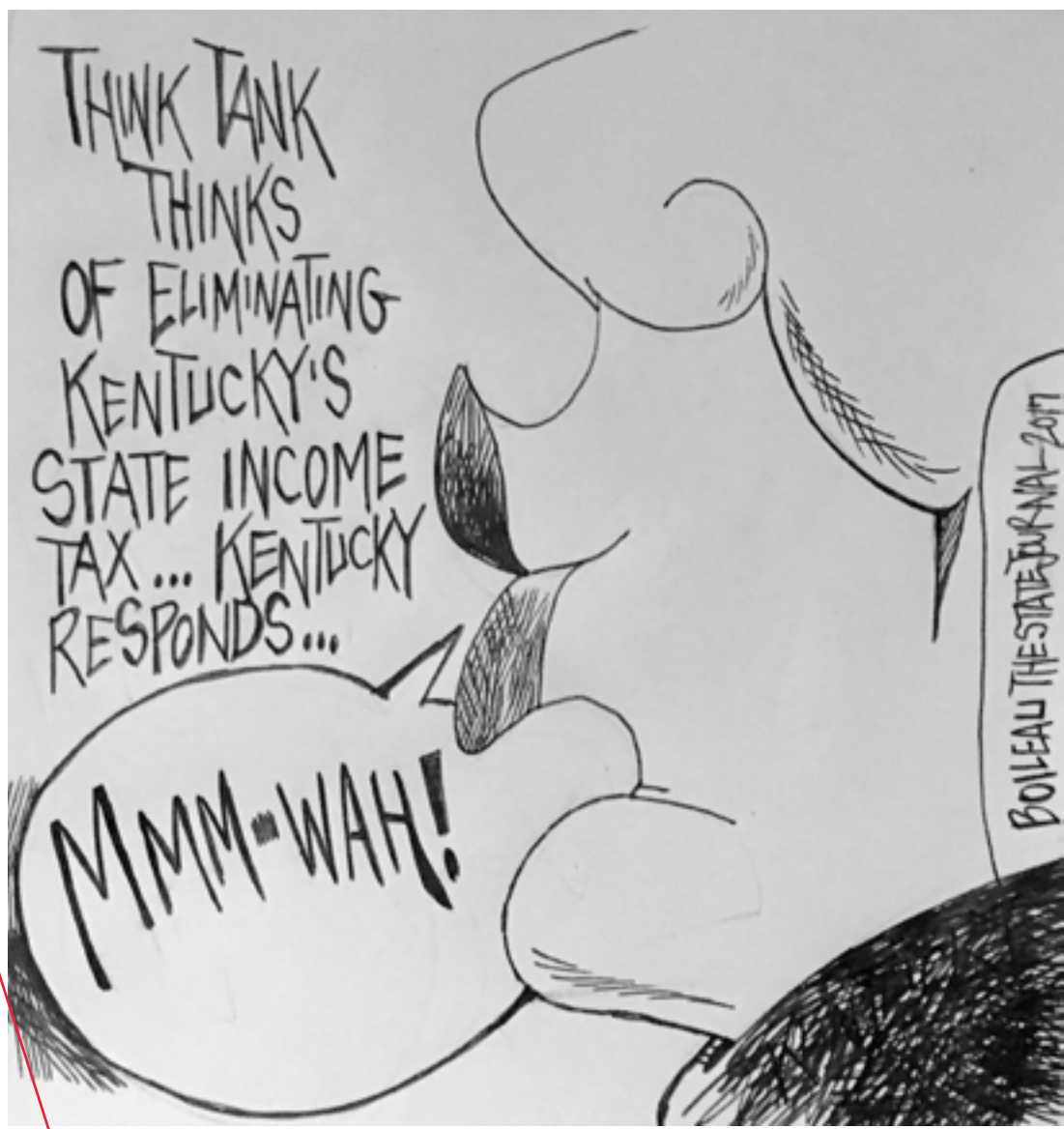
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Froma Harrop

Syndicated Columnist

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EDITORIAL

Open door policy

While we appreciate the diligence of those getting the community organized to answer the state's call for a vision for downtown Frankfort, we hope they'll rethink their decision to do so behind closed doors.

The group, consisting of city, county, tourism and Downtown Frankfort Inc. representatives, outlined its mission in a guest column in Sunday's edition: "We are researching funding streams that may be used and procurement processes that must be followed that will allow us to hire a professional who will help the community formulate a development strategy. And we are gathering information that will allow these professionals to better understand our community and the desires of our citizens."

That's important but innocuous work, raising a simple question: Why not let taxpayers and other stakeholders observe?

If officials — local and state — should have learned anything by now from community reaction to the controversial plan to demol-

ish the Capital Plaza complex, including the Frankfort Convention Center, it's the need for complete transparency in every ounce of future deliberations.

Since state officials sprung the Capital Plaza plan on the community last spring, Frankfort citizens have been understandably skeptical of the state's intentions and motives — and of city and county governments' response to the state plan. Distrust was further fueled by last week's disclosure that the state, unbeknownst to the community, had "offered" the embattled convention center to city government for a dollar, with an understanding that essential renovations and ongoing maintenance would be the city's responsibility.

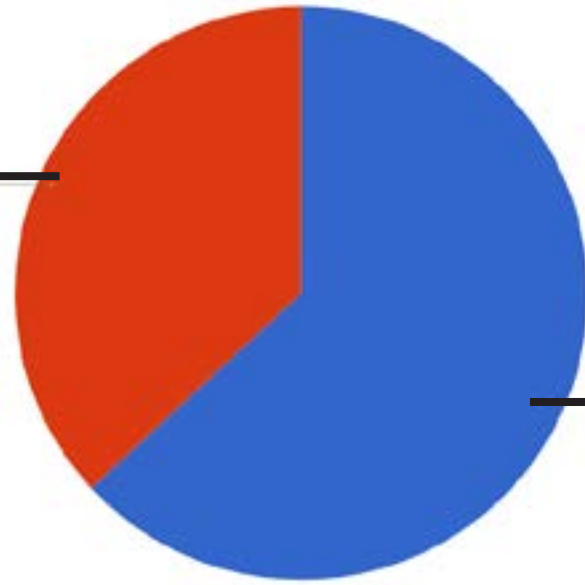
Taxpayers aren't sure whom or what to believe. Closed-door meetings — even about something as simple as hiring a consultant — will undermine citizen confidence in local officials charged with forging the community's path forward.

POLL RESULTS

Would you be in favor of local government's taking ownership of the Convention Center?

36.9% (39 votes) No

63.1% (53 votes) Yes



WRITE US

The State Journal encourages letters to the editor. Have a topic you feel strongly about? Express yourself in a letter to the editor. Letters of no more than 350 words should be emailed to letters@state-journal.com.

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Barry Saturday

GUEST COLUMNIST

All Kentuckians should welcome pension reform

New leadership should keep promises, empower public employees, teachers

Kentuckians are wary of the whole pensions conversation, and as they say, lack of understanding breeds fear (it's a real challenge for us to think when we're afraid).

As a financial adviser and former high school social studies educator (I also have family members who rely on Kentucky pension payments to pay their bills), I can sympathize with all sides on this issue. I also know that most Americans, including Kentuckians, have very little knowledge of retirement plans of any sort, be they pensions or 401(k)s/403(b)s. To really have this conversation, let's start by building some understanding, which can alleviate some of the fear and create a healthier and more productive discussion.

As Gov. Matt Bevin recently said, "benefits will not be altered for (retirees), and ... current employees will get what they thought they were going to get." This should allay an initial set of fears. Still, some structural reforms are badly needed.

What happens if we don't make changes? If we do nothing, retirees in the KRS system could stop receiving a paycheck within about six years when the fund goes bust due to pension underfunding. If we continue the same path of accruing massive unfunded liabilities, more of state government employees' pay would have to be diverted to fund their retirement accounts as well as an increase in state taxes, and a huge increase in employer contributions to their employees.

If we look at the benefits of pensions, it's easy to see the attraction, though they have significant downsides. The biggest advantage for pensions is that they're perceived to be a guaranteed benefit, which provides peace of mind and financial security. Talk about a fear reducer. That really is an excellent feature once you're retired, as, in theory, you never worry about your finances in retirement.

The big downside to this should be clear by now: Retirees have zero control over their retirement assets. Retirement beneficiaries have little transparency into the funding decisions and investment assumptions made in Frankfort. That's a big reason Kentucky finds itself in such a precarious predicament.

How could changing to a 403(b) plan for new and recent hires help? First, 403(b)s are, in simple terms, a 401(k) designed for non-profit organizations like government workers, religious institutions, charity employees, etc. Most employees who have a retirement plan in the for-profit world have a similar type of plan, which takes an employee contribution, often an employer match as well, and invests it with employee input in the stock and bond markets.

The best part of a 403(b) is that you are in nearly full control of the money in the plan. With minor exceptions related to management fees (fees are also withdrawn from pensions), no one can change the investments or take money from it without your say so. 403(b)s also have the potential for higher growth over their lifetime, and there's no lifetime maximum dollar amount you can receive. In practice, if invested properly, you may do financially better under a 403(b) than in a pension, though of course, it is also possible to do worse.

Additionally, if you change jobs and move out of state, the 403(b) can go with you and be added to your new employer's retirement plan, which isn't possible with a KRS/KTRS pension. Next, you could withdraw money for a down payment on a house or to help with serious medical issues, or even fund a kid's college education. Can't do that with a pension. Want to retire early? Save more early in your career and cash out when you're financially ready. KRS/KTRS won't allow that.

There are many benefits to all Kentuckians when it comes to making important structural changes to our retirement system. New leadership in Frankfort has a terrific opportunity in front of them to keep promises, to save the system and to empower a new generation of public employees and teachers.

Barry Saturday of Lexington is a retirement planning specialist and former public school teacher. His email address is barrysaturday@gmail.com.

WRITE US

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EDITORIAL

Let the sun shine on Capital Plaza project

We've been mostly supportive of state government's plans to knock down the Capital Plaza Tower and replace it with a modern, functional state office building that will bring 1,500 state workers back to downtown Frankfort. That has required us to hold our nose on an unpopular piece of the state's plan: demolition of the Frankfort Convention Center, this community's only large gathering place.

We've also expressed heartburn about the secrecy that has shrouded project planning to date, but a few rays of sunshine are finally peeking through.

First, a community delegation tasked with helping prepare for redevelopment of the convention center site voluntarily agreed last month to subject itself to the Kentucky Open Meetings Act. In another shot in the arm for transparency, the state Attorney General's Office sided with this newspaper Monday in formally opining that the Department of Finance and Administration committee choosing a developer for the Capital Plaza project is likewise subject to open-government laws.

The State Journal filed a formal appeal with the attorney general last month after the newspaper's repeated requests for copies of meeting

schedules and minutes and other records identifying members of the Capital Plaza redevelopment project's "Built-to-Suit Selection Committee" were denied.

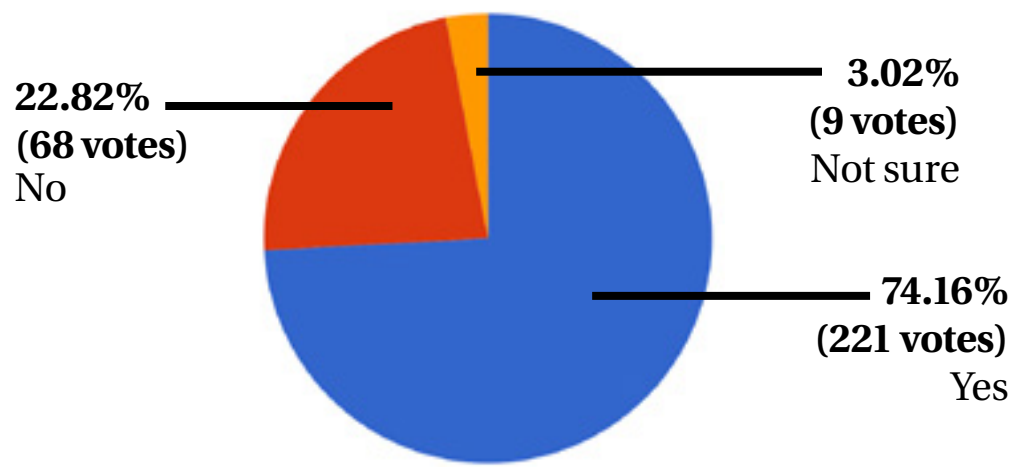
The Finance Cabinet had argued that making the identities of committee members public could subject them to "improper contact and influence," prompting this rebuttal by the AG: "While any contacts or pressure put on the committee members by others may unfortunately result, public service requires that meetings of agencies conducting public business must be conducted in public."

Cabinet officials could appeal the opinion to Franklin County Circuit Court, but that would be a waste of taxpayer time and money and a slap in the face to Frankfort taxpayers. Finance and Administration should heed not just the letter of the open-meetings law but the spirit of its original passage: doing the public's business in the full light of day.

The Capital Plaza project will forever alter the landscape and economic fabric of downtown Frankfort. In turn, the citizens of this community are owed forthrightness and full transparency on the decisions that guide the project's implementation.

POLL RESULTS

Are you in favor of making it legal to sell wine, beer and spirits in Frankfort and Franklin County retail stores on Sundays?



Visit www.state-journal.com to vote in this and other polls.

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Time for candid discussion on Frankfort race relations



Ed Powe

Guest Columnist

As I sit here at my computer on an unseasonably warm winter day, I am staring out the window at this 10th day of January 2018. I tell myself that I am looking at the first month of a brand-new year. This is a special day for me, not only because it is in the middle of winter and the sun is shining brightly and the air temperature is approaching 60 degrees, but today is also my 73rd birthday.

If I break my life expectancy into quadrants — 0-24, 25-49, 50-74, 75-100 — I find that I am at the tail end of the third quadrant. This causes me to reflect on what contributions I have made to the world around me. This leads me into a profound self-discussion on what significant contributions I could possibly make prior to entering that fourth and final quadrant.

I step away from the keyboard and reflect on what has happened over the past 12-month period. I am alarmed by the separation along racial and religious lines that has surfaced in our country.

I go back to Charlottesville and replay in my mind the racial hatred and white supremacy that are openly displayed.

I go back to Colin Kaepernick and the NFL players taking a knee during the national anthem and the firestorm of racial hatred that erupted because of it.

I go back to the repeal of the deferred-action plan for young undocumented immigrants (DACA).

I go back to the president of the United States saying U.S. District Judge Gonzalo Curiel may be biased because of his Mexican heritage.

I go back to the vicious tongue-lashing battle between citizens who want to retain statues in the state capital because they represent Confederate war heroes and citizens who want to remove those same statues because they represent years of slavery, torture, cruel and inhuman punishment, a denial of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for people of color.

I go back to the stories of police brutality and the use of excessive force, the challenge to the right to vote for many people of color, and the reduction of spending in the field of education, which has a direct negative correlation on persons of color.

By now, these events are rolling off my tongue faster than my fingers can touch the keypad. My head is starting to swim. I have to take a break!

OK. I'm back. Let me see if I can pull all of this together. On Nov. 13, Derrick Johnson, president and CEO of the NAACP (National Association for the



Advancement of Colored People), wrote a letter to me requesting support. Here is what he said: "Racism, abuse of power, violent backlash to demands for equality, systematic injustice — these are the conditions under which the NAACP was founded over a hundred years ago. And these are the same evils that we have found ourselves resisting in 2017."

A Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll taken from March 28-April 3 asked more than 2,800 adults to rate the danger of racism and bigotry in America. About 36 percent gave it the worst possible rating, saying they considered racism and bigotry an "imminent threat" to the country. That is up from 29 percent who answered the same way two years ago.

Nonwhites tend to see racial discrimination a lot more than whites do. A February poll from the Public Religion Research Institute found an overwhelming 87 percent of black Americans say black people face a lot of discrimination in the United States, but only 49 percent of white Americans say the same thing.

Racism is evil. The great parliamentarian Edmund Burke said it best when he said, "All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." I will add to that by saying in the year 2018, the only thing necessary for the continuing escalation of racial tensions in the United States is for good men and good women to hear nothing, see nothing, say nothing and do nothing.

I consider myself a good person. So now what do I do? What is the next step?

I decided to start with certain fundamental truths. Racism and bigotry are not built into our DNA. They are taught to us and learned by us over a period of time. They are reinforced by triggers within our society that act as gates to keep us in or out, to help us up or hold us down, to give us access or denial depending on which side of the racial equation you rest.

But if racism and bigotry can be learned, it stands to reason that they can be unlearned. In order for this to happen, we must first initiate some open and honest conversations about race relations. At this point, I picked

up a pen and jotted down these questions:

- Are race relations in Frankfort, Ky. — Great, Very Good, Somewhat Good, Fair, Poor, Very Poor, Terrible?
- Does racial discrimination exist in Frankfort in 2018?
- How is the issue of race relations being addressed in our school systems, if at all?
- On Sunday mornings, the most segregated day of the week, are race relations mentioned from the pulpit?
- Are race relations even on the radar of our local and state government officials?

I know how I would answer the above questions, but I don't know how Frankfort as a whole would respond. What I do know is that I would like to find out. This brings me back to answering the question, "What's next?"

I am starting a new group in Frankfort whose purpose is to encourage the initiation of open and honest conversations on race relations in Frankfort. The name of the group is "Frankfort: F.O.R.R."

The F.O.R.R. stands for Focus on Race Relations. We want to bring the issue of race relations to the forefront. Let's put it on the table where everyone can see, hear, say and do something about it. Do we have the magical answers that will solve our racial problems and eliminate racial prejudice and bigotry? No! What we do have is the willingness to step outside of our comfort zone and talk about our private thoughts, about how we really feel about people whose color is different from us; people whose ethnic background is different from us; people whose religious beliefs are different from us.

We want to be the catalyst to help Frankfort openly discuss issues such as affirmative action, entitlements and the concept of white privilege. We want to be part of the discussion that leads to unlearning of racism in Frankfort. After all, we are the capital city in Kentucky. Let's get focused!

If you are interested in being a part of Frankfort: F.O.R.R. or would like more information and/or the opportunity to make a comment, simply send us a note at Frankfort: F.O.R.R., P.O. Box 973, Frankfort, KY 40602.

Ed Powe is a civic leader and retired Frankfort businessman. His email address is edpowe@hotmail.com.

EDITORIAL

So much for Plant Board transparency

Walt Baldwin's about-face on transparency threatens to undermine two years of needed reform at the Frankfort Plant Board and fuel a city commissioner's drive to boot Baldwin and a colleague from the municipal utility's board of directors.

Baldwin's inexplicable decision to conceal for seven weeks a draft of a highly controversial report from an outside law firm enraged a one-time ally on the board and left even his sidekick, Chairwoman Anna Marie Pavlik Rosen, scrambling to provide an explanation.

Rosen, when asked Sunday by a State Journal reporter about the report from Reed Smith law firm scrutinizing FPB's participation in the Kentucky Municipal Energy Agency, said Baldwin had single-handedly "nullified" the draft copy and deleted it. Therefore, it "doesn't exist legally," she asserted. Pressed to elaborate, Rosen clammed up, citing a "highly volatile" situation.

Baldwin, who himself ignored the reporter's request for comment, indeed is playing with fire. Of all people, the board vice chairman should have understood the intense board, staff and public interest in a report whose very authorization was shrouded in controversy.

In October, the motion to hire Reed Smith to analyze KyMEA contracts passed on a 3-2 vote after a bitter debate. Highly respected board member John Cubine resigned the next day.

"I think we're on a path that exposes this board to possibly millions of dollars in damages and litigation," Cubine told fellow board members before the vote.

New board member Dawn Hale, who provided the critical third vote to hire the law firm, has since pleaded with Baldwin for more transparency in his dealings with Reed Smith. Her motion in November to remove exploration of contract "exit paths" from the law firm's scope of work was blocked by

Rosen and Baldwin.

In a Nov. 29 email, Hale asked Baldwin for a thorough Reed Smith update. In his response a week later, Baldwin failed to acknowledge the draft report that, according to Reed Smith's own invoice, he had received on Nov. 28. The Plant Board met twice in December, but still no mention was made of his having received the report.

Hale and Plant Board management, which has been kept in the dark about Reed Smith's work from the beginning, are understandably livid about Baldwin's deception.

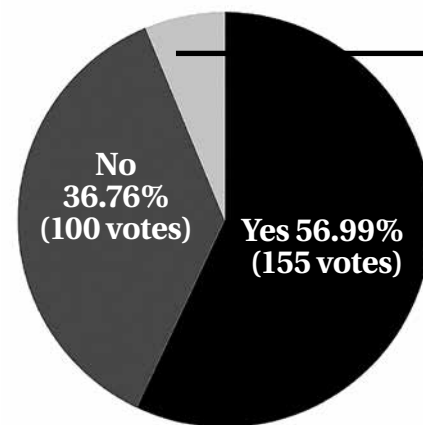
Baldwin's choice to operate in the shadows on a matter of intense citizen interest is a dramatic turn from the refreshing splash he and Rosen made in 2015 when they joined the Plant Board and vowed to make the municipal utility more transparent and citizen-friendly. Indeed, Baldwin led the push to post more Plant Board documents online and post videos of its meetings in a more timely manner. We praised them repeatedly in this space for their efforts to shed light on an institution that for too long had thumbed its nose at ratepayers.

But that commitment to transparency seems to have vanished in recent months. Since October, Baldwin has hidden from the press, refused to answer questions from the city commission at a public hearing, and ostracized board colleagues and FPB staff with his secretive micromanagement of the Reed Smith review.

What once was a one-man crusade by City Commissioner Robert Roach to kick Rosen and Baldwin off the board has since drawn sympathy from others on the city commission, which voted 4-1 last month to hire its own outside lawyer to review the case for removal. The embattled Baldwin's latest actions will surely invite increased scrutiny from the commission, further alienate a former ally in Hale, and jeopardize the commission's confirmation of Mayor Bill May's nomination of a replacement for Cubine.

POLL RESULTS

Should the city of Frankfort require department heads to live in Frankfort or Franklin County?



No opinion
6.25%
(17 votes)

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Catherine Boone
General Manager

Progress 2018: '360 Degrees of Frankfort' coming this weekend

If you ask people in Frankfort where they live, you'll hear one of many things. It could be the east side, the west side, South Frankfort, downtown or the county. Each part of our community is different, and all contribute to making Frankfort and Franklin County the place we love and call home.

A special section in this weekend's State Journal, Progress: 360 degrees of Frankfort, seeks to tell the story of Frankfort's geographical territories and how each one makes our community unique.

You'll find stories of longtime employees of state government, like Boro Rudic, who, in his 20-plus years as head butler at the Governor's Mansion, has witnessed and been a part of the personal lives of some of Kentucky's most prominent legislators. We cover Kentucky State University, whose aquaculture program is one of the top five in the nation, the history of Buffalo Trace Distillery, tourism that stems from Canoe Kentucky excursions and the Kentucky National Guard. The edition ends with Capital Plaza, which is once again in the spotlight as it awaits demolition March 11 to make room for the next era of downtown revitalization.

Creating this Progress edition gave us an opportunity to dig deeper into Frankfort and Franklin County and find stories of the people, organizations and institutions who are doing special things here. The edition took five months to produce, and it was somewhat a labor of love. We are fortunate that our work was strongly supported by local businesses. Because of their advertising, we are able to tell our community's stories.

We don't want Frankfort's story to end with The State Journal's readers and subscribers. We've printed 1,500 extra copies that will be distributed in key areas around town like the Chamber of Commerce office, Capital Plaza Hotel and Frankfort Regional Medical Center. We'll also have copies at our office that can be picked up by subscribers who would like an extra as well as non-subscribers.

Our hope is this section will read like a snapshot of our community, and serve as a resource to new residents, businesses looking to come to the area and locals alike.

Catherine Boone is general manager of The State Journal. Her email address is catherine.boone@state-journal.com.



EDITORIAL

A shameful retreat on transparency

Two years of platitudes — and some progress — on transparency at the Frankfort Plant Board hit a brick wall Tuesday night, thanks to a couple of unlikely obstructionists.

Board Chair Anna Marie Rosen and Vice Chair Walt Baldwin, who deserve credit for making the city-owned utility more responsive to ratepayers since they joined the board in 2015, proved that transparency can be limited by the politics of its purveyors. A long-awaited and expensive legal analysis of electricity contracts that are projected to save Frankfort ratepayers millions of dollars beginning in 2019 will remain secret because Rosen and Baldwin decided so.

Their votes negated a motion by board member Dawn Hale to make available for public inspection the \$50,000 final report by law firm Reed Smith. As Hale noted, this is no longer a draft of an attorney's work. It is an official, paid-for analysis that could influence important public policy and guide millions upon millions of dollars in electricity purchases over the next decade.

Good for Hale and colleague Ralph Ludwig for making a stand for transparency. Shame on Rosen and Baldwin for ignoring the advice of Kentucky's foremost expert on sunshine laws and keeping ratepayers in the dark on a matter of intense public interest.

Amye Bensenhaver, a Frankfort attorney who dedicated decades of her life to enforcement of the Kentucky Open Meetings and Open Records acts as an assistant attorney general and now advocates for sunshine laws in her role with the Bluegrass Institute Center for Open Government, told the FPB board in

public comments prior to its votes on release of the report that invocation of attorney-client privilege to shield the document was a serious affront to open government.

Attorney-client privilege allows public officials the option of confidentiality in cases of actual, pending or likely litigation. Rosen and Baldwin have bent over backward in recent months to declare that they have no desire for FPB to leave the Kentucky Municipal Energy Agency, much less to sue the organization, of which Frankfort is a charter member. Yet, attorney-client privilege was the reason given for shielding the Reed Smith report.

So, Rosen and Baldwin either have been misleading ratepayers about their KyMEA intentions or they've wrongly used attorney-client privilege to achieve politically expedient secrecy for a controversial report. Either way, they've thrown fuel on the fire that is the city commission's investigation of their conduct as FPB board members. Litigation with an entity that stands to substantially reduce electricity bills for Frankfort citizens or willful violation of sunshine laws would almost certainly fit a state statute's broad reasons for removing board members of a municipal utility.

Worse yet, Rosen and Baldwin have undermined their own two years of hard work to make the Plant Board more open and responsive to the citizens. Transparency isn't a value you preach one day but discard the next when the spotlight of public service gets too bright.

As board chair, Rosen should acknowledge her mistake and quickly convene a special meeting of the board to right a wrong. Make the Reed Smith report public now.

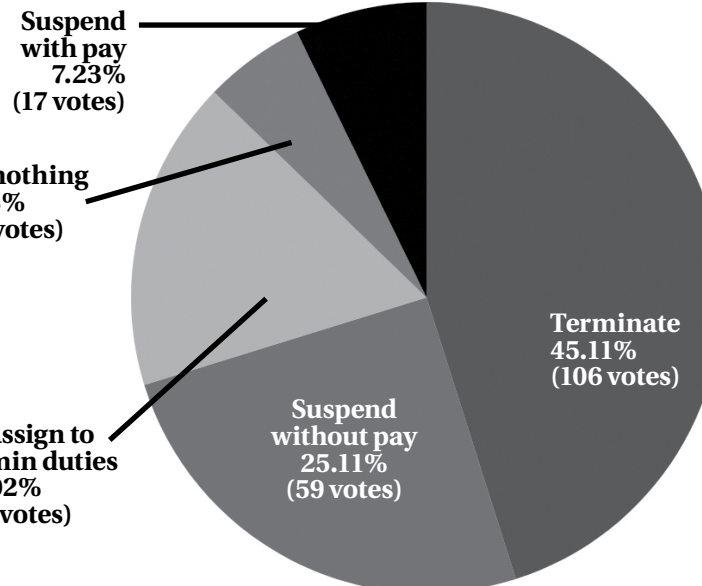
PROGRESS

360 degrees of Frankfort



POLL RESULTS

What is the appropriate response by Franklin County Sheriff Pat Melton to felony tax-fraud charges against Chief Deputy Alvin Cummins?



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OPINION

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Steve Stewart

Publisher

Transparent government is a must

State Journal is equal-opportunity offender of secrecy advocates

When it comes to open government, I'm a confessed radical.

Unless a government document's dissemination is a threat to public safety, it should be available for inspection by any citizen, including journalists. That's my firmly held belief, sharpened by decades of work in the Fourth Estate and seeing the public trust abused by secrecy in all levels of government. Sunshine laws, unfortunately, allow a few more exceptions.

Our unequivocal stand for transparency sometimes gets The State Journal sideways with public officials all across the political spectrum.

On the far right, Gov. Matt Bevin's administration has sued us over our dogged pursuit of records documenting the work of a secretive committee that

See **SECURITY**, D3

YOUR LETTERS

Infrastructure investment needed in state

Dear editor,

As a highway contractor employing 70 people in the greater Central Kentucky region, I want to share a few thoughts about the importance of investment in transportation infrastructure in our state.

The safety of our roads is our primary concern. We are on the roads every day and we see the dangerous curves, the need for turn lanes, and steep shoulders in need of guardrail, not to mention the hazardous potholes that Kentucky winters create. We have more than 1,000 structurally deficient bridges — some too weakened to carry a school bus or ambulance.

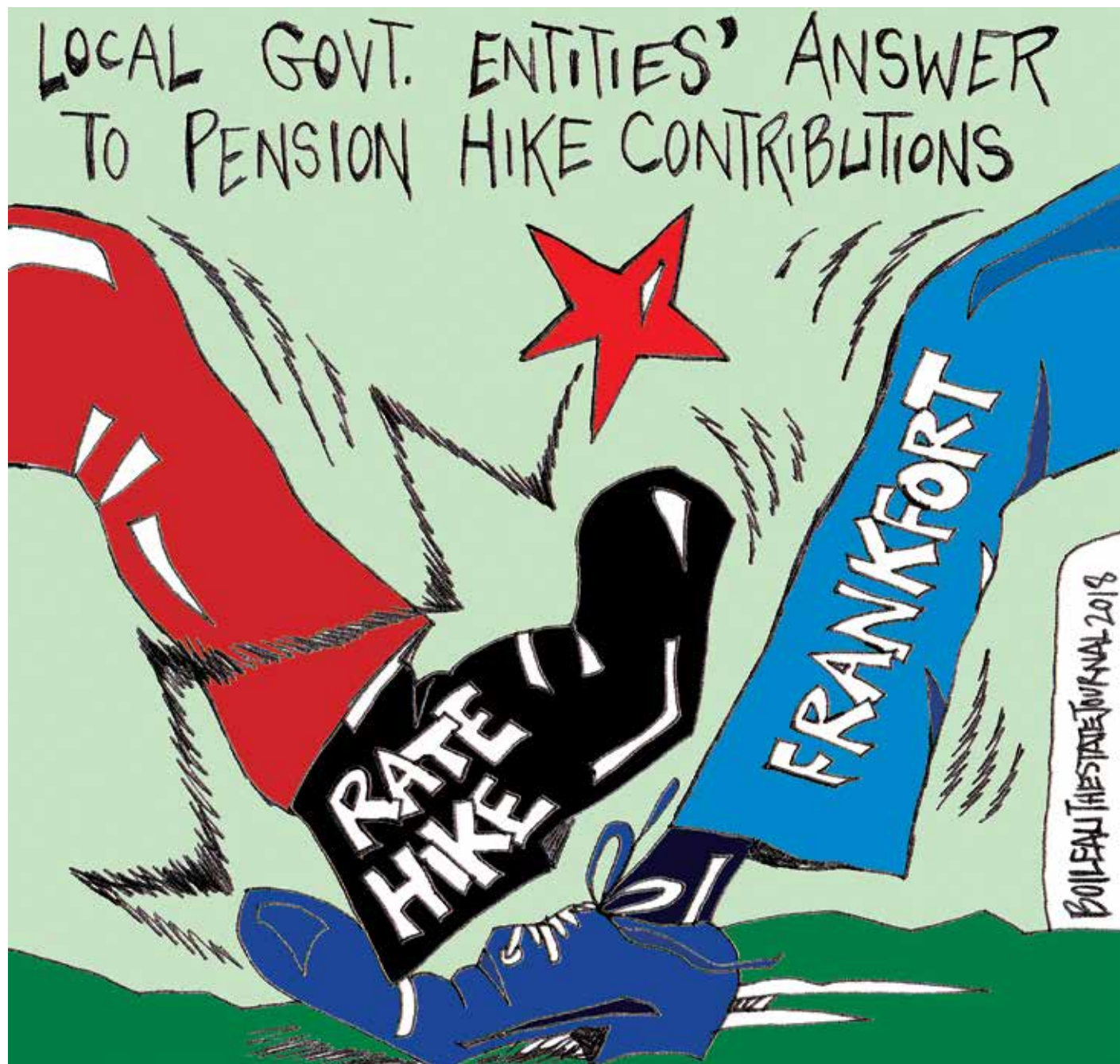
The time is now to address these critical safety concerns.

A good transportation infrastructure creates opportunity for businesses to thrive through the easy movement of people and products.

More than \$500 billion in freight flows through Kentucky annually, and transportation brings visitors who contribute almost \$14.5 billion each year to our economy.

H.G. Mays Corp. (formerly Robert L. Carter Co.) is proud to have served this community since 1958. With a robust

See **LETTERS**, D2



EDITORIAL

Fix pension crisis once and for all

The fact that public pension reform headed for votes in the General Assembly next week looks substantially different — and much friendlier to state employees past, present and future — than the plan unveiled by the governor and Republican lawmakers last fall speaks to a couple of realities in Kentucky politics:

- Matt Bevin's influence, even within his own party, is limited.
- Government workers, especially schoolteachers, are a potent force in the commonwealth.

As it stands, the Senate could vote by Friday on a bill that Republican backers claim will shore up an estimated \$42 billion in unfunded obligations to pensioners and save taxpayers nearly \$5 billion over the next three decades.

Curiously, it would do so without some of the draconian measures that Bevin and legislative leaders said just a few months ago were essential to saving the system. Those included capping all retirement benefits after 27 years of service and moving workers into a 401(k)-style plan to replace traditional defined-benefit plans.

Bevin has been strangely quiet since the pension reform

bill by Sen. Joe Bowen, R-Owensboro, was introduced this week. That's very out of character for a governor who is admired by supporters and despised by critics for his bold opinions and forceful leadership style.

Bevin likely is underwhelmed by the plan and skeptical that it will achieve what lawmakers claim. If so, he needs to say so and use his bully pulpit to push lawmakers back to the negotiating table.

Kentucky's pension systems are in their current deplorable condition because of the unwillingness of past governors and lawmakers to take bold action. Kicking the can further down the road with timid solutions should be unacceptable.

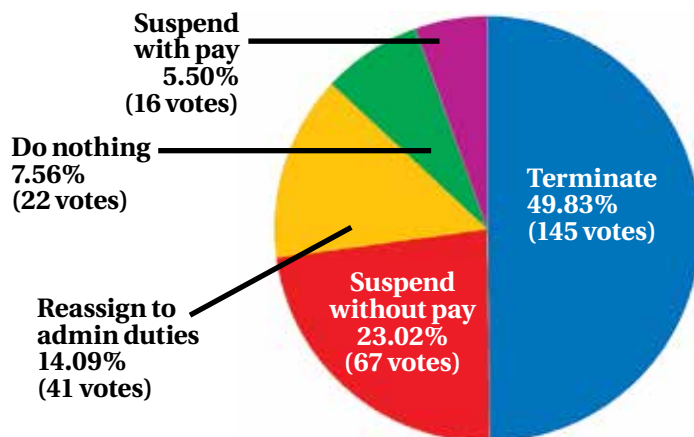
We're pleased that state retirees and current state workers — who make Franklin County's economy tick — would avoid devastating financial consequences under Republican lawmakers' plan. The most controversial component — reducing cost-of-living increases for retired teachers — is still being examined, lawmakers say.

We just hope that Senate Bill 1 isn't short-term appeasement of current and former public employees, who

See **PENSION**, D3

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