

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

June 20, 2017

Be Thankful for "Leakers"

President Trump keeps trying to change the public discussion from the investigations surrounding him to the fact that people are leaking information about the investigations.

We are a democracy and the only way we can be successful democracy is if we have an informed electorate. I don't know who established the secrecy policies our federal government is currently using, but they are routinely concealing information from us that should be made public on a daily basis. We, as citizens, have a right to know what is going on. We have a right to know when foreigners are interfering in our elections while it is happening. We have a right to know when our president is under investigation.

Secrecy is the antithesis of a free and open society. It is how major corporations get laws passed that harm consumers. It is how the wealthy get tax cuts put into the tax code. It is how corruption festers and undermines our democracy. The recently outed leaker, Reality Winner, deserves a medal for standing up for us and giving us information we have a right to know. There is too much secrecy and too little accountability in our elected officials.

A group of Republican senators are currently meeting in secrecy to draft a new health care law to replace the Affordable Care Act. Nobody knows what will be in the bill - no public hearing. Their plan is to write it all in secrecy and issue it in its completed form and demand an immediate up or down vote. Other Republican senators will be forced to vote for it and a truly horrendous law will be passed. Another nail in the coffin of our beleaguered democracy.

Back in the 1990s, the Wisconsin legislature took the open records law away from prisoners (except for personal records of the prisoner). Before that, prisoners routinely exposed corruption and malfeasance by corrections officials. After that, they have been free to act without fear of exposure to public scrutiny. Nobody cares what happens to prisoners or how they are treated except the prisoners themselves. Free world people do not have the time or inclination to hold corrections officials accountable. We do, but we are powerless to act.

Secrecy harms us all, and the less secrecy we have in state and federal government the better off we will all be.