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The Mercury News

New View of How Humans Moved Away From Apes

By NICHOLAS WADE

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Anthropologists studying living hunter-gatherers have radically revised their view of how early human societies were structured, a shift that yields new insights into how humans evolved away from apes.

Early human groups, according to the new view, would have been more cooperative and willing to learn from one another than the chimpanzees from which human ancestors split about five million years ago. The advantages of cooperation and social learning then propelled the incipient human groups along a different evolutionary path.

Anthropologists have assumed until now that hunter-gatherer bands consist of people fairly closely related to one another, much as chimpanzee groups do, and that kinship is a main motive for cooperation within the group. Natural selection, which usually promotes only selfish behavior, can reward this kind of cooperative behavior, called kin selection, because relatives contain many of the same genes.

A team of anthropologists led by Kim S. Hill of Arizona State University and Robert S. Walker of the University of Missouri analyzed data from 32 living hunter-gatherer peoples and found that the members of a band are not highly related. Fewer than 10 percent of people in a typical band are close relatives, meaning parents, children or siblings, they report in Friday's issue of Science.

Michael Tomasello, a psychologist at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Germany, said the survey provided a strong foundation for the view that cooperative behavior, as distinct from the fierce aggression between chimp groups, was the turning point that shaped human evolution. If kin selection was much weaker than thought, Dr. Tomasello said, "then other factors like reciprocity and safeguarding one's reputation have to be stronger to make cooperation work."

The finding corroborates an influential new view of early human origins advanced by Bernard Chapais, a primatologist at the University of Montreal, in his book "Primeval Kinship" (2008). Dr. Chapais showed how a simple development, the emergence of a pair bond between male and female, would have allowed people to recognize their relatives, something chimps can do only to a limited extent. When family members dispersed to other bands, they would be recognized and neighboring bands would cooperate instead of fighting to the death as chimp groups do.

In chimpanzee societies, males stay where they are born and females disperse at puberty to neighboring groups, thus avoiding incest. The males, with many male relatives in their group, have a strong interest in cooperating within the group because they are defending both their own children and those of their brothers and other relatives.

Human hunter-gatherer societies have been assumed to follow much the same pattern, with female dispersal being the general, though not universal, rule and with members of bands therefore being closely related to one another. But Dr. Hill and Dr. Walker find that though it is the daughters who move in many hunter-gatherer societies, the sons leave the home community in many others. In fact, the human pattern of residency is so variable that it counts as a pattern in itself, one that the researchers say is not known for any species of ape or monkey. Dr. Chapais calls this social pattern "bilocality."

Modern humans have lived as hunter-gatherers for more than 90 percent of their existence as a species. If living hunter-gatherers are typical of ancient ones, the new data about their social pattern has considerable bearing on early human evolution.

On a genetic level, the finding that members of a band are not highly interrelated means that "inclusive fitness cannot explain extensive cooperation in hunter-gatherer bands," the researchers write. Some evolutionary biologists believe that natural selection can favor groups of people, not just individuals, but the idea is hotly disputed.

Dr. Hill said group selection, too, could not operate on hunter-gatherer bands because individuals move too often between them, which undoes any selective effect. But hunter-gatherers probably lived as tribes split into many small bands of 30 or so people. Group selection could possibly act at the level of the tribe, Dr. Hill said, meaning that tribes with highly cooperative members would prevail over those that were less cohesive, thus promoting genes for cooperation.

The new data on early human social structure furnishes the context in which two distinctive human behaviors emerged, those of cooperation and social learning, Dr. Hill said. A male chimp may know in his lifetime just 12 other males, all from his own group. But a hunter-gatherer, because of cooperation between bands, may interact with a thousand individuals in his tribe. Because humans are unusually adept at social learning, including copying useful activities from others, a large social network is particularly effective at spreading and accumulating knowledge.

Knowledge can in fact be lost by hunter-gatherers if a social network gets too small. One group of the Ache people of Paraguay, cut off from its home territory, had lost use of fire when first contacted. Tasmanians apparently forgot various fishing techniques after rising sea levels broke their contact with the Australian mainland 10,000 years ago.

Dr. Chapais said that the new findings “validate and enrich” the model of human social evolution proposed in his book. “If you take the promiscuity that is the main feature of chimp society, and replace it with pair bonding, you get many of the most important features of human society,” he said.

Recognition of relatives promoted cooperation between neighboring bands, in his view, allowing people to move freely from one to another. Both sons and daughters could disperse from the home group, unlike chimp society, where only females can disperse. But this cooperation did not mean that everything was peaceful. The bands were just components of tribes, between which warfare may have been intense. “Males could remain as competitive and xenophobic as before at the between-tribe level,” Dr. Chapais writes.



MU steps up efforts to sell its research animal lab

By Janese Silvey

The University of Missouri is moving forward with discussions about whether to sell its research animal lab, but there still are a lot of questions that won't be answered until a potential buyer surfaces.

MU has been discussing for years whether to privatize the Research Animal Diagnostic Laboratory, or RADIL, a 40-year-old center that serves companies that use animals in biomedical research by providing biological and genetic testing services.

In December, administrators took that discussion to the next level when they retained a Chicago-based brokerage firm to help facilitate a possible sale.

Representatives from Livingstone Partners were on campus for a second time earlier this month meeting with RADIL employees, MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said.

The firm is expected to help identify potential buyers and possible financing options for them, Banken said. Additionally, they'll help the university determine what type of value to place on the lab.

In recent years, RADIL's annual revenue has been between \$11 million and \$12 million. The lab returns between \$1 million and \$2 million back to the university and College of Veterinary Medicine.

Banken stressed MU has not made any final decision to sell the lab.

If it does, it's unclear whether RADIL will remain in Columbia, where it's been for 40 years.

Yesterday, Steve Wyatt, MU's vice provost for economic development, told Regional Economic Development Inc. members that whether RADIL stays in Columbia depends on the buyer.

Last summer, a group of local businessmen indicated it was interested in purchasing the lab if it were to be put on the market. Alex Labrunerie, who was part of that group, said the businessmen are no longer interested.

REDI is interested in what happens, but President Mike Brooks said this morning he "can't speak" to how REDI might assist in the process.

“Certainly, our primary interest is in seeing that business remain in Columbia,” he said. “There’s no question about that.”

The lab is staffed by tenured faculty members. Students don’t work there, but some veterinary students occasionally conduct research there through a summer research program.

Last year, Lela Riley, a researcher and former director of RADIL, said she would support privatizing the lab.

“I believe it would be a win-win situation,” she said in July. “The university would win by acquiring money from the sale of RADIL at a time university finances are tight. It would be a win for RADIL in terms of the ability to expand and grow.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.



Curators measure approved in Senate

The Missouri Senate yesterday approved a bill that fixes the makeup of the University of Missouri Board of Curators and in doing so decided also to change the name of the state's higher education governing board.

The Missouri Constitution requires nine curators, and a state law requires no more than one curator from each of the state's congressional districts. That works when there are nine districts, but Missouri is losing a district in 2013. The bill, sponsored by Sen. David Pearce, R-Warrensburg, allows for a ninth curator to be an at-large member.

The Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education is patterned after the Board of Curators, so the bill also would allow for an at-large member on it after 2013.

During discussions, Sen. Tim Green, D-St. Louis, suggested the coordinating board's name be changed "because they don't coordinate anything."

Senators gave first-round approval to change the name to the State Board of Higher Education.

Expert predicts a quieter spring for Columbia

By Jessica Perkins

March 10, 2011 | 9:31 p.m. CST

La Niña will push jet stream and storms toward northern Midwest.

COLUMBIA — As Missouri held its annual statewide tornado drill Thursday afternoon, an MU climatologist said residents of the state might have a quieter spring than usual.

Tony Lupo, professor of atmospheric science at MU, expects La Niña to direct severe weather toward the east and north of mid-Missouri. La Niña is a phenomenon that occurs when the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean is cooler than usual. It's essentially the opposite of El Niño, which is when the eastern tropical Pacific is warmer than usual, Lupo said.

La Niña generally pushes the jet stream toward the northern part of the Midwest, Lupo said. This could lead to more storms and severe weather in those areas.

"For us, this could possibly lead to a drier than normal spring, and that would also mean a drier than normal summer," Lupo said.

Still, there are other factors that help determine whether or not a severe storm will occur, National Weather Service meteorologist Jayson Gosselin said, and it is difficult to make accurate seasonal forecasts.

The weather service's three-month outlook shows that Columbia has an equal chance of experiencing above- or below-normal precipitation and temperatures over the next three months.

Not that this ever stopped the writers of the Farmers' Almanac, who predicted February's near-blizzard in mid-Missouri to the day. The almanac calls for significant snowfall March 24 to 27, intermittent dry spells in April and May and potentially severe thunderstorms April 20 to 23.

"This is just part of the natural ebb and flow of things with El Niño and La Niña," Lupo said.

No tornado has touched down in Columbia since Nov. 9, 1998, when a twister struck the southeast part of the city, destroying or severely damaging about 50 homes and businesses. The storm hit Southridge Subdivision particularly hard.

Even though it has been more than 12 years since a tornado touched down in Columbia, Lupo said the area doesn't enjoy any immunity, especially from storms coming from the north and west. The area between the Ozarks and St. Louis does receive some natural tornado protection, though.

"We are a bit shielded from tornadoes from the southwest due to the Ozark Plateau," Lupo said.

Green Products that 'Break Down'

Biodegradable plastics, electronic components and clothing are gaining ground.

Thu Mar 10, 2011 06:00 AM ET

Content provided by Kelsey Kind

The United States produces 250 million tons of garbage every year, according to the EPA. Twelve percent of landfills, which are close to capacity in most cities, are composed of plastics that will take hundreds of years to break down.

On top of that, many plastics contain the synthetic hormone, Bisphenol A, or BPA, which mimics estrogen and has been linked to miscarriages, birth defects, obesity and insulin-resistance.

It's no wonder that consumers are looking for alternatives. In fact, according to a report published by Reporter Link, demand for biodegradable products in the United States is expected to increase to nearly 16 percent by 2012, which is valued at \$845 million in sales.

As a result, companies are responding with biodegradable products made from chemicals or organic materials that decompose naturally in months or even weeks. Not only is it a great selling point, but also promoting biodegradable products can be good for a manufacturer's bottom line.

"Biodegradable plastics will reduce our reliance on foreign oil, lower our carbon footprint, and could eventually be cheaper than traditional plastics from increasingly expensive and dwindling oil," said Brian Mooney, a professor of biochemistry at the University of Missouri, Columbia, who conducts research on biodegradable plastics made from plants.

Biodegradable materials used in industry come in all forms, but among them are plastics derived from the starches of plants like cornstarch and pea starch.

These so-called bioplastics take less time to degrade in landfills because they are made of organic materials that possess the ability to decompose.

Bio-plastics are one of the main items used to create these eco-friendly technologies. Companies like Ilium Studios in Paris, France, created a line of gadgets in 2010 using biodegradable materials. They created calculators, radios and other devices using bio-plastics made from corn and bamboo trim to allow them to break down into the soil once they are disposed of.

Besides bio-plastics, some companies are utilizing local lumberyards and creating technology with wood pulp. Companies like Microprobe Computers Ltd. in Dublin, Ireland, and Fujitsu in Tokyo, Japan, are two companies utilizing this resource.

The world's first biodegradable computer, the iameco, debuted in Dublin Ireland in 2008. The iameco had a frame made from wood pulp. Its wood panels contained seeds so that when the computer was thrown into a landfill and decomposed, it would eventually sprout new trees. Besides being biodegradable, the iameco also used one-third less energy than conventional computers of the time.

Fujitsu used this same idea to introduce the KBPC PX ECO keyboard and the M440 ECO mouse in 2011. Both are made from Arboform, a by-product of the paper-making process called lignin, and Biograde, a compostable cellulose acetate.

Fujitsu reports that using the plant-derived materials reduces carbon dioxide emissions during manufacturing and keeps about 132,000 pounds of plastic out of landfills per year.

Being biodegradable may also mean that the products can be multi-faceted. Asus, based in Taiwan, has decided to ship their motherboards in a reusable case. Made from cardboard, the shipping box can be transformed into that a case later on.

Computers and peripherals are not the only products looking to jump into the biodegradable market; clothing and accessories are also making a name for themselves. The Geneva, Switzerland-based company Altanus started selling a paper watch in October 2010. The watch, called the Patch, features a band made of paper and an LED screen, made of a very thin glass, which is biodegradable.

OAT Shoes, based in Amsterdam, have created a compostable sneaker using hemp, cork and organic cotton, which is grown without the use of toxic and persistent non-bio-degradable chemical-synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.

The sneakers also feature seeds inside the tongues, so that when the shoes wear out, they can be buried in soil to grow plants. The shoes will be available to European buyers online in the near future.

But not all biodegradable items are beneficial to the environment, says Kristin Riott, the Interim Executive Director of an environmental group out of Kansas City, Missouri.

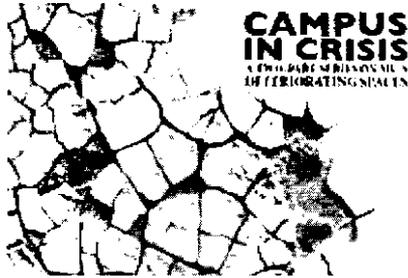
"In general, disposable products of any kind are more damaging to the environment than using, for example, reusable ceramic dishes and glassware," said Riott. Furthermore, the products used to create certain biodegradable materials may actually be dangerous to the environment.

"If a biodegradable product is made of corn, for example, its possible that the environmental damages of raising corn, which is very water and pesticides intensive, as well as hard on the soil, outweighs the benefits of biodegradability."

And currently, bio-plastics and other compostable materials for industry are still in their infancy and more expensive than plastic made from oil, says Mooney. However, Mooney's research and others like him hope to make these items more common and accessible, which should bring the price down.

The technology sector is looking to make less of an impact on the environment when their products are thrown into the landfills. Various creators and inventors are looking toward being eco-friendly in order to appeal to an expected growth in consumers' demand for such products.

THE MANEATER



Campus buildings deteriorate as funding runs low

This is the first article in a series of reports on academic buildings in need of renovations.

By Allison Prang

Published March 11, 2011

A 2009 report from the Missouri Department of Higher Education reviewed the state of facilities at public institutions of higher education throughout the state and found three distinct trends.

According to the report, public universities are struggling to provide enough on-campus, quality space to students and faculty, with deteriorating facilities and a need for more funding for campus maintenance and repair projects.

The report outlined more than 30 MU buildings in need of renovation. Specifically, it recommended renovations for Lafferre and Strickland Halls and a reconstruction of the Fine Arts Building. Altogether, costs for these renovations and reconstruction would total to an estimated \$177 million.

MU needs \$187 million to fund all deferred campus maintenance projects, a Jan. 25 report from MU Campus Facilities stated. The report defines deferred maintenance projects as repairs that were not accomplished as part of normal maintenance and have accumulated to the point that facility deterioration is evident.

The Campus Facilities report stated that in 10 years, MU's total projected facility needs could be as high as \$1 billion.

Lafferre Hall

Since its construction in 1892, Lafferre Hall has undergone 10 additions, some of which were torn down to make room for new ones, said Marty Walker, College of Engineering director of administrative services.

The latest addition, completed in 2009, demolished 24,000 feet of the 1922 portion of the building and replaced it with a 60,000 square-foot addition that houses an undergraduate lab, research space, faculty offices and student study areas, Walker said.

Restructuring the whole building would be in the university's best interest, he said. Currently, one portion of the building needs a new roof and another needs a new wall.

"Conditions in Lafferre would surprise most visitors to campus," the MDHE report stated. "Paint is peeling, ceilings are stained, floors are buckling. Much of the building does not receive natural sunlight, and the interior of the building is a confusing maze of hallways, classrooms and tables."

According to the MDHE report, cracks in the interior and exterior walls indicate potential structural damage -- floors, walls and ceilings show evidence of water damage and some labs are filled with outdated equipment.

Walker said there are some safety issues in Lafferre, and parts of the building do not meet Americans with Disabilities Act codes.

"In years past, there were no ADA standards," he said.

Buildings are not required to be updated with every new code, but during significant renovations, buildings must accommodate the most current regulations.

"We are very concerned because we want to make the building comply with these standards," he said.

Some of the standards are impossible to meet without renovating the entire building, which is why it would be more cost effective to build an entirely new structure, Walker said.

Fine Arts Building and Loeb Hall

Constructed more than 50 years ago, the Fine Arts Building now houses the School of Music, art department and theater department but has since outgrown the building's space.

School of Music Director Robert Shay said there is a disconnect with how it is used now and when constructed in 1958.

"I think it was designed for much smaller programs than we have today," he said. "The fact that it doesn't serve our needs that way makes us feel like it has a lot of shortcomings. There's never enough space."

Shay said the School of Music is forced to conduct classes in four additional buildings due to the lack of space in Fine Arts.

While there are no pressing safety issues, he said there are minor renovations needed, such as the addition of more railways, safety bars and central heating and air conditioning.

Shay said the students' learning is affected because there is no one place for instrumental ensembles to rehearse.

The School of Music's Large Instruments and Ensembles coordinator Margaret Lawless said these groups are forced to rehearse in Loeb Hall, which was converted from a dining facility to an academic building in 1995. The building was not finished until five or six years ago, when it was reconfigured to house a small and large rehearsal room and five faculty studios.

In October 2010, a New York City-based professional acoustic designs firm, Acoustic Dimensions, reviewed Loeb Hall. Acoustic Dimensions' Principal Consultant David Kahn made a series of recommendations to improve the building's acoustics.

None of Kahn's recommendations have been implemented. Shay said they are in the process of responding to the recommendations, but most of which will need to be done over a period of years.

“(Loeb Hall) was not really designed with the sound absorbing material and because of that, the noise level in (Room 201) is extremely high and just not good for the players or anyone listening,” Lawless said.

She said she would not want to see anyone bring a lawsuit to the School of Music for the dangerously loud noise levels.

“For the short term, we will be making several acoustical modifications to Loeb Hall later this spring and over the summer,” Shay said. “One of the main changes will be hanging adjustable curtains that will allow the acoustics to be controlled.”

Shay said most of the recommendations would be more costly and would need to be made over a period of years.

Strickland Hall

Formerly known as the General Classroom Building, Strickland Hall was built in 1969 and, according to the MDHE report, has only undergone minor renovations.

Karlan Seville, MU Campus Facilities Communications Manager, said Strickland's classroom technology needs to be modernized to meet the needs of faculty and staff, and the lighting and building operating systems need to be replaced.

“With the increase in demand for an MU education, as evidenced by a continued growth in our student enrollment, Strickland Hall will continue to be a facility that nearly every undergraduate student will experience through the course of their education and must be improved to ensure a quality environment for providing a quality education,” MU’s request for capital funding for fiscal year 2012 states.

Strickland Hall houses a variety of classes for students, including many for the College of Arts and Sciences.

During the summer of 2010, Room 117 in Strickland Hall was transformed into a model classroom for a task force project led by Jim Spain, MU vice provost for Undergraduate Studies, and UM System President Emeritus Mel George. The group was designed to look into faculty members’ experiences and opinions about classrooms on campus.

Strickland was chosen for the classroom renovation because it houses a variety of different classes from a myriad of different academic departments, Spain said. The renovated room includes new chairs, whiteboards and projector equipment and has no front or back, so students can see and interact from anywhere in the room with faculty.

Finding the Money

Aside from Lafferre, Fine Arts and Strickland, more than 30 other MU campus buildings need maintenance, according to the MDHE report. But with continued decreases in state appropriations for higher education, money for campus facilities and deferred maintenance is increasingly more difficult to attain.

According to the UM System’s FY 2012 Appropriations Request for Operations, as the deterioration of buildings continues to increase, it will be more difficult to catch up on backlogged maintenance.

“Right now with the maintenance and repair budget, we don’t have a very robust pool of money to do those kinds of projects,” Spain said.

According to a previous Maneater report, MDHE Deputy Commissioner Paul Wagner said at some level there is not much they can do.

“There comes a time when deferred maintenance catches up,” he said. “And that time is now.”

THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Sunshine Week: The Forecast is Mostly Cloudy

By: Kenneth F. Bunting, Executive Director, National Freedom of Information Coalition, University of Missouri School of Journalism

Posted: March 10, 2011 10:35 AM

COLUMBIA, Mo. -- Heading into "Sunshine Week," many open government advocates across the country feel they have much more to bemoan than they have to celebrate.

Even if no court or attorney general ever chastises Wisconsin's Republican legislators for violating open meetings law notice requirements, the convoluted web of parliamentary rationalizations surrounding their vote last night is still beyond ordinary comprehension.

Meanwhile, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert has signed into law a measure that now means that fewer than half of all U.S. state legislatures hold themselves to the same levels of transparency they prescribe for others.

Worse yet, open government laws in state after state, whether or not their reach goes to lawmakers themselves, are being damaged and weakened, with increasing frequency, by new exclusions, loopholes and crazy exemptions that promote more secrecy and a lot less transparency.

President Obama's openness pledge has garnered a lot of attention, with advocates questioning whether it was a false promise and whether his professed belief in transparency will ever make its way down through the vast federal bureaucracy.

But at the state and local levels, there has been little notice of an ongoing frontal assault on open, accessible government. When viewed comprehensively and nationally, what has been happening in state legislatures all across the land has been downright scary.

David Cuillier, an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Arizona whose specialty is open government, said the sweeping new changes to Utah's Government Records Access Management Act, which goes by the folksy-sounding acronym GRAMA, will leave Utah

residents with less access to information about their government than residents of Australia, Ireland and Mexico, or even Albania and Kyrgyzstan.

"I'm guessing most countries have better FOIA laws than what Utah will have," said Cuillier, who had based the first observation on quick, informal survey.

Unless good-government common sense and conscience overtakes Utah's leaders before summer, that state's lawmakers will no longer be subject to provisions of its open records law.

Backers said the change was needed because Utah lawmakers were being bombarded and overwhelmed by frequent, time-consuming, privacy-invading requests for records. But when someone went to the legislature's general counsel to find out just how many requests the state's lawmakers had received so far this year, it turned out there had been only eight.

Utah's new law also exempts virtually all electronic communications, including voice mails, instant messages, video recordings and text messages. And, Utah bureaucrats with something to hide will have carte blanche discretion to discourage records requesters with high copying charges and unexplained delays.

The dubious reforms were ramrodded through the legislature in less than three days, with little rational thought, no honest dialogue and not a single public hearing. Gov. Herbert signed it into law on Tuesday, after some kind of pretense that involved lawmakers recalling it from his desk for further consideration.

Linda Petersen, president of the Utah Foundation for Open Government, saw the gesture of recalling the measure from the governor's desk as "a political ploy" aimed at getting critics "to move on and forget about this horrible piece of legislation."

"We're not going anywhere," said Petersen.

But as bad and disappointing as their actions were, the Utah lawmakers weren't alone in waging their war against openness. Elsewhere, there are plenty of challenges for proponents of openness. In Tennessee, open government advocates are fighting proposals that would permit withholding of all 911 dispatch records and allow local governments to decide on their own how much they disclose about tax breaks and enticements for "economic development."

Another change would allow charging requesters for the time it takes government staffers to obliterate the records they request with markers, Sharpies and other redaction tools. A similar measure on charges for staff time spent retrieving, researching and preparing records for release was successfully defeated in Washington state, where openness advocates breathed a sigh uttering the old baseball adage, "There's always next year."

In Maine, a new governor who promised the most transparent administration ever, has created a new business advisory council that would hold its meetings out of public view. In Virginia, open government advocates fought off a legislative proposal that would have allowed state agencies to seek anti-harassment court orders against records requesters who burden them too much.

Advocates in Ohio are fighting a push by university presidents to make their own rules on responding to requests for records.

And in Maryland, open government proponents are fighting a bill that started with an idea they liked: Making electronic records available in formats that are searchable, and usable for aggregate and quantifiable analysis. But by the time lawmakers were done drafting, marking and amending it, those proponents were horrified by parts of the measure that allow erasing of data, excessive charges for providing electronic records and a scheme that lets private vendors gain rights to sell public data at a profit.

If you are given to conspiracy theories--and I'm not usually prone to them--one might fear that somewhere out there is an evil operative pulling the strings and calling the shots. Perhaps the secret strategy of that sinister, behind-the-scenes champion of government secrecy was coaxing Utah's and Wisconsin's leaders into overreaching to such an extent that no one would notice what's happening elsewhere.

I only wish I was just saying this entirely in jest. Be assured, though, there are powerful special interests who favor keeping citizens in the dark, and allowing governments to operate behind closed doors.

Who knows how the drama in Wisconsin that has been dominating the cable news nighttime talk shows will ultimately play out? Who knows for certain if the meeting where Wisconsin public employees' collective bargaining rights were stripped away will be officially declared illegal? The experts I trust in that state tell me that Wisconsin's legislators are still among those covered by an open meetings law and that last night's hurried meeting was indeed illegal.

But they also suspect that if the action is invalidated at all, it will just be long enough for the Republicans to have a do-over once their Democratic colleagues are back in town. It's just another oops. Veteran observers of public affairs have seen them before.

New, however, is the phenomenon of a brand new bill finding its way to a conference committee before anything resembling it had ever come up for a vote in one of the two houses.

Maybe I shouldn't begrudge power grabbers the satisfaction that comes with successful parliamentary maneuvering. But in a year of so many challenges to openness and transparency, the public should be wary of any new tricks for those hostile to "sunshine."

Ken Bunting is executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition (NFOIC) at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. He is a former reporter and top editor who worked for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, the Los Angeles Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, among other newspapers.

THE MANEATER

Jesse Hall's dome sports colorful traditions

The dome is typically only lit different colors for Homecoming and Engineering Week.

By Jimmy Hibsich

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For the next week, Jesse Hall's dome will sport a new color: green.

In the spirit of Engineering Week, which begins next week, the spotlights shining upon Jesse Hall's dome will be filtered with a green tone. This is a long-standing tradition, Engineer's Club President Elizabeth Horvath said.

"Today, the green lighting of Jesse Hall's dome has become a beacon for MU Engineering – signaling the arrival of Engineers' Week and the annual return of St. Patrick, and reflecting the engineers' proud history of enlightening MU," stated a St. Pat's Board and Engineers Club document.

When Jesse Hall was restored in 1987 for MU's 150th anniversary, lights were added to the dome. This was when the St. Pat's Board and Engineer's Club decided the dome should be lit green, to commemorate St. Patrick, who was an engineer.

"Lighting the dome green was done before the dome was lit gold for Homecoming," Horvath said. "Other groups have asked the dome to change colors for them but have been denied."

The dome has been glowing green annually since the spring of 1988, upon receiving permission from former chancellor Haskell Monroe. Friday evening, the engineers will celebrate their fourth Dome Lighting Ceremony at 5:30 p.m. on Francis Quadrangle. This year's ceremonial switch thrower is Dave Lillard, who won the Distinguished Alumni Award.

"Green is grandfathered in because the Engineering Week organizers requested it several years ago," MU spokesman Christian Basi said. "It's become a tradition."

Basi said Jesse Hall's dome is typically lit different colors on two occasions: Engineering Week and Homecoming, when it is lit gold.

"We do light the dome gold for special celebrations or occasions that encompass the entire university," Basi said. "They might be major events, or they might be campus celebrations. One of the major deciding factors is whether they encompass the entire university."

An example of this was made a few weeks ago for the Big XII Conference on Black Student Government.

Requests to light the dome different colors aren't rare, he said. But, due to expenses associated with different colors and staff time, MU is often unable to change the filter to anything other than gold.

"What we don't do is typically light the dome different colors besides gold or green," Basi said. "There is an additional expense associated with the colors and staffing time."

Most of those requests go through the University Affairs office, Basi said, but one person in particular doesn't make the final decision.

"There's not one individual who makes the decision," Basi said. "The last decision was made by three people. It really depends on the request."