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# OPINION

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## Sound policy, not divisive politics, must be Kentucky's priority

By Jim Waters



How much more economically competitive and free – including from special interests – might Kentuckians be if government's priority was sound policy rather than divisive politics?

A few weeks ago, Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear signed House Bill 1, which codified action the Republican-dominated legislature took last year by passing House Bill 8.

HB 8 reduced the personal income tax rate to 4% and stipulates additional half-percentage point reductions would occur in following years provided revenues meet required thresholds and the state's Budget Reserve Trust Fund remains sufficiently funded.

The ultimate goal: eliminate the individual income tax and move Kentucky to a consumption-based policy where more of government's revenues are raised through the sales tax.

The best part of this story: the governor signed HB 1 even though he opposed it.

Politicos lamented that Beshear only signed the

bill because he wants to score political points during an election year.

However, if we want Kentucky to become competitive again – a goal frequently supported in this column – the question must be: Is this the right policy, election year or not?

A nonpartisan focus on developing sound policy rather than partisan power grabs in Frankfort and in county courthouses and city halls across Kentucky would create an environment where the interests of taxpaying citizens dominate the decision-making.

The governor signed the income tax rate reduction – lukewarm about it though he was – while acknowledging the policy provides some relief to Kentuckians in their current tussle with inflation.

See, the best policies happen when opposing them becomes so unpopular that even their ideological and partisan opponents yield.

Last April, Beshear vetoed HB 8, claiming that cutting taxes "threatens Kentucky's economic future."

Still, in February, he signed the tax-rate cuts codified by that bill – not because he wanted to, but for the reason that he must believe enough taxpayers who vote wanted him to sign it.

Beshear's banking on those taxpayers rewarding

him at the ballot box.

After all, why can't good policy also be good politics?

Then, there's the politics of special interests.

The governor took executive action in June to freeze Kentucky's gas tax that would have increased under the state's broken road fund formula, which drives up taxes at the pump when fuel prices spike.

Senate President Robert Stivers, R-Manchester, criticized Beshear's action, insisting it's the legislature's purview, not his, to take such action.

"The legislature looks forward to working with the governor to accomplish the goal of suspending any additional increase to the gas tax, but doing so in a legal and proper fashion," Stivers said in a statement.

Yet the legislature has dragged its proverbial feet in responding to the gas-tax hike during this year's General Assembly session, removing the shine from Stivers' statement.

The legislature can restore the shine by acting to freeze the gas tax before this General Assembly's session adjourns for the year.

Special interests have pressured lawmakers for years to hike the tax, or at least allow it to grow.

But shouldn't legislators also support the right

policy even if they, too, must hold their political noses while doing so?

Failure to act will leave small businesses and traveling Kentucky families wondering why their political representatives didn't respond – especially when the opposing party's governor indicated he's willing to work with lawmakers to reinstate a freeze.

To be sure, Kentucky's road fund formula needs overhauling, which should take place after the legislative session ends and a proper amount of time and thought can be given to the effort.

The Bluegrass Institute recommends freezing the tax for 18 months while a new formula is developed.

Developing the right policy that will adequately fund 21st century transportation needs matters much more to Kentuckians than which party or politician gets the credit.

But for those politicians who live for partisan credits: rest assured, if the legislators work with Beshear to freeze the tax, there will be more than enough political kudos to go around.

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## Sunshine Week



By PJ Martin  
Jobe Publishing,  
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March 12 – 18 is Sunshine Week and March 16th is the National Freedom of Information

Day. You may be asking what does that mean to me. Well if you boil it down to just one word it means 'freedom'.

Freedom is one of our rights as stated by the United States Constitution, however, what happens when your government wants everything kept secret? That's where the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) comes into play.

Sunshine Week is celebrated in conjunction with National Freedom of Information Day to highlight the importance of open government. It promotes awareness and discussion about the impact government secrecy has on the people represented. But not just government entities, also media, nonprofits, schools, and civic groups such as volunteer fire and rescue groups, PTA, Kiwanis Clubs, and any community group that works for the benefit of the people.

The Freedom of Information Act offers citizens and journalists access to information and documents that are controlled by these organizations to ensure transparency. It promotes more awareness by allowing media outlets such as newspapers to inform the public so that they are aware, can take action, give feedback, and voice their concerns. When groups such as those listed allow open access to meetings, documentation, etc. it promotes trust by the community and its people.

Public knowledge of what is occurring is necessary to build trust in a day and time it is sorely needed. Newspapers have been touting transparency in government for many years and help to keep the public informed by reporting on government meetings.

### History

The idea of the FOIA goes all the way back to 1952 with Congressman John Moss of California. He actually held hearings on government transparency and investigated cases where the government withheld information. He wanted to push the FOIA, but his party would not back him.

Fast forward to 1966, Moss found a co-sponsor Representative Donald Rumsfeld and they were able to get the act passed by the Senate. Although against the act, President Lyndon B. Johnson quietly signed the FOIA into law on July 4, 1966. He released this statement that day, "I sign this measure with a deep sense of pride that the United States is an open society."

In 2005, Sunshine Week was created by the American Society of News Editors, now referred to as the News Leaders Association. This year they are being joined by the Society of Professional Journalists.

The purpose of Sunshine Week is simple; it promotes open government and holds it accountable. It holds government (federal, state, and local), media outlets, and anyone working closely with those entities to transparency of their actions through open meetings and open records.

To read more about Sunshine Week or the National Freedom of Information Day go to [www.dea.gov/foia/about-foia](http://www.dea.gov/foia/about-foia), <http://www.sunshineweek.org/> or <http://www.spj.org/sunshine-week9.asp>.



## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

5 days almost without power hot water or food and all those things we so take for granted everyday. I will not ever be guilty of taking those little things for granted anymore not after this windstorm that knocked out people's

power for a long time.

I mostly want to say thank you to those wonderful linemen and workers at RECC.

Who I am confident worked endlessly and tirelessly to restore this community back to normal. What would we do

without you?

I also would like to say I hope that every citizen of this county is safe and well and enjoying a normal routine again.

I hope that if I'm ever faced with this again I will learn to be a little more patient and not

quite so fearful. A hot bath never felt So Good! and now every time I flip my light switch on or off I say thank you for this blessing.

So, once again THANK YOU RECC!

Patty Hadley