

NEWS RELEASE

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Washington Coalition for Open Government
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**SANDY STOKES OF THE LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS GARNERS
AWARD FROM WASHINGTON COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT**

Sandy Stokes, publisher and editor of the La Conner Weekly News, has been honored with a Key Award by the Washington Coalition for Open Government for forcing a Skagit County fire protection district to be more transparent to the public.

Stokes successfully filed suit earlier this year against Fire Protection District No. 13 for violations of the state's Open Public Meetings Act and Public Records Act. The district had improperly withheld requested copies of advance board meeting packets and improperly approved employment contracts in a closed meeting. One of the contracts was for the fire chief's wife.

The fire district agreed to a settlement requiring the district make meeting packets readily available to the public and to require district officers and staff to take regular training in compliance with open-government laws. The district also agreed to pay \$24,500 in penalties and legal costs. Stokes planned to distribute a large portion of the amount to La Conner-area charities and non-profit groups.

WCOG board members presented the award to Stokes June 26 at her office in La Conner. "Sandy Stokes did an outstanding job of holding a local public agency accountable for the way it conducts public business," WCOG President Toby Nixon said. "These were egregious violations, and Stokes won a binding agreement that ensures that the district will be more transparent in the future."

WCOG was founded in 2002 by a group of individuals representing organizations with a broad spectrum of opinions and interests but all dedicated to the principles of strengthening the state's open government laws and protecting the public's access to government at all levels. WCOG stands for the principle that transparency and public participation are essential building blocks of good government.

Membership is open to the public. For more information contact WCOG at 6351 Seaview Avenue NW, Seattle, WA 98107-2664, on the web at www.washingtoncog.org, or call (206) 782-0393.

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