



# Washington Coalition *for* Open Government

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Seattle----The Washington Coalition for Open Government is lauding the efforts of three Washington residents who personally asked the state legislature to vote no on SB 6617, a bill WCOG strongly opposes. The Coalition will honor former Whidbey Examiner Owner Kasia Pierzga of Olympia, Navy Retiree Gordon Paget of Vancouver, and The News Tribune Publisher and President David Zeeck, with Key Awards for appearing before lawmakers, with very little notice, to urge them to defeat a bill WCOG considers an affront to the principles of open government.

*“This bill was passed under the very cloak of darkness. Notice of the public hearing was posted at 11PM the night before the noon hearing. The public had almost no notice, but these three individuals immediately dropped what they were doing to express their objections to the passage of this bill. For that, we want to honor their efforts,”* said Michele Earl-Hubbard, WCOG past president and current board member. *“When people go the extra mile to fight for transparency, WCOG wants them to know we appreciate and respect those actions.”*

Key Awards are given to individuals and organizations that have done something notable for the cause of open government within the past 12 months. WCOG honors these three individuals who stood up for open government and for an open process.

WCOG stands with Pierzga, Paget, Zeeck, and the newspapers across the state that have condemned this legislation.

## *SB 6617*

In a 48-hour streak of action, the Washington State Legislature approved the bill exempting its members from the Public Records Act enacted 46 years ago by voter initiative. SB 6617 was scheduled with little notice, no hearings and scant debate. It was approved on Feb. 23, 2018 by votes of 41-7 in the Senate and 83-14 in the House, and includes an “emergency” provision to take effect immediately.

Proponents point out it makes some records public: legislators’ calendars and email exchanges with registered lobbyists — but not until July 1, 2018.

By making the PRA exemption retroactive, legislators appear to be trying to nullify [a still-pending lawsuit](#) by a number of Washington media organizations seeking to clarify that the PRA applies to the legislature. In January, a [Thurston County judge ruled](#) that individual state legislators and senators are subject to the Public Records

Act. Attorneys for the legislature *[have filed an appeal](#)* to the state Supreme Court, but then pre-empted itself by *[passing ESB6617 in on a fast track](#)*.

The Washington Coalition for Open Government strongly opposes the spirit and process of the legislation. WCOG President Toby Nixon said the process shows the utter contempt lawmakers have for the public when it comes to transparency. WCOG is urging Governor Jay Inslee to veto the legislation and lawmakers not to override a veto.

For current information and updates on this matter, or to join or donate to WCOG, visit us at [www.washingtoncog.org](http://www.washingtoncog.org).