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## **Sunshine Week Highlights Access to Government Information - and You Can Participate**

by Susan Nevelow Mart, Reference Librarian and Adjunct Professor of Law, UC Hastings College of the Law.

In 1966 Congress passed the Freedom of Information Act. It's been amended many times, expanded through the Electronic Freedom of Information Act, and contracted by many new exemptions. Flawed or not, FOIA is our basic tool for access to government information, but there are powerful forces in favor of more secrecy. 2007 will be the third year for Sunshine Week, which was started by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, with a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, as a "national initiative to open a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information." The initiative is non-partisan, and is supported by groups covering the full range of our political spectrum. This year, for the second time, the stellar panel discussion at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. will be webcast live. The webcast will be co-hosted here in Oakland at the County of Alameda Training Center by the Northern California Association of Law Libraries, the SF Bay Chapter of the Special Libraries Association, the California First Amendment Coalition, and the League of Women Voters of Oakland.

\*There is no charge to attend the webcast.

The theme this year is

### **CLOSED DOORS, OPEN DEMOCRACY**

The webcast program focuses on access to government information, in particular the impact of government suppression and manipulation of scientific information on public health and safety, and on government accountability. The lunch program addresses the nuts and bolts of open meeting and sunshine laws, freedom of information requests at the local, state, and federal levels, and the tension between the government's valid needs for secrecy and the public's right to know.

DATE: Monday, March 12, 2007

LOCATION:

County of Alameda Training Center  
125 - 12th Street, Suite 400  
Oakland, CA

The webcast will be broadcast live from at the National Press Club from 1-2:30 p.m. EST (10 - 11:30 a.m. PST). Audience members will have an opportunity to call in and e-mail questions to the program participants. There are two panels.

Panel 1 will focus on national issues. Speakers include:

- Susan Wood, former assistant FDA commissioner for women's health and director of the Office of Women's Health who resigned in August 2005 over the delay on making Plan B accessible
- Rick Piltz, former Senior Associate with the U.S. Climate Change Science Program who blew the whistle on the Bush administration's manipulation of scientific reporting related to global warming
- Francesca Grifo, Senior Scientist and Director of Scientific Integrity Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, will give an overview of how "Secrecy Can Make You Sick" - how secrecy of and manipulation of science can hurt you and your community
- Jay Dyckman, director of The Knowledge Project at the National Coalition Against Censorship, to discuss first amendment free speech issues and describe what you can do

Panel 2 will focus on state and local issues. Speakers include:

- Bill Wolfe, Director of the New Jersey chapter of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)
- Mark Tapscott, Editorial Page editor of the Washington Examiner
- Dorothy Biggs, former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) librarian, National Enforcement Investigations Center

The discussion will be moderated by Ira Flatow of NPR's Science Friday.

Please note that the Training Center is easily reached from the Lake Merritt BART station. Additional directions and a map are available at:  
<http://www.acgov.org/conference/location.htm>

#### **AGENDA:**

- 9:00-10:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast
- 10:00-11:30 a.m. National Webcast
- 11:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Break
- 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunchtime program
- 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. Questions and Discussion

The lunch program, "Government Secrets versus the Public Interest," will discuss:

- Open Meeting & Sunshine Laws
- Freedom of Information under state and federal law
- Balco & Beyond – Testing the limits & looking to the future

A representative of the California First Amendment Coalition will moderate the lunch discussions.

LUNCH MENU: Platters of sandwiches, bowls of salad, drinks including water, tea & coffee, and cookies.

COST: No charge for National Webcast; \$10 for lunch program (\$12.50 at the door with no advance registration)

Although there is no charge for attending the webcast, advance registration is strongly encouraged to assure that space is available. People who do not register in advance will be admitted on a space available basis.

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE: Thursday, March 8, 2007**

Send registration to:

Anne Barker  
Townsend and Townsend and Crew LLP  
379 Lytton Ave.  
Palo Alto, CA 94301  
650-324-6347  
[abarker@townsend.com](mailto:abarker@townsend.com)

For more information about Sunshine Week activities, visit [www.sunshineweek.org](http://www.sunshineweek.org).

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