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WASHINGTON COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT PRESENTS KEY AWARDS TO ERIC RACHNER, ANTHONY HEMSTAD, AND THE YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

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The Washington Coalition for Open Government will present Key Awards to a Kent public official, a Seattle computer security expert and a central Washington newspaper with Key Awards on Sept. 17 in recognition of their work to make government entities in Washington open and accountable to the public.

Anthony Hemstad, a commissioner for King County Hospital District No. 1, is being honored for his effort to bring transparency reforms to the governing body of Valley Medical Center. The district was sanctioned by the state Public Disclosure Commission for misusing public funds in the run-up to a failed 2005 annexation election and weathered more public criticism for approving a lavish retirement package for the hospital's chief executive. Hemstad ran as a reform candidate on a 10-point platform designed to open the workings of the district to taxpayers. Since his election, the district has begun videotaping its meetings and posting its meeting agenda and minutes on the internet.

"I care deeply about public policy, and frankly, I'm proud to be a public servant," Hemstad, who is also Executive Director of the World Trade Center Tacoma, told a local newspaper. "When a government breaks the law, I consider that both a disservice to society and a personal insult."

Hemstad was nominated for the award by former Washington Secretary of State Ralph Munro.

Computer expert Eric Rachner is being honored for his investigation into how the Seattle Police Department uses video recordings of street arrests and revealed a troubling pattern that shows the department tends to use the recordings to exonerate officers involved in internal investigations -- and deny access to suspects and others. Rachner was arrested by SPD and charged with obstructing an officer for refusing to give his name when police investigated a late night game of "urban golf" on Capitol Hill. Although charges against him were later dropped, Rachner was intrigued by the use of video recordings by police and found that they aren't routinely destroyed as SPD officials claimed.

Also being honored is the Yakima Herald-Republic newspaper, which is being recognized for its expensive legal battle to force Yakima County to turn over legal billing records. The county spent upwards of \$2 million to defend two suspects charged in a high profile murder case and refused to turn over details of how that money was paid out, citing both attorney-client privilege and a claim that judicial records are exempt from Washington's public records law. The state Supreme Court will determine if the Herald -- and the public -- will get to see the records.

The three awards will be presented Friday, Sept. 17 at an annual awards breakfast from 7-9 a.m. at The Conference Center, Eighth and Pike in Seattle. At the event, WCOG will also present its annual James Madison Award to The Seattle Times Co. and publisher Frank Blethen and the James Andersen Award to attorney Duane Swinton and his Spokane law firm, Witherspoon Kelley Davenport & Toole.

The Washington Coalition for Open Government (WCOG) is an independent non-partisan non-profit organization founded in 2002 by a group of individuals representing organizations with a broad spectrum of opinions and backgrounds, all dedicated to the principles of strengthening the state's open government laws and protecting the public's access to government at all levels.

For more information, contact Washington Coalition for Open Government, 6351 Seaview Avenue NW, Seattle, WA 98107-2664 or on the web at [www.washingtoncog.org](http://www.washingtoncog.org) or call (206) 782-0393.

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