

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON COALITION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT PRESENTS KEY AWARD TO JOHN KNUTSEN,
PUYALLUP CITY COUNCILMEMBER

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The Washington Coalition for Open Government will present a Key Award to a Puyallup City Councilmember on Aug. 16 in recognition of his efforts to keep council discussions and transactions open to the public.

John Knutsen, a Puyallup city councilmember since 2008, is being honored for his effort to promote better accountability in government by refusing to participate in informal discussions between small groups of councilmembers and the city manager that occur outside of the regularly scheduled council meetings.

The so-called "serial meetings" have drawn public criticism, because the small groups of fewer than a quorum (four of Puyallup's seven councilmembers) enable the members to meet without the public notice and other provisions of transparency required by Washington's Open Public Meetings Act. Knutsen has boycotted the informal meetings since they were instituted earlier this year by the city manager and mayor, who defend them as informational only.

"It just didn't seem appropriate" to discuss city business outside regular meetings, said Knutsen. "Too often, business is done outside the public view" in many jurisdictions, even when the participants have good intentions. A retiree from 25 years working for the city of Tacoma, he said he supports transparency whenever possible.

"I do appreciate this award," he said. "Since I've been in government, I think it's important that people step forward and do the right thing for the community." Since citizens have complained, Councilmember Rick Hansen has joined Councilmember Knutsen's boycott. It's also good for the council to know that someone is watching how we operate."

The award is being presented by Toby Nixon, president of the Washington Coalition for Open Government.

"It takes a great deal of courage for a member of any public body to stand up to their peers and their professional advisers, and insist that not only the *letter* of the law but the *spirit* of the law be obeyed," said Toby Nixon, WCOG president. "The Coalition actively encourages other officials around the state to follow the example of Councilmember Knutsen and demand that

actions be taken openly and that deliberations be conducted openly unless the law and the public interest clearly require otherwise.”

WCOG presents its Key Award to individuals and organizations, including public officials and agencies, who have done something notable for the cause of open government. Knutsen was nominated for the award by WCOG Board Member Patience Rogge, who praised the councilmember’s stand for public access to all city council discussions, and for his efforts educating his colleagues that the “serial meetings” violate the spirit of the state’s Open Public Meetings Act.

The Washington Coalition for Open Government (WCOG) is an independent nonpartisan 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 or call (206) 782-0393.