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# Opinions

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## History behind Freedom of Information Act

**BY PAUL WOLF, ESQ.**

President of the New York Coalition For Open Government

On July 4, 1966, President Lyndon Johnson signed the federal Freedom of Information Act into law. According to Bill Moyers, Johnson's press secretary, "LBJ had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to the signing ceremony. He hated the very idea of open government, hated the thought of journalists rummaging in government closets, hated them challenging the official view of reality."

Unfortunately, in 2022, many elected officials feel the same way about open government as Lyndon Johnson did. Understanding the history behind the Freedom of Information Act is important as is continuing the fight for open government today.

In 1952, John Moss was elected

to represent the Sacramento area of California in Congress. While serving in Congress, Moss asked for agency records and was denied. News reporters complained to Moss that they likewise had difficulty obtaining information from government officials. In 1954, Moss introduced legislation to make government records available to the public. For 10 years as chair of the subcommittee on Government Information, Moss held hearings, and issued reports about government secrecy and advocated for such information to be available to the public.

The Government Information Subcommittee noted many instances of federal agencies refusing to release information, such as:

- The National Science Foundation stating it would not be in the "public interest" to disclose

competing cost estimates submitted by bidders for the award of a multi-million dollar project;

- The Navy ruled that telephone directories fell within the category of information relating to "internal management" and could not be released;

- Many federal agencies refused to release minutes showing the votes taken on contract awards.

Due to the efforts of Congressmen Moss, all of the above items and more are now made available to the public. Every single federal agency that testified at hearings for the Freedom of Information Act opposed it. Attempts were made to deny funding and to abolish Moss's Committee. It took 12 long years pushing Congress to pass it and three presidents to sign it, but on July 4, 1966, the Freedom of Information Act became

law.

On the 56th anniversary of the Freedom of Information Act, we owe a debt of gratitude to John Moss for his many years of fighting for the public's right to know what their government officials are doing.

New York state has its own Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), which all too often government officials are slow to respond to or refuse to comply with. There are no consequences for government officials that do not comply with the law and there is no entity that the public can turn to that has the power to enforce compliance with the law. New York's open government laws are in need of reform, and we need an elected official like John Moss with the tenacity to make it happen.

## AAA shares pool safety tips

From hazards to coverage, AAA offers safety advice for pool owners

**BY AAA OF WESTERN AND CENTRAL NEW YORK**

Drowning kills nearly 4,000 people each year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control. Drowning is also the leading cause of injury for children between the ages of 1 and 4. Many of these fatalities occur even with supervision.

"When warmer weather arrives, it's great to beat the heat in a pool. But pool owners, and their family and friends, should be aware of basic pool safety tips to make sure swimming is safe and fun for everyone," said Stacey McConnell, vice president of insurance at AAA Western and Central New York.

### Have Proper Pool Equipment

✓ Use a safety cover when your pool is not in use. Pool covers should tightly cover the entire pool so children or pets cannot slip underneath.

✓ Surround your pool with a fence or other barrier. The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends securing your pool with a 4-foot-high fence or barrier with a self-closing, self-latching gate.

✓ Keep your pool clean and clear, and keep children away from pool filters and other mechanical devices. The suction from these devices

can injure a swimmer and even hold someone under water.

✓ Keep lifesaving equipment nearby. Life rings, floats or a reaching pole should be easily accessible.

### Learn and Teach Water Safety Skills

✓ Keep children under supervision at all times. Have inexperienced swimmers swim with an adult in the pool and wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved vest.

✓ Limit alcohol use. The CDC reports that alcohol is involved in 70% of all teen and adult deaths associated with water recreation. Alcohol negatively impacts balance, coordination and judgment. These effects are heightened by sun exposure and heat.

✓ Regularly check the pool area for any potential accident hazards. Glass bottles, toys and electric devices, such as radios and fans, can pose tripping or electrical hazards.



✓ Don't leave toys or floats in the pool when it's not in use. Kids may fall into the pool trying to reach them.

✓ Take CPR and first aid training or refresh your training if it has been awhile. Those trainings save lives every year.

✓ Contact your insurance company. Let your insurance agent know if you have a pool to make sure you have the right coverage.

For more information, call AAA Members Insurance Agency of Western and Central New York, Inc. at 888-671-7044, visit [AAA.com/Insurance](http://AAA.com/Insurance), or stop by your local branch.

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**PUBLISHER**

Skip Mazenauer

**GM/MANAGING EDITOR**

Joshua Maloni

**EDITOR IN CHIEF/SENTINEL EDITOR**

Terrence P. Duffy

**WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS**

Joshua Maloni, Lucia Spiritosanto,

Toni Snyder

**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES**

Colleen Rebmann, Jeff Calarco,

Marcy Lombardo

**CIRCULATION**

Kim Wendt

**ACCOUNTING/OFFICE MANAGER**

Kim Wendt

**PRODUCTION MANAGER/ GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Wendy Juzwicky

**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS**

Lucia Spiritosanto, Toni Snyder

**CLASSIFIED MANAGER**

Toni Snyder

**ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

Jennifer Walowitz

**CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS/REPORTERS**

Michael J. Billoni, Kevin and Dawn Cobello,

Michael DePietro, Karen Keefe, Nathan

Keefe, Wayne Peters, Mark Williams Jr.,

David Yarger

**©2022 Niagara Frontier Publications**

1859 Whitehaven Road

Grand Island, N.Y. 14072

Phone (716) 773-7676

Fax (716) 773-7190

**Editorial:**

Tribune@wnypapers.com

Dispatch@wnypapers.com

Sentinel@wnypapers.com

**Advertising:**

NFPDesign@wnypapers.com

**Classifieds:**

NFPClassifieds@wnypapers.com

**Circulation:**

NFPCirculation@wnypapers.com

**Legals:**

legalnotice@wnypapers.com

**Website:**

wnypapers.com

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