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No more private sessions, Senate president vows

LEGISLATURE | He barred reporters at budget briefing

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February 18, 2010

BY **DAVE MCKINNEY** Sun-Times Springfield Bureau Chief

SPRINGFIELD -- After criticism from open-government advocates, Senate President John Cullerton pledged to avoid convening the Senate in private again as he did Wednesday to hear a budget briefing from a nationwide legislative association.

Cullerton (D-Chicago) faced unexpected blowback over a decision that he said was meant to foster a bipartisan working relationship with Republicans as the state stares down a \$12 billion budget deficit.

"You know what? Since everybody seems to be pretty upset about it, it's not that big a deal. We just won't do it anymore," Cullerton told reporters, who were barred from the Wednesday morning session with representatives of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Cullerton, who refused to characterize his decision as a mistake, said several senators, who are candidates for statewide office, might want to ask questions out of the public limelight.

"If you're a candidate, and you're worried about running for governor, you might want to ask a question. Maybe it's an uninformed question. Maybe it's a question that has some political ramifications, [and] you might not be inclined to make that question if reporters are there," he said.

Representatives from the National Conference of State Legislatures later briefed reporters on the group's findings, though that forum did not offer a snapshot of how senators interacted on the most volatile subject on the spring legislative agenda.

One longtime legislative expert said he'd never seen a similar instance of barring public access in four decades of watching the Senate.

"When it's a briefing about fiscal matters, I don't think there's a valid reason that it shouldn't be open," said Charles N. Wheeler III, director of the University of Illinois at Springfield's Public Affairs Reporting program and a former Sun-Times Statehouse bureau chief.

[Abridged Transcript Brown, Coakley, Kennedy U.S. Senate Debate WGBY Springfield, January 8th](#)

From Degrees of Moderation and Sanity

[The Coming Week - Legislative Edition](#)

From Blog For Arizona

The views expressed in these blog posts are those of the author and not of the Chicago

Sun-Times.

conservativeleftist wrote:

So was Cullerton winking and nudging McKinney in the ribs while making this profound observation? Springfield is infested with clueless (see Forby) or corrupt vermin. The voters need to clean house and elect candidates who favor "term-limits."

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damfunny wrote:

Cullerton is a disgusting P.O.S. who uses taxpayer monies like a

drunken sailor on shore leave AND denies Illinois citizens their 2nd Amendment rights. Shame on the stupid voters who keep voting for him and these other jagoffs:--Madigans--Daleys--Burkes--Strogers--Quinn--all the other bleeding-heart liberal big-government tax-and-spend gun-hating shmucks.

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chicago paul wrote:

Release the tapes! Release the transcripts! How many ways can we raise taxes seminar should be on C-SPAN, not behind closed doors. All the rats like to work without the light of day shining down upon them.

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honestly now wrote:

I like his statement: "You know what? Since everybody seems to be pretty upset about it, it's not that big a deal. We just won't do it anymore." Does that include all the other corrupt things going on? All the under the table money and favor exchanges? The outright lies and deceptions? The arrogance and the darn the taxpayer attitude? Just asking.

2/18/2010 5:50 AM CST on suntimes.com

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