First Amendment Foundation
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FLORIDA'S FIRST AMENDMENT FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES WINNER OF THE 2014

PETE WEITZEL/FRIEND OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT AWARD

The First Amendment Foundation is pleased to announce it will award **George Gabel** of Holland & Knight its **2014 Pete Weitzel/Friend of the First Amendment Award**.

"George Gabel is always there to stand up in court on behalf of the Sunshine laws and the First Amendment. George has been our legal champion for many years, as we worked to pry open public meetings, liberate public records and ensure the court system is open to the public," said *The Florida Times-Union* Editor Frank Denton in his nomination letter.

Gabel has been involved in First Amendment, media law, and open government issues throughout his career. His recent victory in Brown v. Denton ensured the public involvement in what had been a secret mediation. The Jacksonville City Council rejected the proposed pension plan that was negotiated during the mediation. The city then negotiated a new pension plan in public as required by law.

"As the First District Court of Appeals said in our recent pension fund case, when the business of the public is being discussed, the public has the right to be in the room. George has fought for that principle, believes that principle, and has been one of the leading lawyers in the state in the advancement of that principle," said Tim Conner, Gabel's partner at Holland & Knight.

Gabel's legal guidance allowed the *Times-Union* to better and more accurately explain the state's test scores under the controversial Value-Added Model (VAM) system. The test scores are used in public-school teacher evaluations. The Governor's office and the Department of Education refused to release the database of test scores. Gabel fought for the information's release and won. The *Times-Union* stories that followed raised public awareness of the problems with using the VAM approach.

Gabel is fond of quoting Thomas Jefferson: "If I had the choice between living in a democracy with a controlled press and a dictatorship with a free press, I'd choose the dictatorship, because it would soon become a democracy."

The Pete Weitzel/Friend of the First Amendment Award was created in 1995 to recognize the significant contribution made by Pete Weitzel, former managing editor of *The Miami Herald,* and founder and past president of the First Amendment Foundation, in the area of open government. The Award is given annually to someone in Florida who has made a significant contribution to the cause of furthering open government. Past recipients of the award can be found on the Foundation's website, www.floridafaf.org.

The 2014 Pete Weitzel/Friend of the First Amendment Award will be presented at the Foundation's annual Sunshine Recognition luncheon on Tuesday, March 17, 2015, at the Governor's Club in Tallahassee during Florida's annual Sunshine Week celebrations.

To sponsor the luncheon or purchase a table or individual tickets, please contact Katherine Garner at 850.224.4555 or via email at katherine@floridafaf.org or go to www.floridafaf.org/Sunshine_luncheon.