

Mike Weinstein needs to vote like a Republican

Yesterday when the House Civil Justice Subcommittee had the chance to sunset an antiquated Florida law that guarantees a monopoly on legal advertising to the failing newspaper industry, District 19 Representative Mike Weinstein of Jacksonville voted to kill the idea.

HB 149 would have allowed plaintiffs in foreclosure cases the option to publish legally mandated public notices online — rather than be limited to local printed newspapers.

This simple cost saving alternative, supported by the Florida Association of Counties and others, is long overdue when you consider that circulation at most printed newspapers has dropped sharply in recent years, making them a less important source of information distribution.

Under an arcane Florida law, most legal notices must be published in a printed newspaper qualified to be entered as “periodicals matter” at a post office in the county where it is published, and they must have been in existence for one year.

To qualify, the newspaper carrying the legal notice must be published at least weekly, at least 25% of the words must be in English, it must be for sale to the public and publish official and other notices from the public. It must customarily contain information of a public character, or of interest to the residents or property owners in the county, or of value to the public.

In Weinstein’s hometown, how many competing sources can meet the very narrow definition of the outdated law? Does anyone still qualify to publish legal notices in St. Johns County since the St. Augustine Record shut down their publishing plant at 1 News Place and now publishes their newspaper in Duval County?

Had the measure been allowed to advance to the full House floor for a vote, then been approved, foreclosure plaintiffs and local clerks of courts would have gained more flexibility and ultimately saved money, as website prices, which would have been capped at \$100 per notice, would have been significantly lower than the prices currently charged by newspapers.

Our appreciation for the effort by Ocala Representative Dennis Baxley, the Republican who sponsored the legislation; even though his pleas to “Let me out of committee” fell on regressive, technology-challenged ears. All five Democrats on the committee voted to protect the guaranteed

monopolistic subsidy given to printed newspapers, as expected. However, the remaining ten members could have easily allowed this important, modern-thinking, cost-saving measure to make its way to the full House for a vote.

Power lobbyists, like the Florida Press Association, threw in all the money and influence they could muster to avoid the expected “substantial loss of revenue to local newspapers”, according to a staff analysis of the legislation.

HB 149 never made it out of a Republican dominated committee (10 of 15 members are registered Republicans). The Republican Party supports smaller government, less wasteful government spending, less government regulation over free enterprise, and the ability of private businesses to compete in fair and open markets.

One vote would have allowed those ideals to be realized.

Shame on Mike Weinstein, Tampa Rep. Shawn Harrison and Naples Rep. Kathleen Passidomo. If you are going to use the Republican banner to be elected, then vote like a Republican when you get into office.