

• Latest Stories

- [Niles police log Dec. 3-4, 2014](#)
- [Buchanan woman jailed for embezzlement](#)
- [Inaugural “Stuff a Blue Goose” program a success](#)
- [Brandywine’s Smith overcoming adversity](#)
- [McKeel named new Niles softball coach](#)
- [Dowagiac hosting Cassopolis tonight](#)
- [College football ‘final four’ is just right](#)
- [Raises proposed](#)
- [Shop with a Cop](#)
- [Man accused with Amtrak stabbings told police he saw ‘a demon’](#)
- [Victims stable following stabbing](#)
- [This week at Fernwood Botanical Garden](#)
- [Police log — Dec. 1-2](#)
- [Woman gets probation for assault on mother](#)
- [Dowagiac woman receives prison for drunken collision](#)

Archived Story

Nixing public notices to keep citizens in the dark

Published 8:00am Thursday, November 20, 2014

[Email Print](#) [Comments](#)

| Be the first of your friends to like this.

Although it remains unclear whether or not they liken themselves to French seer Nostradamus or Apple creator Steve Jobs, part of the Michigan Legislature clearly thinks it can predict the future when it comes to technology and business.

That essentially is the only conclusion that I can draw from the recent effort to move House Bill 5560 from the Local Government Committee to the floor. This bill essentially predicts newspapers will be obsolete in 10 years, a common but misinformed Chicken Little outcry that “the sky is falling” that I have heard for most of the last two decades.

The bill would essentially eliminate public notices from being published in newspapers by 2025, with government Websites being the sole repository for this information across the state.

This bill would eliminate any outside verification of what government is doing. Hiding things from the citizens of our state will become easier due to the lack of oversight.

It is very concerning, as it would go a long way toward eliminating transparency because the government is now in charge of the mechanism by which they are sharing information. It also creates access issues for citizens who do not have regular access to computers, still a significant segment of the population in Cass and Berrien counties.

The legislation now heads to the full House of Representatives for consideration during this “lame duck session.”

If this bill becomes law, the phase out of newspaper notices will begin with the maximum required number of public notices for any government actions set at two insertions. In 2019 that number would drop to one before going away entirely about a decade from now.

“To me, this legislature is sending a clear message to the local newspapers of this state: don’t confuse us with the facts when it comes to public notice and taxpayer transparency,” MPA Executive Director Mike MacLaren said. “They’re saying they can predict the future, that technology will evolve the way they think it will and take it on faith that there will be significant cost savings in allowing government to control this vital information. I’ve yet to see ONE piece of legitimate evidence that says this will save government one cent. And when I see that some municipalities spend less than seventeen-hundredths-of-a percent of their budget on these notices, I begin to wonder what the real motivation is for this legislation.”

Our own Rep. Dave Pagel serves on the House Local Government Committee. I reached out to him prior to the vote and again afterwards upon learning that he voted in favor of moving it to the House floor.

“There is still time to amend this bill,” Pagel said via email, adding that the press association fought against any changes including some that would have actually required three notices instead of two. “I hope the newspapers can come around and support the change that I suggested. I want us also to take another look at the ‘3 versus 2’ issue. I voted ‘yes’ with some reservations ... but I hope that changes can yet be made to the bill. I have not decided yet how I will vote on the final bill in the House if changes are not made.”

If the goal is to create a simpler and uniform way for public notices to be handled across the state, it is an admirable one. If it is to save government resources that can be repurposed to better benefit taxpayers, I applaud those efforts. However, if it is simply a way to save a few bucks while ignoring other areas of wasteful spending and give government more control over the information we receive, then something has to change.

The Michigan Press Association may have stated it best with its efforts to explain to the public how important this is when it comes to accountability.

“Right now your newspaper prints these notices on pages independent of government control. Their pages can’t be ‘hacked,’ disappear during a power outage or be quietly updated to hide a mistake. These newspaper pages prove beyond the shadow of a doubt what government did, when it did it, how it did it and where citizens can learn more about the matter. They are proof-positive legal documents. They protect your rights.”

How can you put a price tag on that?

Michael Caldwell is the publisher of Leader Publications LLC. He can be reached at (269) 687-7700 or by email at mike.caldwell@leaderpub.com.

[Email Print](#) [Comments](#)
FROM AROUND THE WEB

Sponsored Links by Taboola