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HB 2447 is costly, unnecessary, dangerous

Edited version from the Sierra Vista Herald Feb 17, 2016 1

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Arizona senators will decide the fate of a bill that is supported by the leadership of the State Legislature, and if approved, will erode the intention and effectiveness of the public records law.

Last week the House voted 33-26 in favor of HB 2447, which lists Speaker David Gowan and Senate President Andy Biggs among the 16 sponsors of the measure. The bill calls for the Arizona Corporation Commission to set up a computer database as an alternative to publishing public notices in newspapers, which is required for new businesses and some corporate transactions. The legislation is limited to the state's two largest counties, Pima and Maricopa.

Casual observers of state government will miss the insidious design of this legislation to assure its passage and set up future extensions to further erode and eventually eliminate the need for printing public notices in newspapers. Once the database is built — at state expense and continuing state cost to maintain — it can only be financially justified by expanding its application to include other public notices and other counties.

Resistance to changing state laws governing public notices, public records and open meetings has consistently come from rural lawmakers. With the exception of Speaker Gowan — and in the past Rep. David Stevens — most legislators from rural districts in Arizona have favored keeping the existing laws in place to assure transparency and accountability in government.

Put simply, the laws are effective and understood, so HB 2447 is a bill without a problem to fix.

But that's not the view of state political leaders, several of whom have been embarrassed, questioned and criticized because of the information newspapers discover and report using the state's Public Notices, Public Records and Open Meetings laws.

Taxpayers will be paying the government for a service that is already available free of charge. The Arizona Newspapers and the Arizona Capitol Times currently pay for and maintain a searchable database for all public notices — including those for new businesses and corporate transactions.

Instead of helping the state's business community, this bill will result in job losses for the state's newspaper industry when the advertising revenue from these published notices is lost to the government.

Finally, which agency or what enforcement office will make sure that these notices get published? If enacted, HB 2447 would leave our state government in charge of its own oversight and enforcement.

Edited version from the Sierra Vista Herald.

(1) comment

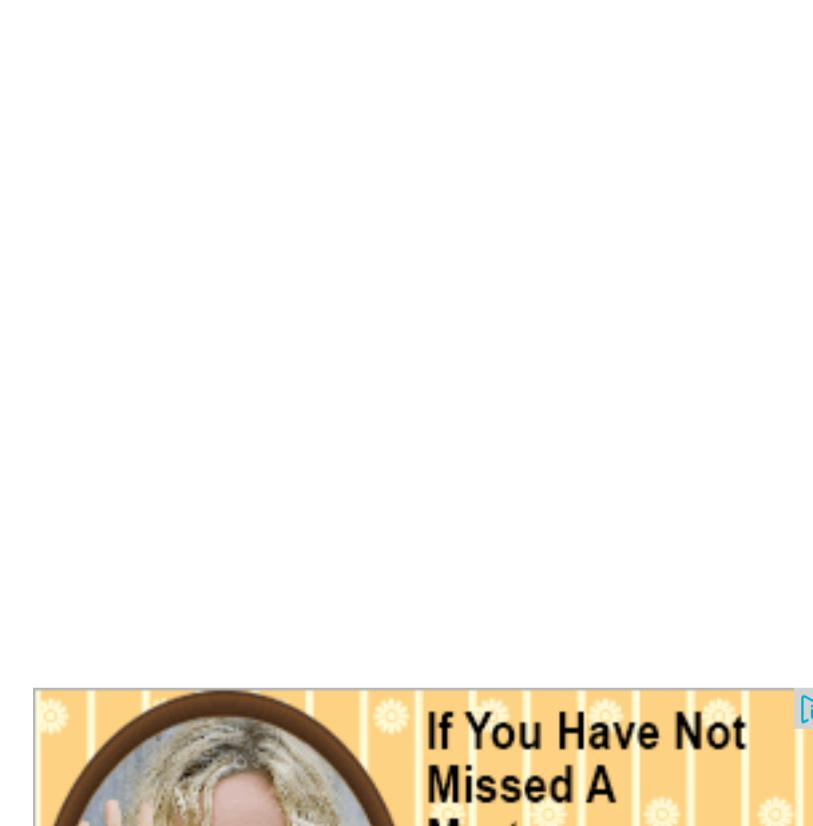
Mike Holmes Democratic Candidate for State Representative from Southeast Arizona Feb 17, 2016 12:19pm

Why is it that the elected leadership of our state continue to do all they can to weaken the People's ability to find out what their government is doing! Many in rural Arizona, or in our poorest communities do not have access to the internet. But most have access to newspapers. Our Republican leaders have become more and more elitist, and less interested in listening to the people who vote them into office.

So, let us stop voting them into office.

#RememberNovember2016

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