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Public notices as important as ever Hub Opinion Posted: December 29, 2011 1:00 pm Citizens who support government with their hard-earned tax dollars deserve accountability. It's no wonder that public notices published in newspapers are a cornerstone of open government.

Public notices have earned their place, and yet lawmakers and some officials wage a continued assault against notices.

This month in Wisconsin, one governmental entity argued that it takes too long for public notices in print to reach the intended audience. Earlier this year the Nebraska Legislature considered a handful of proposals that could have removed notices from newspapers.

Fortunately, our lawmakers didn't advance any of the proposals. Nebraska's public notice laws remain among the strongest in the nation.

Rather than sticking with trusted newspaper notices, officials seem to be enchanted with posting notices on government websites. Doing so might save the expense of publishing in legally designated newspapers, but the idea is like leaving the fox to guard the chicken coop.

With notices in print, there's no chance to alter them, as officials might do if they could publish their own notices online. Also, newspapers provide affidavits that prove notices have been published.

There are so many instances when notices have proven their worth.

Nebraska government spends just pennies per resident during major elections to publish in newspapers complete drafts of proposed constitutional amendments.

The notice process also calls for governments to publish requests for bids on important purchases of services and equipment. It was the notice process two years ago that helped Nebraska Auditor Mike Foley foil an attempt by a state psychologist to steer a \$200,000 contract for substance abuse counseling to a friend.

After Hurricane Katrina, the federal government decided publishing notices requesting bids would take too long. Lacking competitive manufacturers' proposals, Uncle Sam wasted millions of tax dollars buying badly designed and shoddily built shelters for hurricane victims.

Some years ago, the law requiring U.S. banks to publish quarterly condition reports was quietly set aside. We have to wonder if the banking crisis of 2009 might have been avoided if Americans had been able to monitor bank conditions more closely.

Our elected leaders know it is the government's responsibility to be open and accessible. It is citizens' responsibility to keep watch by reading public notices and news stories and attending important governmental meetings.