

Some state lawmakers and other government officials seem to figure that Virginians get all of their news from the Internet.

Which means they must not be thinking about you, if you're holding a newspaper.

Eight bills were introduced during the current General Assembly session that would shift some notices about government meetings, public hearings, procurement and other actions from print publications to websites and other places, according to our sister newspaper, the Richmond Times-Dispatch, which examined all of them.

The legislation would pull those notices from the classified pages of papers such as this one in favor of locations where, probably, one would have to go hunting for them, such as an official city or county website.

Put another way: It's unlikely that one would stumble upon notice of a City Council meeting on an obscure part of a municipality's site, but that certainly could happen if a reader was thumbing through the paper.

In fact, maybe that reader, seeing the notice, decides then to attend the meeting and offers insight that helps to move the community forward.

At The News Virginian, we like that possibility. When information is in the hands of the public, it allows discussion to happen. It gives voice to the people so elected officials know how their constituents really feel. And it can help to shed light on wrongdoing.

Such examples have been shared before on this page. It bears repeating, too, that, no, we're not in this for the money. Public notices are advertisements, and governments and governmental organizations do pay for them. But the revenue we get from them is minimal, compared to other sources.

And, as for the argument that eliminating these ads would save governments money, estimates indicate that only one-half of 1 percent of operating expenditures is spent on public notices, regardless of a locality's size, according to The Times-Dispatch.

So it was disheartening to hear that the Valley's own Del. Steve Landes was one of those lawmakers who introduced a bill that would have ended the mandate that notices be printed in a newspaper of general circulation in a given area.

The Weyers Cave Republican's legislation would have allowed local governments to choose two methods of publicizing notices. They could have continued to put them in a local paper, but the notices also could have appeared on the locality's website, or on a public access channel. Local governments could have employed an automated voice or text alert system, or posted notices at a public library.

Landes' service to this region is well known, and it's certainly a boon to have a member of our delegation on the influential, budget-writing House Appropriations Committee.

However, we have to part ways with the gentleman on this matter, and we're glad his bill was voted down in subcommittee Thursday.

Another bill, this one introduced by Del. Ron Villanueva, R-Virginia Beach, will go to the full House of Delegates. It would make it optional to publish local government procurement notices in newspapers.

Let's hope a majority of delegates do the right thing and agree with most of the more than 500 folks who participated in a survey for the Virginia Press Association on the matter:

97 percent of the respondents said that the principle of the public's right to know what their government is doing and planning is either very important (79 percent) or somewhat important (18 percent);

63 percent said that they would read public notices much less often (36 percent) or less often (27 percent) if these were placed only on government websites;

and 72 percent have not gone to a government website to read a public notice.

In the newspaper business, the facts, the details, are what are important. And these details seem to make the argument for us: State residents want government notices in print. May the General Assembly follow their lead.