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Some ink in defense of print

Sometimes, there's a big advantage to having a newspaper's editorial page at your disposal. This is one of those times.

Although this year's municipal elections have several controversial issues that have kept Anchorage residents busy debating one another, there's a ballot proposition that has gotten almost no attention in the local media that, if passed, would have a major impact on newspapers like ours.

Proposition 6 would allow the municipality to publish its public notices online, rather than in a print newspaper as is currently the law. The idea behind the proposition is to save the muni money by allowing it to simply post its meetings and agendas on its own website as opposed to buying an advertisement in one of the local newspapers.

While this might seem like a good idea, there are a couple compelling reasons why it's not — and we'll admit, the first one is in our own interest.

Revenues at print newspapers are derived in large part from advertising dollars. Many of these dollars have left print media in recent years as businesses have chosen to put their money into television, radio and online rather than print — where readership numbers have decreased over the past two decades.

As these revenues have decreased, publications have been forced to cut staff and reduce the size of their papers. This, in turn, has led more people to turn away from traditional newspapers. It's a cycle that often causes folks to say, "the paper is just so small!" when referring to the much-larger daily paper just down the road from the Star.

In other words, the fewer advertising dollars that go into newspapers, the less those papers can deliver to readers; and the less papers can deliver to their readers, the weaker those publications become.

While it's not the role of government to subsidize newspapers, the revenue that is derived from public notices is one of the few areas where we are still able to compete with online sources. If this proposition passes, it will be just one more nail in the coffin for all print publications. And that will mean that instead of complaining papers are too small, people will be left to wonder why there's no paper at all.

Aside from our admittedly biased reason for being against Prop 6, there's also a couple other reasons people should consider when they go to the polls. First, there's no guarantee that a municipal website can ever be 100 percent free from the risk of going offline. Power outages, hacking and viruses can easily put websites out of commission for minutes, hours or days. If the

only source of municipal notices is a website, that website could easily disappear — taking the public notices with it. That can't happen with print. You can't hack ink.

Finally, we'd argue that many people are still unable or unwilling to easily access online sources. Although it may seem like second nature to many of us, finding information online can be a daunting task for those who came of age before the Internet Age. For these people — many of whom remain very active in local politics — seeing public notices in print is often the only way they're able to find out about public meetings, road closures and other information vital to their making an informed decision and being a viable part of the debate. If passed, Proposition 6 would likely cut many of these people off from the discussion and, in effect, limit their ability to participate in our Democracy.

Please vote "No" on Prop 6.