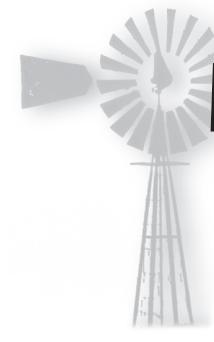


Bronco wins

HC men, women victorious at Midland.

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Call for unity

After surviving recall by narrow margin, Omaha mayor ready for fresh start.

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The entire notion of public notices was built on the reliability and accountability of newspapers. Once you print it, it is there forever. It cannot be updated with a timestamp.

"

- Brook Curtiss, owner of the Plainview News

A fight for the right to know

NEWSPAPER OFFICIALS TURN OUT IN FORCE AGAINST PROPOSED CHANGE IN PUBLIC MEETING NOTICES

SHAY BURK

sburk@hastingtribune.com

LINCOLN — Nebraska newspaper publishers and owners testified against a legislative bill here Wednesday that could potentially push public meeting notices out of newspapers and onto the Internet.

The seven representatives with newspapers from Omaha to Benkelman testified before the Nebraska Legislature's Government, Military and Veteran Affairs Committee on LB444.

The bill, introduced by Sen. Bill Avery of Lincoln, would allow city, county and other public bodies to publish their meeting notices online rather than in newspapers.

According to existing state statute, "Each public body shall give reasonable advance published notice of the time and place of each meeting by a method designated by each public body and recorded in its minutes."

Generally this means organizations will place a short notice in the local newspaper and post a paper copy of the agenda in the city hall, county courthouse or other public building.

The proposal Avery introduced late Wednesday afternoon would add to the existing statute the following language: "Methods of providing such notice shall include, but not be limited to, publication in a

Please see KNOW/page A7



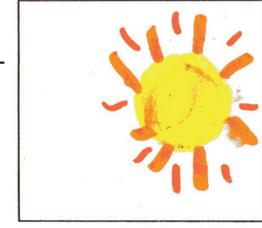
The Legislature's Government, Military and Veteran Affairs Committee Wednesday heard testimony on a bill that could potentially push public meeting notices out of newspapers and onto the Internet.



Jean Reinhardt shares her childhood memories of growing up near Mullen with Alcott fourth-grader Kiera Tenant-VanWinkle Wednesday at The Kensington.

Weather

Lo:
25
Hi:
52



Art by Meghan Brandt, 7, Dresher Lutheran School

PACKERS TIE

CHICAGO — A Chicago man who was fired for wearing a Green Bay Packers necktie to his job at a car dealership is going back to work selling Chevrolets — but not for the same place.

Thirty-four-year-old John Stone of Chicago's South Side says he's starting work today at Chevrolet of Homewood. He decided to take the new job even though the manager of Webb Chevrolet in Oak Lawn relented and offered him his old one back.

Nation

Stone says he was offered the new job Tuesday as he was being interviewed on television about his firing. Chevrolet of Homewood general manager Guy Cesario says Packers fans called promising to buy new cars from Stone if he's hired.

The Associated Press

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THE SEATON PUBLISHING CO., INC. HASTINGS, NEBRASKA

Rose out in Clay Co.

TONY HERRMAN

therman@hastingtribune.com

CLAY CENTER — By a vote of 2-5 here Tuesday, the Clay County Board of Supervisors chose not to renew the contract of Emergency Manager Bob Rose, who has been in the position for 31 years.



Rose said in an interview this morning that he was not given a reason for the decision and the supervisors hadn't communicated with him about the issue prior to the meeting.

"Absolutely not," he said.

Please see ROSE/page A7

River flood watch set

WILL VRASPIR

wvraspir@hastingtribune.com
Residents and businesses located near the Platte River are being asked to watch for an increased flood risk.

The National Weather Service Wednesday issued a hazardous information outlook for areas along the river.

Cindy Fay, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hastings, said a few factors have come together to cause the action.

River channels in areas of Hall County are already ice jammed or frozen over, causing water flow to be restricted. Fay said the river has been more full than usual since the area is coming out of a drought. Even though the river levels in the Platte remain below flood stage, she said it could change.

Warmer weather caused the possible flood situation as snow and ice has melted, adding water to the river.

Please see RIVER/page A7

When I was in school ...

ALCOTT STUDENTS INTERVIEW KENSINGTON RESIDENTS ABOUT GOOD OL' DAYS

CHARIS UBBEN

cubben@hastingtribune.com

How have schools changed over the last century or so? The young and old students chattering away inside the Kensington dining room Wednesday intended to find out.

This afternoon visit was the third Alcott Elementary fourth-graders have made to The Kensington retirement home this year. Students interviewed Kensington residents who volunteered for the activity, first gathering their Thanksgiving memories, then Christmas

memories, and now school memories.

School safety measures, certainly, have evolved over the years.

"When we were in high school, we had fire drills," said Iola Saddler, 89. "We had a fire escape on the side of the building, so the girls always went down first — we slid down this big tube and got outdoors — and then the boys followed. Well, I guess there were two boys that went first and they caught us as we came out, so we didn't fall in the gravel out there."

Saddler graduated from Kenesaw High School, attending a three-story brick building that has since been torn down. High school classrooms were upstairs, while first through eighth grades were combined two grades per classroom on the first floor. The basement held class-

rooms like home economics, shop and gym, Saddler said.

After graduating from Kenesaw, Saddler returned to teach there; at District 57, north of the Hastings airport; at District 12 south of Juniata; and at Maxwell.

While Alcott fourth-graders Brittany Ramos, Amber Buck and Emily Gartner talked with Saddler, across the room their classmates Josiah Bronson, Grant Benway and Trevor Cox were interviewing Druella Hohnstein, 86. The boys were surprised by some of the things Hohnstein said about school.

"They had to bring their lunch and we don't have to, because they make it for us and give it to us. That's what I thought was really interesting," Josiah said.

Please see SCHOOL/page A7

Know: Newspaper reps fight for public's right to know

Continued from page A1
 newspaper of general circulation, posting on the public body's website, or posting in a public building in the community."

Throughout the hearing, there was confusion among both the eight members of the committee and members of the audience regarding the interpretation of the proposed language.

Larry Dix, executive director of the Nebraska Association of County Officials, was the lone supporter of the bill who spoke in favor of allowing counties to post emergency meeting notices and other meeting notices on their government websites.

"If some piece of equipment breaks down and we only have a board meeting once a month and it's not on the agenda, we have to wait a month," he said. "And many times those don't meet the level of emergency but they're things we need to talk about. Therefore we want to have latitude to talk about these kinds of requirements."

When questioned, Dix said some counties already post meeting notices on their websites; however, the Nebraska Legislature has never given them the express permission to do so.

"From a county government

perspective, counties are sort of a creation of the state and we only have the authorities that the Legislature gives us and counties are looking to publish on their websites," he said. "We see this as a clarification of existing law."

Sen. Charlie Janssen of Fremont asked about the specific wording of the proposed change and what exactly it meant.

"So you have to put it in paper and on website according to this language," Janssen questioned.

"I don't read it that way," Dix retorted.

Janssen replied by saying that if a tractor breaks down and the county board needs to talk about it, that a meeting notice could be nailed to a post in town and then they could have the meeting.

Sen. Scott Price of Bellevue said he believed that the proposed language gave public groups an additional option for meeting postings.

"We're saying this gives us another option and gives us option to do some of the things we're doing today," Dix replied.

Sen. Paul Schumacher of Columbus said that this proposal would allow a county to replace the posting in the "pulp newspaper" with a post-

ing on the Internet.

Dix also reminded the committee that this proposal would only affect public meeting notices and not the minutes, claims and other information that must be published in a newspaper.

"And I just came from a hearing down the hall that wiped out state aid to counties and some of the comments were that, 'If you have an idea of something that would help, bring it forward.' This is something that would help," he said. "We're bringing it forward. With that, I would more than stress we're not trying to do this to harm a newspaper. We're trying to do this to help notify the public of our meetings."

Throughout the hearing, Sen. Schumacher asked different publishers how much they charge for the short meeting notices.

The average was \$4-6 per legal notice and most boards and commissions meet once or twice a month or less. Some groups only meet at certain times a year or quarterly.

Brook Curtiss, owner of the Plainview News in northeast Nebraska, said his newspaper is one of three in one county. The three newspapers each publish the legal notices for the one price and split it among

the three papers. In some cases that may mean the \$5 for the ad is split with each paper only getting about \$1.25.

"With the meeting notices, since I get only one-third of income, it wouldn't be much money," he said.

It wasn't the money so much as it was the public's right to know that the publishers defined as their reason for protesting against the proposed legislation.

"The entire notion of public notices was built on the reliability and accountability of newspapers," Curtiss said.

"Once you print it, it's there forever," he said. "It cannot be changed. It cannot be updated with a timestamp."

Curtiss, 30, said he is a child of the Internet age, yet he has come to know that everything on the Internet is not fact and things can be changed easily.

Additionally, Curtiss said of his 1,200 subscribers, he only had 15 over a period of six months who expressed an interest in subscribing to the online edition of his weekly paper.

Jason Frederick, another young owner with three weekly papers in southwest Nebraska, said he knows the Internet isn't readily available to many or widely used by his readers.

"I want to stress if legal notices are moved from newspapers and put on the Web — my grandmother, my mother-in-law and aunt, they don't have computers and aren't on the Internet — you will take away these citizens' rights and abilities to stay informed on what their representatives are doing," he said.

According to the "Internet Connectivity and Use in Nebraska" study conducted the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 44 percent of central Nebraskans are without access to broadband Internet and many of them don't have Internet at all.

If public notices and/or other public documents are moved completely online, Frederick said many Nebraskans would lose access to this vital information.

"Are you going to count these people out? I don't find it prudent or responsible," he said.

Barry Richards, a farmer from Hayes Center, said he gets all his news from the newspaper and doesn't even know how to use the Internet.

"I just want to bring the human side to it," he said. "I live to read the paper and I dictate my week by it. The paper tells me if something is going on in town, at school or in McCook."

Larry King, vice president and general counsel for The Omaha World Herald, also testified against the bill, saying that newspapers are the best source for local information in any community from Omaha to Hemingford.

"Newspapers are an independent entity separate from government that serve as a watchdog and allow people to also be watchdogs independent of the government," he said. "I just think the newspaper is the best source, most credible and best for people to find it instead of a government website."

King said he believed the proposed legislation was confusing and that he was satisfied with the current laws regarding the posting of meeting notices.

"I don't understand reason for this legislation and I think it's confusing and the options on where government entities can post adds confusion and doesn't help the public find the information. It would scatter it," he said.

The committee will meet in a closed session meeting before releasing a final decision on the bill sometime during the session. The committee's options are to forward it to the full Legislature, table it or vote to not forward it to the full Legislature.

Rose: Clay County board doesn't renew contract

Continued from page A1

Rose, 68, had been Clay County's volunteer emergency manager from 1980 through 2004, when he received a paid contract. Meanwhile, he taught and coached in Nebraska schools for 40 years.

Before becoming the county's emergency manager, he was Edgar's local emergency manager and county deputy emergency manager.

The vote to reappoint Rose as Clay County emergency manager for 2011 came at the end of his annual evaluation.

Supervisor Todd Nuss of Sutton made the motion for reappointment, and Jerry Schmidt of Harvard seconded it.

The men were the only two supervisors who voted in favor of reappointment.

Nuss voted in favor then, Rose recalled, supervisor Gary Johnson of Clay Center wanted to put off the reappointment to keep the county's options open. Then all of the other supervisors, except for Schmidt, voted against Rose.

In an interview this morning about the vote, Schmidt was reluctant to talk about the issue but said Rose and his wife Carol, who worked in the emergency management department, have had a positive influence on Clay County.

"We are going to go see what the classrooms are like," said Rhonda Kolbet, Kensington activities director who baked a large batch of chocolate chip cookies for students to enjoy after their interviews.

"We get to know people that we don't know," Emily added.

This discussion of school memories will help to prepare the fourth-graders for their Feb. 4 visit to the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, where they'll learn about the one-room schoolhouse.

A few more interactions are also in store for students and residents. In April, for the first time since this program began, Kensington residents will make a visit of their own to Alcott.

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