

Courier Press, Pence says he would centralize public meeting notices in Indiana (10.30.12)

INDIANAPOLIS — U.S. Rep. Mike Pence says he plans to launch a central bulletin board for citizens to find public meeting notices posted by state agencies and commissions if he's elected governor.

Pence, the Republican who is facing Democratic former Indiana House Speaker John Gregg and Libertarian Rupert Boneham, said he plans the new website in a response to a survey sent to each candidate by the Indiana Coalition for Open Government.

Currently, state meeting notices are posted only on the websites devoted to each agency and commission, which makes tracking each meeting difficult for watchdog groups.

"Indiana should make it easier for its citizens to learn about and attend state meetings. We will create a central posting site for notices of public meetings so that Hoosiers can find out about any public meeting, at any time, for any agency, at one convenient website," Pence wrote in his response to the survey.

He also said he would favor that the state respond to public records requests by sending the information electronically, if possible, or by mail, rather than requiring citizens to pick it up in person.

And Pence pledged to require that a "reasonable number of copies" of documents or other materials discussed at public meetings be brought to hand out to members of the public who are attending those meetings.

"In our increasingly complex information society, It is vital that voters have a clear understanding of the candidates' commitment to maintaining and improving public access to the affairs of government," said Gerry Lanosga, the Indiana Coalition for Open Government's president.

His organization, the Hoosier State Press Association and others successfully lobbied state lawmakers last year for a law measure that allows for fines of public officials who knowingly violate Indiana's open records laws.

Pence said that law's implementation should be monitored to see whether any changes are necessary.

Gregg's campaign did not respond to the nine specific questions that Lanosga's group addressed to each candidate. Instead, Gregg provided a four-paragraph written response.

"Where practical, I am in favor of making public records available online. This not only increases government transparency, but it can reduce administrative costs," Gregg's response said.

Boneham's campaign, Lanosga said, did not respond at all.