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Bill on legal notice law should be rejected

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Posted: Saturday, January 12, 2013 12:00 am

2 comments

Eagle Editorial Board

Freshmen lawmakers generally fall into two categories. Some are content to sit back, watch and learn how things work, while others are eager to file their first bill as a way of showing the folks back home they are hard at work.

Falling into the latter category is new state Rep. Jonathan Strickland, R-Hurst, who no doubt wants to show he can cut spending with a bill he filed on Dec. 31. In his proposed legislation, Strickland would let government entities, including school boards, city councils and commissioners courts, post the legally required notices of upcoming meetings and various requests for proposals and bids on their own websites. Now, the law states the notices must be printed in a newspaper of general circulation that covers the area served by the government.

While at first glance, the bill seems innocuous, it is, in fact, dangerous -- and, it won't save much money, either.

Yes, The Eagle and other Texas newspaper make money from such ads, but the income is minimal. State law requires newspapers to charge their lowest classified rate to run the notices. In 2011, Texas counties spent an average of 0.00533 percent of their budgets on legal notices involving procurement. And, most papers put the legal notices on their websites at no additional charge. And, those online notices are gathered by the Texas Press Association and put on its website.

So why should government entities be allowed to switch such notification to their own websites, which wouldn't cost them any extra money? Quite simply, as hard as it may seem for our younger readers, not everyone has access to the Internet. Statistics show that the elderly, minorities, the disabled and those living in rural portions of Texas are less likely to have a computer and an Internet connection. Are they not supposed to know what their government is up to and how it is spending their money?

Many of those without the Internet take their local newspaper. Even if they don't, they can read a copy at their public library or any number of other places where newspapers are available, from barber shops to village cafés.

Many readers might ask why the legal notices are so important. Simply put, it is a way the taxpaying public can keep tabs on what their government is doing. The public can learn what topics are up for discussion and a vote at the next council or court or board meeting. The public can learn what projects and programs affecting traffic, water, public health and so much more are being funded. It can learn what the proposed tax rate is going to be? It is all a part of government transparency and the ability of the public to know what the government is doing for -- and, perhaps, to -- them.

By all means, government entities should post their legal notices on their own websites. It makes for a better-informed public. But they shouldn't be allowed to drop the requirement for publication in their local newspaper. Too much is at stake for that to happen.

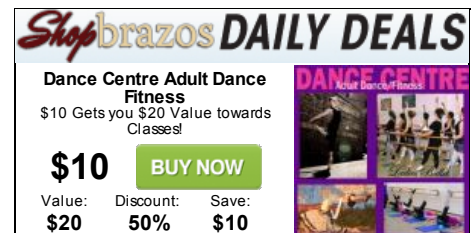
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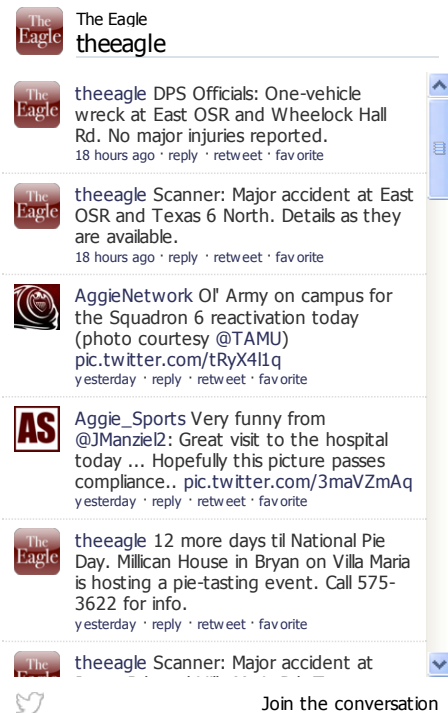
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The Eagle is not responsible for the content above, which is provided in real-time from Twitter.

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3

Be Truthful.
Don't knowingly lie about anyone or anything.

4

Be Nice.
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5

Be Proactive.
Use the 'Report' link on each comment to let us know of abusive posts.

6

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January 2013						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		
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2 comments:

FredMark posted at 1:43 pm on Sun, Jan 13, 2013.



Posts: 1

The bill should be changed. Firstly, we taxpayers are being overcharged to put notices in print and so the publication requirement should dump print immediately. A notice in Nevada just cost Clark County \$580,000. Secondly, in agreement with the Eagle, the notices shouldn't be only published on the counties' own web sites. There should be an independent entity to make sure notices are published in full. The Rio Grande Guardian, a fantastic online only local publication is publishing notices really well and anyone with a cell phone can receive them. Allow the online only news publications to compete for the publication of notices and we will see our waste decrease and community engagement increase.

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BRYAN: \$100 FREE RENT!

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ftw posted at 9:59 am on Sun, Jan 13, 2013.



Posts: 225

I agree with The Eagle on this one. The public needs every opportunity to learn and know what their elected officials are doing, and what is happening in their communities and surrounding area.

Even with private development, there can be a lot of public money required to improve infrastructure to support traffic, water, sewage and electricity, to mention a few. Those items are typically paid for from taxes on the public, and cost significant amounts of money. Many times, a bond election is held to pay for these items, including school bonds to pay for new schools or upgrades to existing ones.

Knowing what happens locally within your municipality is as much a part of being a good citizen, as voting is. Be involved and be informed so you can make good decisions about local issues and voting. After all, it's your money.

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Updated: 12:46 am

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