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EDITORIAL: A bad idea: Stickland bill would place all trust for public notices in government's hands

Tuesday February 5, 2013

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Freshman state Rep. Jonathan Stickland's bill scuttling a state requirement that local governmental entities publish public notices in newspapers strikes us as not only naive but dangerous. Anyone who believes in open, honest government should oppose this legislation, which would effectively trust all cities, counties, school districts and other entities across Texas to post notices about meetings, taxes and procurements on their websites.

Granted, some governmental entities might be beyond reproach in how they run their websites, but are all up to it? And what happens if they fail?

Stickland says allowing governmental entities to post such notices would be cheaper than placing them in newspapers. Perhaps, but in our experience, some governmental websites are abysmally maintained by those very entities. Some websites are not only difficult for the average constituent to negotiate but border on irresponsible when it comes to providing up-to-date information — which, of course, is the very bread and butter of daily newspapers. What's more, unless they're looking for something specific, most people don't routinely peruse government websites the way they do newspapers. And what if they lack computers?

This bill appears at an odd juncture in time. Polls suggest that many Americans are more distrustful of government — all government — than they've been in some years. Even when public notices are duly published in both newspapers and on governmental websites, as they are (or should be) currently, some in the public still claim they're not properly informed. And yet Stickland would further restrict public access to such information, some of it critically relevant.

In a column by Stickland that we published at his request Saturday (and at no charge), he suggested newspapers are antiquated and that nobody reads public notices in them anymore. We are moved to wonder then why he wanted his remarks published in the local newspaper.



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