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Two public notice bills bad for taxpayers

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Posted: Wednesday, February 27, 2013 12:00 pm

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ver encounter something that, at first glance, seems to make sense. But on closer examination, you find it's actually a really bad idea?

That's the case with a few bills being heard by the Arizona legislature.

These bills deal with the public notices you find in the backs of newspapers all across the state.

These bills — one from Cochise County's representative David Stevens and the other from Warren Peterson of Gilbert — would allow governments and the purchasers of other public notices, for corporations, bankruptcies, etc., to place the notices on a Web site managed by the governmental agency making the notice and not have to purchase space in the newspaper.

Sounds like a government cost-saver, right?

Wrong.

The rates charged by newspapers pale compared to the salaries and benefits that each governmental body would have to pay to hire a full-time staff member or members to manage the public notices — about one-third the cost. Plus there's the added cost of additional server space.

That means more money from the taxpayer for a service that's already paid for.

And what about the members of the public that aren't on the Web? Or the people that don't go to a government's Web site? And let's be honest, how often do any of us surf a county or city Web site just to check it out? Now compare that to the almost hourly checking of our Facebook or Twitter accounts and the daily, twice daily or more checking of news sites.

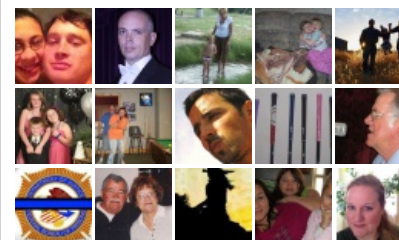
The truth is, putting a public notice on a city or county Web site means the majority of people — the overwhelming majority — will never see that information. Which is perfect for a politician or bureaucrat who wants to do things outside of the public eye.

Public notices in the newspapers — as required under current state law — mean every reader has the potential

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to see what their government is doing. And the newspaper acts as historical record — once it's printed, it never goes away. Unlike on the Web, where history can be scrubbed.

As a newspaper, we have a vested interest in the fate of these bills. But we also believe these bills are bad for champions of open government. And we encourage everyone to contact state representatives and senators and ask them to vote against these bills.

Oh, and Mr. Stevens and Mr. Peterson? All those public notices are already online — on the Web sites of the individual newspapers across the state and through the Arizona Newspaper Association. At no additional cost to the taxpayer.

Reprinted from the Eastern Arizona Courier.

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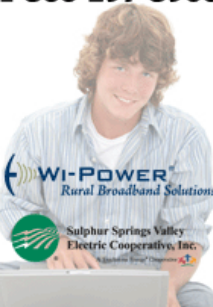
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▼	2.07	▼	0.07%
S&P 500			1514.68
▼	1.31	▼	0.09%

Russell 2K			911.11
▲ 1.191	▲	0.131%	
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