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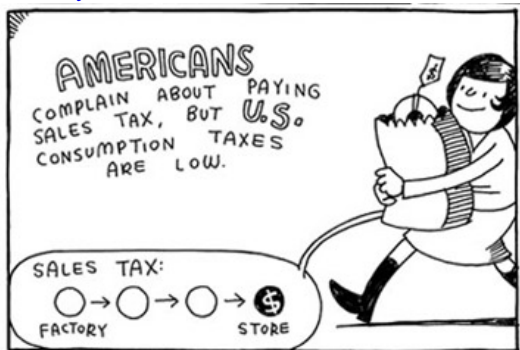
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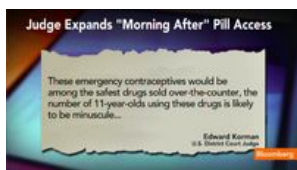
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# Arizona lawmakers go after newspaper notices

By By Cristina Silva on March 19, 2013

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PHOENIX (AP) — Republicans in the Arizona House of Representatives are once again trying to repeal a mandate that makes local governments publish public notices in newspapers.

The House voted 31-27 Monday on the measure that would allow some cities and towns to instead post public notices online. Communities with populations smaller than 100,000 people would still be required to publish notices in newspapers under the proposed law.

The bill returned to the Republican-led House after it failed in a 26-31 vote Wednesday. Republicans joined Democrats to defeat the bill.

Republican Rep. Warren Petersen of Gilbert, the measure's sponsor, promised to amend the bill in the Senate so only some notices could be published online. It would also remove the exemption for cities and towns smaller than 100,000 people.

Republican Rep. Karen Fann of Prescott, one of the bill's fiercest critics initially, was among the handful of Republicans who changed their minds and ultimately helped send the measure to the Senate for approval. Fann said Petersen's proposed amendment would address her concerns about rural, low-income and elderly

residents not being able to find notices online.

"Regardless of which medium you use, you will be notified," she said of the proposed changes.

But Democratic Rep. Lisa Otondo, of Yuma, said the changes would still leave some residents in the dark.

"I love newspapers and, as I heard someone say, I love the smell of them and I love the touch of them, but this just isn't about newspapers," she said. "It's about the digital divide that exists in Arizona."

A second measure to limit the publication mandate failed with opposition from Republicans and Democrats. The House voted 18-39 against the legislation that would have established a maximum rate for the cost of the notices. It also would have required governments to post the notices in the local newspaper with the greatest circulation.

The bill's sponsor, Republican Rep. David Stevens of Sierra Vista, called it a first step toward stopping the mandatory notices.

"We dictate that people have to do it, that they have to go publish in a newspaper, then we should be able to dictate the price," Stevens told The Associated Press before the vote.

But critics said the measure violated the First Amendment because it limited the publication of public notices to only certain newspapers. They also opposed the rate cap.

The newspaper industry opposes any effort to limit the mandate. Smaller newspapers could face steep revenue losses if the measures became law, prompting job losses and some publications to fold.

"Public notices have been in newspapers for years. It has been a very effective way to notify the public of what the government is doing," said Paula Casey, executive director of the Arizona Newspapers Association.

Under the proposed changes, voters would have to hunt down information about budgets, hearings and other public business on government websites, Casey said.

"They will be able to hide stuff if they want to. Who would know unless you are privy to what is going on in that situation," she said.

Proponents said it is unfair to force local governments to pay for newspaper space. They note newspaper circulation is generally in decline and more people are getting their news from the Internet.

"If it was 20 years ago I wouldn't even support it, but today as it stands, yes," Stevens said.

Similar bills in recent years have failed to win passage.

Cristina Silva can be reached at <http://www.twitter.com/cristynsilva>.

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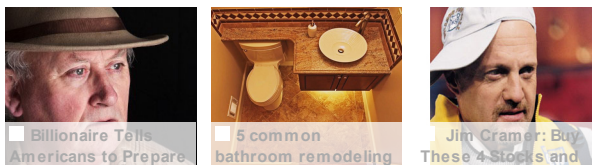
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