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Arizona public-notice bill voted down in House

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By Mary Jo Pitzl

The Republic | azcentral.com

Wed Mar 13, 2013 10:00 PM

The House of Representatives isn't willing to cut off a source of money for Arizona newspapers by changing rules on publication of official municipal announcements — at least not yet.

On Wednesday, the House defeated a bill that would have allowed cities and counties to publish the notices of zoning changes, budget hearings and other government dealings on their own websites, instead of in a newspaper of general circulation. Currently, state law requires the notices run in a newspaper.

Debate on House Bill 2533, sponsored by Rep. Warren Petersen, R-Gilbert, spread over two days, and the vote was close. A bipartisan mix of 31 lawmakers voted to defeat it by five votes, prompting Petersen to call for it to be reconsidered Monday. In a bid to pass the bill, Petersen offered an amendment that would have it apply only to cities and counties with populations of 100,000 or more.

The Arizona Newspapers Association, of which *The Arizona Republic* is a member, strongly opposes the bill and has worked to defeat it.

The bill sparked a passionate debate that revolved around the declining revenues of newspapers, the digital divide that leaves rural Arizona with limited Internet service and whether allowing local governments to post their own notices would be tantamount to the fox guarding the henhouse.

"Consider the rights of those in rural areas," said Rep. Jamescita Peshlakai, D-Cameron. She argued that many people in her district don't have Internet service.

But Rep. Steve Montenegro, R-Avondale, said those fighting the bill are simply trying to prop up the financial fortunes of newspapers.

"What (they're) trying to do is protect the subsidization of an industry," he said.

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