

## County 10 Viewpoint: Legal Notices are a Legislated Monopoly for Wyoming Newspapers

8 days ago by Fabian Lobera 2 .(Lander, Wyo) — Up for discussion tomorrow by the Wyoming Joint Corporations committee is legal advertising and publication requirements for local governments. Legal notices are the fine print you see in the back of your local newspaper that occupy a few pages announcing foreclosures, public meetings, and other legal proceedings. What is not well known is that state regulations currently require municipalities to pay newspapers to place these notices. Many local governments have decried this practice as a legislated monopoly that is no longer the most efficient way to spend these dollars. We agree.

This represents a significant amount of money to cities, counties, state and ultimately you and me, as taxpayers. In Fremont County the budgeted costs for the 2012 fiscal year will approach \$50,000. Statewide, that number will be over three quarters of a million dollars this year alone.

The discussion tomorrow will likely center around whether local governments should be required to post notices in a local newspaper or whether other avenues may serve the public interest better. Many local governments around the country have turned to the web as an efficient tool for posting notices. Ignoring benefits related to posting on the web as a more sustainable practice, access via the web is significantly greater for the public; notifications can be posted in a more timely manner, and; this allows notices to be more easily found by anyone (around the globe) using a search engine. The shift away from this mandate around the country is already taking place. We now see other state governments posting their own notices. They have realized what we need to heed: Eyes are migrating to the web for news, entertainment and social sharing. If we wish to reach people in the most efficient manner possible and give these notices value we need to allow local governments to use the tools available to do that. We should not shackle them to paper.

The Wyoming Press Association touts the results of a 2010 survey they'd commissioned reporting that "87 percent of Wyoming adults read a newspaper at least once a week." If we don't question their surveying methodology (e.g., what does "read a newspaper" mean) we're still talking about 2010. In 2010 there were 350 million people on Facebook. Just 18 months later that number has skyrocketed to over 900 million. Traffic for online news sites has also seen explosive adoption and growth percentages during that time. If we need further evidence that news and information are moving online, look at the chart above to see how advertisers have voted with their dollars. Advertising revenue for print newspaper has dropped dramatically to levels not seen since 1950. Advertisers spend money where they know they'll get the most

visibility and return. These numbers show that newspapers aren't where they find that value (more data).

In a time of economic downturn, I'm proud to live in a state that was first to adopt Google as a cloud-based solution for state government email, computing and document storage (a move that will save a reported \$1 million annually). We should continue to question old systems and processes that are wasteful. Most importantly, we should challenge any existing mandates that create a taxpayer-supported monopoly.