

Linn County News



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March 16, 2015

Re: HB 2237

To: Rep. Mark Hutton, chairman, House Commerce, Labor and Economic Development Committee

Linn County has a population of approximately 9,500 people; very progressive people that are extremely active in Kansas and national politics.

They take their right to know and to have public access to information very seriously. The recent attempt by members of our Kansas legislature to remove public notices from the hands of the people has not gone unnoticed. K.S.A. 12-3007 was the first step in allowing local government of all sizes to hide information from the very people who pay the taxes and elect you to your positions.

Several of our local cities in Linn County now run brief synopses of full legal publications in the local paper - with the entire versions appearing at various locations online; synopses written by the same attorney who happens to represent four cities of seven in our county. He has mentioned, under your legislation, that the full public notice is required to be published on a website within one month of the publication date of the legal. The public notices are then published on websites designed by that same attorney's wife under a web development business that he owns.

This has several implications to consider. Though I believe the attorney referenced is honorable, think about the public's right to know and how easy it would be to deceive the public through the legislation you have created.

1. There is no oversight on public notices beyond the attorney and the party uploading the material.
2. The public's ability to see public notices in a timely manner has been compromised.
3. The public's ability to actually have access to public notices is in question.

The third concern is a larger state issue than it would seem. Linn County is 25 - 27 percent elderly. They get out and vote, but many do not physically have access to the internet.

Though Linn County, like many of Kansas' 105 counties, has internet in the larger towns, those 6,000 or so people that live in the country do not have access to normal internet systems. This inability to get on the net means that public notices that are published on the internet are not seen by the majority of residents of the county.

This leads to an uninformed electorate and lack of transparency in government leadership, whether intentional or not.

The last point is economic doom on many small newspapers across Kansas. Many papers depend on the small percentage earned from public notices to keep the doors open. Newspapers are small businesses that employ people, pay taxes and purchase goods in almost every county in Kansas.

In today's Kansas economy and lack of tax income, the last thing we need is for dozens of businesses to close in our rural centers. There is enough stress in our rural centers without creating undue hardship from those we elect to guide our state.

I urge you to vote no on this bill. It will not do anything but snowball into closed government and an uninformed electorate. Thank you.

Jackie Taylor
Linn County News publisher