

THE IOLA REGISTER

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To: Rep. Mark Hutton, chairman, House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development
From: Susan Lynn, Iola Register
Re: HB 2237

This appeared in Saturday's Iola Register. Thank you for your attention to this important issue facing not only newspapers but also public citizens.

Internet a 'black hole' for public information

In their effort to save public funds, a state legislative committee is studying the merits of allowing city and county governing bodies to list official business on the Internet, rather than with an official publication such as a newspaper.

Current law states such news concerning local elections, delinquent taxes, and bids for construction must be available in local publications. Newspapers profit from the publications. The Register typically scores \$15,000 a year from the business. Fortunately, that's not enough to make or break the Register, but every penny counts.

In truth, it's the public that would suffer from the legislation in House Bill 2237 that would allow public bodies to put such information on the Internet-only.

Despite advances in technology, almost 30 percent of Kansas households lack access to the Internet. If it's the intent of legislators to get this news to the broadest audience possible, relegating it to the Internet-only would neglect a substantial portion of the public.

The very nature of reading a newspaper as opposed to going to a website differs as well. When leafing through a newspaper, readers often "stumble" upon news. If public notices are relegated to a city or county website, they would be discovered only through a specific search.

Legislators also should consider whether the burden of learning about government doings should be put on the consumer, or on the municipality. News of those who have filed for public office is pretty easy to spot in a newspaper. If the same news were relegated to a link on a city's website, what's the chance of as many people seeing it?

The same goes for zoning changes and bids let for county and city business.

When printed in the newspaper such news also becomes a verifiable public record that cannot be altered, hacked, or changed after the fact — always a possibility on a website.

Relegating official news to the Internet-only also doesn't come without costs to city and county entities. As with anything, adding responsibilities to post notices and maintain their currency takes time and supposed savings are quickly lost. The state of Utah, in fact, tried the Internet-only avenue for public notices to only reverse course and give the business back to newspapers.

If the public good is put as the priority, keeping public notices in newspapers fits the bill.

Sincerely,

Susan Lynn
Editor & Publisher
The Iola Register