

Government operates best when it is accountable

During the past months, hundreds of politicians – which we prefer to call “servants of the people” raised their right hand and swore to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States and to represent their constituents to the best of their ability.

Sometimes these vows are forgotten down the road as special interest groups or personal agendas get in the way.

But public servants should always keep in mind they should represent the majority of people in most cases and represent them fairly and honestly.

Over the years, newspapers which we have worked for or corresponded with, have conducted surveys regarding the importance of public notices. Those who did respond overwhelmingly indicated they wanted to know what was going on in government and how their tax dollars were being spent. Every American has the right to know this.

According to a survey conducted by the Minnesota Newspaper Foundation a few years ago, nine out of 10 Minnesota adults, or 90 percent, believe cities, counties, townships and school boards should be required to publish public notices in newspapers, and 92 percent believe keeping the public informed of such government activities is a worthwhile expenditure.

The *Redwood Gazette* and other papers in this county have published public notices, in many cases, for more than the 100 years of their existence. The *Redwood Gazette* also places these public notices on its Web page at no additional charge.

As technology advances, some think the electronic media of Web pages and the Internet is a cheaper method in which to get public notices out to the residents they serve.

This particular discussion just took place among the Redwood County Commissioners. We applaud



the fact the commissioners are looking at ways to cut their budgets – but this is not a way to do it –the majority of the public needs to know what county government, any government body for that matter, is doing. Cheaper is seldom better.

Certain groups at this moment are also lobbying the Minnesota Legislature to eliminate the requirement for cities, schools and counties to disperse public notice information in newspapers. Certain groups are calling for the public notice requirements to be relaxed on the basis that local government can do just as good a job in spreading the information on their Web sites.

These sites are not being read nearly as much as your local newspaper. Another consideration is many people don't even have access to a computer or Internet service, but they do subscribe to or read a newspaper.

While all meetings are open meetings, most people do not take the time to attend them, unless they have a specific agenda or reason. Those who don't attend, look to their newspaper to learn about county business and spending.

In a nutshell, government operates best when it is accountable to its constituents. Regular publication of all meaningful legal notices in the local newspaper is one important avenue for keeping local officials connected with the residents they represent and who they vowed to represent to the best of their ability. We ask the Redwood County commissioners to reconsider their idea of posting any of its public notices on a Web page only.

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