

# Let's keep Public Notices in newspapers

Freedoms are almost always lost while nobody is watching. The quiet campaign by some elected officials on the state and national level to discontinue the requirement for putting public notices in local newspapers could be characterized as a loss of freedom – the freedom to know what your government is doing. With the budget deficits, elected officials are searching for ways to curtail spending. One of the ways they are considering saving money would be for these cities, counties, townships and school boards to post their notices and minutes on the internet, which would be free.

One could argue that the Internet is certainly not free. Computers, access and phone lines are certainly not free and are beyond the means of many citizens in this area. The ultimate goal of public notices is to inform the citizens, and we maintain that substituting the posting of notices on governmental websites simply does not accomplish that. Newspapers still reach far more citizens than anyone else.

Of course, newspapers are very emphatic in their efforts to have government bodies continue to publish their information in official newspapers. It is a source of revenue for the newspaper, but it is still the best way to inform the people. Many people, especially elderly and those in rural areas, do not have computers, let alone reliable Internet service.

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

Are these notices read? The survey also showed that 88 percent of Minnesota adults read public notices in local newspapers and 72 percent of them rate the continued publishing of public notices in newspapers as very important or important.

While all meetings are open meetings, most people do not take the time to attend meetings, unless they have a specific agenda or reason; otherwise citizens are expecting to learn about their city, county and school board actions through the stories and legal notices in their local newspapers.

This newspaper, along with the Minnesota Newspaper Association and the National Newspaper Association, will advocate for continuation of public notice requirements in newspapers and oppose any move on the part of the state legislature to overturn or weaken current reporting standards.

It isn't about saving money. It's about losing a freedom. We will be watching to see that doesn't happen, at least not on our watch.

