

# The Herald-Sun



## Editorial: Support public notice compromise bill

Apr. 21, 2013 @ 07:48 PM

Tennessee doesn't want to be in the dark.

Bill Haslam, the Republican governor of the Volunteer State, signed legislation that keeps the job of informing the public about government business out of government's hands.

The law, which had been proposed by the Tennessee Press Association and closely resembles similar legislation offered by the North Carolina Press Association to our own General Assembly, keeps public notices in newspapers.

However, like HB723, the Tennessee law requires newspapers to absorb the cost of posting those notices on local and statewide newspaper websites. It also demands better visibility for notices on those websites.

And we don't mind that at all, because we don't want you to be in the dark, either.

It's baffling to us that seven Republican senators in North Carolina want to seize control of that critical gatekeeping function, which newspapers have amply served for many decades.

It's disturbing to us that when someone spoke up to question the railroading of S287 through committee, they got this response from Sen. Tommy Tucker of Waxhaw: "I am the senator. You are the citizen. You need to be quiet."

These are the people who want to champion your access to public notices?

The Tennessee legislation came in reaction to a national trend of governments shifting notices out of newspapers and exclusively onto government websites.

Michael Williams, TPA president and editor and publisher of The Paris Post-Intelligencer, gets it right when he says: "Newspapers are in the mass communication business. Government is not. No other communication medium provides wider distribution of public notices than community newspapers and their websites."

Here's an interesting point about the Tennessee legislation: The vote wasn't even close. Only one person in either the House or Senate voted against it.

And it was sponsored by Republicans Ken Yager in the Senate and Ryan Haynes in the House.

"Using an independent agency, the local newspaper, builds integrity in the process," Yager said. "To even give the appearance of manipulating mandatory public notices tarnishes the reputation of government because it undermines the concept of independence and transparency."

Tonight, North Carolina's senators are expected to take up S287. It's a mistake if they pass it.

We think it would be wiser to shelve that bill. Instead, legislators should move forward with HB723, the compromise bill currently before a House Judiciary subcommittee, which has four Republican sponsors.

North Carolina shouldn't be in the dark, either.

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keith brown · 17 days ago

Oh please , quit trying to justify your government subsidized taxpayer funded laws that were made before the Internet came into existence, if this information was so important to the public then save the taxpayers money and offer it for free. Your greed has put blinders on to the issue of public notices and what is best way to reach your audience and the print paper is expensive and does not work for the year 2013

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