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Sen. Allen votes to pull the wool over our eyes

CHRISTOPHER FOX GRAHAM / MARCH 17TH, 2016



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Arizona Sen. Sylvia Allen [R-District 6], who represents Sedona and the Verde Valley, wants to deprive the public of our ability to see legal notices.

Allen is vice chairwoman of the committee that last week approved Arizona House Bill 2447 and attempted to get it passed on the floor of the Senate.

Fortunately, wiser senators struck down this bad bill with a 16-13 vote, which could have deprived the public of their ability to read legal notices in their local newspapers. The bill would only apply to Maricopa and Pima counties but it's not hard to imagine that a follow-up bill would spread across the entire state.

Currently, legal notices must be published at least three times in a newspaper in the county where the company conducts business. The bill would shift legal notices away from newspapers and instead delegate them to an as-yet unbuilt website run by the Arizona Corporation Commission. Those notices would only have to be online for 90 days.

Considering that ACC Chairwoman Susan Bitter Smith recently resigned due to conflict of interest because of her lobbying connections and Commissioner Bob Stump is in court for alleged illegal campaign donations and ties to a utility company executive, the ACC is not exactly the paragon of public transparency, so Allen's decision is even more baffling.

Forcing the state to set up, fund and maintain a website makes no logical sense, especially when espoused by those elected officials like Allen who advocate for smaller government. Bottom line, the private sector newspapers inform the public better and do so without a dime of taxpayer money.

Unlike websites, print newspapers can't be erased nor tampered with. They are kept on file in print at local libraries and microfiched, and stored in bound books at newsrooms, creating a permanent record the public always has access to.

The Arizona Newspapers Association already maintains a searchable database, www.pubicnoticeads.com, accessible any time, that features every public notice printed by every newspaper anywhere in Arizona. Those notices never expire, meaning shell companies can't set up a network then fade away in 90 days. Taxpayers can "follow the money" and trace records back years if something in their community seems fishy. HB 2447 would negate the vital component with the 90-day time limit. Why Allen would want to put our communities at risk is beyond understanding.

The bill was defeated this time around, but could return in another form at a later date, so it is vital that her constituents demand that she not vote for another short-sighted bill again.

Write Arizona Sen. Sylvia Allen at 1700 W. Washington, Room 303, Phoenix, AZ 85007, and call her office (602) 926-5409 so that she understands that public notices are important tools for a functioning democracy as they preclude one avenue for corruption.

If Allen declines to listen to the public, then simply vote against her in the 2016 primary or general election with a candidate who vows to uphold the public's right to know.

It is unbelievable that Allen and her allies in the senate would strive to remove this protection of the public trust from local newspapers and media outlets. Any elected official who wants to strip away a vital public protection does not deserve your support nor your vote.

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