



Free Press Viewpoint

Our public notices shouldn't be hidden

A Kansas Senate committee planned hearings Tuesday on a bill which would allow cities, counties, school boards and other government units to "publish" their legal notices on government-run websites rather than in the newspaper.

This is a bad idea, and not just because it would hurt newspapers.

The bill was introduced by Sen. John Vratil, R-Leawood, who over the years has made himself a devoted enemy of the state's newspapers. His bill, however, would have effects far beyond his home in Johnson County.

Whatever his issues there, this bill would be a bad law. It would remove public notices from the one place where people see them and hide them away on government websites. And it could cost many small Kansas towns their papers, an economic blow to these communities which should not be ignored.

This definition of a public notice comes from the Public Notice Resource Center, a national nonprofit group.

"A public notice ... possesses four major characteristics:

1. "... published in a forum independent of the government, such as a local newspaper.
2. "... capable of being archived in a secure and publicly available format.
3. "... capable of being accessed by all segments of society.
4. "The public and the source of the notice must be able to verify that the notice was published, and its information disseminated to the public."

Placement on a government-controlled website is not really publication. People would have to find the notice, where a newspaper takes it to the reader. Not everyone has a computer or Internet service, and not everyone is sophisticated enough to find notices buried on some page of a big county website.

Independent verification is hardly possible with a government-run website, and these sites can suffer failures, be entered by hackers, be changed with little or no evidence left behind by anyone with an interest in doing so. Electronic archives are neither stable nor trustworthy.

In short, posting something on a website is little different from filing it down at the courthouse, except the books there last longer than a CD. A citizen still has to go digging for it. Publication means putting a notice out to the public.

Then, there is the economic problem. The income from public notices can be vital to smaller weekly papers. These publications serve their communities, but the towns have fewer businesses and resources each year, and it's hard for newspapers to hang on.

On the other side, Kansas cities, counties and governments spend only a tiny fraction of their budgets on legal notices. That, in our opinion, is spent in return for a valuable service and helps supports each community where a newspaper is published. Ask people in towns where the newspaper has gone away; most would see that as a real economic loss.

The Kansas Press Association estimates as many as 50 Kansas newspapers might be threatened by loss of their legal-notice income.

We hope the Senate will ask itself, is the little to be saved here important enough to justify this kind of damage?

The legislators should kill this bill. It's not likely ever to be a good idea. Taxpayers and citizens deserve to see public notices out in the open, where they can be verified and trusted, and not be forced to go hunting for them. — *Steve Haynes*

COLBY FREE PRESS

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Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



How kittens come home to roost

This is a tale of two cats, or how the Wiletses and Hayneses ended up as four-feline families.

We'll start with Frank.

Frank is son Lacy's cat. He was born in our closet in May 2002. He is a slightly larger version of his mother, April Alice, whom we adopted a month before his birth. Yes, we knew she was pregnant, but she jumped into my arms and purred, and Lacy said he would take one of the kittens. And he did. Until this winter, when he moved to an apartment with a no-pets policy. Then Frank came home to live with Mom and Dad, April Alice, Molly Monster and Zezebel.

Of these four cats, April Alice is the only one I chose. Zezebel belonged to youngest daughter but had to have a new home when her relationship with husband Brad became serious. Brad is allergic to cats. Really allergic.

Molly was picked up at a construction site by son-in-law Nik, who just knew his soft-headed mother-in-law would take her in.

So we are now a four-cat household.

Down in Georgia, Nik is getting his own back, because he has a four-cat household now, too.

Daughter Felicia brought Marcell and Sabine with her into their marriage. Sabine she



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

got in college and Marcell soon thereafter in Wyoming, about the time she got Nik. Both are getting on in cat years.

After Nik and Felicia had been together several years, Louis, a beautiful stray, wandered into their lives and hearts. Their cat population was capped at three for about 10 years.

Then they spotted the pretty little lady living outside. This cat knew suckers when she smelled them, and hung around the Wilets home until she had her kittens — a boy and a girl.

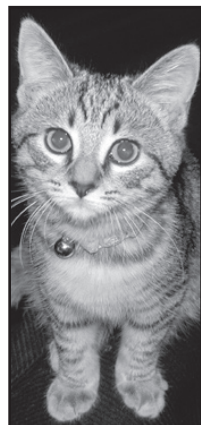
Daughter Felicia dutifully brought the family indoors and found homes for Mom and son. But, strangely, no one seemed to want the third member of the family, the little girl, so they are now a three-cat, one-kitten household. Felicia says they had forgotten how much trouble a kitten can cause.

Cat names vary by year and person naming.

This year is Russian at the Wilets home. The mother cat was Sophie, the brother Urie and the new kitten is Svetlana, which I'm sure is Russian for little trouble-maker.

Svet was the first ornament on the Christmas tree. She drives the older cats crazy trying to play with them. She climbs pants legs. She lords it over the dogs — both of which outweigh her 100-1, since they are very big dogs.

While little Svet wrecks havoc at the Wilets home, her mother is the queen of the house at her new home, I've heard. She even has her own page on Facebook. Now that's one spoiled cat.



Svetlana

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Synthetic cannabis ban passes Senate

Here's a roundup of activity in the Kansas Senate for last week.

SB 348 (banning Synthetic Cannabinoids) was approved 36-1 on Thursday. It amends the hallucinogenic category of Schedule I controlled substances by adding HU-210, benzylpiperazine (BZP), and two synthetic cannabinoids known as "K2," H-018, and JWH-073. Currently, HU-210 and BZP are listed on the federal schedule but not by Kansas.

At the request of the Kansas County and District Attorneys Association, the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee amended the bill to add BZP to the list of schedule one drugs. The Board of Pharmacy believes the bill has no fiscal effect.

On Thursday, the Senate **confirmed** 12 appointments unanimously, including Robert Daniel Lykins, Juana "Janie" Perkins and Christine Downey-Schmidt to the State Board of Regents; Martin Kennedy as secretary of the Department on Aging; and Joshua Svaty as secretary of Agriculture.

Senate debate on House Bill 2222, the **FY2010 budget rescission bill**, is likely this week.

The **Agriculture Committee** heard a presentation by Carole Jordan with the Kansas Department of Commerce and held confirmation hearings.

The **Assessment and Taxation Committee** met Wednesday for hearings on SB 379, which validates the election granting sales tax authority to Chautauqua County. It was amended into HB 2353 and favorably voted out of committee. It is now up for consideration by the Senate.

On Tuesday, the **Business and Labor Committee** received an overview of the Kansas Unemployment Fund by Secretary Jim Garner of the Department of Labor. This is a new committee formed during the interim and chaired by Sen. Susan Wagle.

On Wednesday, acting Secretary Bill Thornton gave an overview of the Department of Commerce to the **Commerce Committee**. The following day, an overview of the Kansas Technology Enterprise Corp. was presented by Kevin Carr, chief operating officer; Kyle Elliott, chairman of the board; and Stan Ahlerich of Kansas, Inc.

The **Education Committee** met with recipients of the Kansas Teacher of the Year Award and Deputy Commissioner of Education Dale Dennis. Representatives of the Fort Hays State Math and Science Academy made a presentation. Finally, superintendents with the school districts of Wichita, Augusta, Blue Valley, Derby, and Holton gave presentations on their



Ralph Ostmeier

• State Senator

respective school districts.

The **Ethics and Elections Committee** heard from Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh. Carol Williams, director of the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission, made a presentation on Thursday.

The **Federal and State Affairs Committee** met Tuesday in closed-door session to receive internal updates from Secretary of Revenue Joan Wagon. Before that meeting, they heard from Carmen Alldritt with the Division of Motor Vehicles in the Department of Revenue.

Major Gen. Tod Bunting, adjutant general of the Kansas, provided an update. The committee received an overview of the activities of the Interim Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight. Thursday, the committee finished work for the week when Secretary of Corrections Roger Werholtz gave an overview of his department.

This week, the **Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee** reviewed the Kansas Insurance Department report, got an update on federal legislation and financial regulatory activities, and held a joint meeting with the House Insurance Committee to review credit scoring.

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, the **Judiciary Committee** held hearings on two bills, SB 208 and SB 375, both proposing to eliminate the death penalty. SB 375 would also create the crime of aggravated murder. The committee is scheduled to work both bills this Friday.

The committee also conducted hearings on SB 376 regarding the Kansas Judicial Review Act; SB 373 which clarifies what municipal ordinance violations require assessment payments; and SCR 1622, a state constitutional amendment that would repeal the Legislature's authority to ban individuals with mental illnesses from voting.

The **Natural Resources Committee** met Thursday to receive an update from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment on proposed Environmental Protection Agency regulations. In addition, there was a presentation on the recommended burning of Flint Hills pastures.

The **Public Health and Welfare Committee** met to consider the appointments of Dr.

Andrew Allison as executive director of the Kansas Health Policy Authority and Dr. William Reed to the board. The committee also held hearings on the appointments of Martin Kennedy as Secretary of the Department on Aging, Belinda Vierthaler as the long-term care ombudsman, and Scott Slabotsky to the Kansas University Hospital Authority. The committee reviewed the impact of new federal guidelines for mammography screening.

The **Transportation Committee** held a hearing on SB 295, which would establish the Motor Vehicle and Safe Mobility Committee to identify and make recommendations to the Kansas Department of Transportation on safeguards that ensure pedestrians, especially the blind and visually impaired, can hear motors of approaching vehicles, particularly hybrid vehicles.

The committee heard presentations on the InSureNet Vehicle Verification System by Jonathan Miller, president of InSureNet, and on the status of Transportation in Kansas by Secretary Deb Miller.

The **Utilities Committee** held an informational hearing on metro dialing, received an update of stimulus-funded energy efficiency programs by Tom Wright, acting chairman of the Kansas Corporation Commission, and reviewed the activities of utility interim committees.

The **Ways and Means Committee** held hearings on SB 350, the rescission bill on the current budget. The bill was amended into HB 2222 and is under consideration by the Senate. The committee also received an update on various audits by Barb Hinton with the Legislative Division of Post Audit and a review of the operations of the Kansas Health Policy Authority by Andy Allison, acting executive director.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeier, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeier@senate.ks.gov.

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