

from our viewpoint...

Public notices support democracy

Public notices go in newspapers because that is the best independent means to deliver information about local government to a wide audience at a reasonable cost.

City and county officials want to take control of the information process, telling the public and the Legislature they can save money by using the Internet, so public notices will be an issue during the upcoming legislative session.

Spring Hill Mayor Mark Squire asked Sen. Karin Brownlee last month to eliminate requirements that cities publish public notices in newspapers. Squire told Brownlee at a Spring Hill City Council meeting Nov. 30 that publishing notices in the newspaper was "needlessly costing city government money."

Squire said he would like the city to be able to instead publish public notices on its own website.

"This is a real simple way to give funding back to the public," he said, "a real way to keep money in our coffers."

Truth is, the cost of most legal notices any city or county publishes are not paid by taxpayers, but rather by the people who are seeking a zoning change, utility franchise or industrial revenue bonds for economic development. Delinquent taxpayers and others pay the cost of notices affecting them.

The city does pay for the ordinances that raise utility rates or make changes in the city code that have a potential penalty. Other public notices a city pays for are to publish the budget and to let people know what the city money has been spent on, including the salaries of the people paid by the city.

What Mayor Squire failed to mention is that it costs money to publishing notices on a website. Web pages have to be built, hosted, maintained and — most important, but nearly impossible — guarded against hackers. Not all Kansas cities even have one, and huge numbers of Kansans don't have any way to look at one.

Public notices in the newspaper let people know what is happening in their city or county, and what the government is deciding through hearings for zoning, nuisance violations and actions that people want the city to take for franchises for cable television, telephone and other utilities.

Many newspapers, including *The Goodland Star-News*, have been publishing public notices on the Internet already, and at no extra cost to taxpayers.

Public notices are among the higher readership items in any poll — usually, more than half the readers report they keep track of them. If notices were left to the search engines on the Internet, hidden away in the back of city and county computers, readership would plunge.

Depriving the citizens of the broad reach public notices in the newspaper to save a few pennies is not going to improve the public's opinion of local government, but it would serve the interest of officials who seek to hide more of the public's business behind closed doors. It would make it more difficult for citizens to know what is happening with their money.

"Our founding fathers ... supported having a newspaper looking over their shoulder," said Richard Gannon, governmental affairs director for the Kansas Press Association. "You can't have the government providing these services. You have to have a third party."

Newspapers have been and will continue to be the fabric that holds a community together. They keep citizens involved and informed about what their government is doing. The impersonal web may be World Wide, but it does not reflect the soul of a community the way a newspaper does. — Tom Betz

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Women want a woman president

Almost a hundred years ago, Sigmund Freud famously asked, "What do women want?"

In political terms, the answer is unmistakable: What women want is a woman president. And their voting preferences show how strongly they feel.

According to the Gallup Poll of Nov. 9-12, both Democratic and Republican women disproportionately support their party's potential female candidates. While it has not been unusual to see polls showing a bias by women voters in favor of women on the Democratic Party line, most of these surveys have failed to distinguish whether it is party or gender that is attracting them. And, until recently, Republican women have not shown a preference for female candidates.

But the Gallup Poll tested Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) in a Democratic primary field and Condoleezza Rice in a Republican match-up. Among both sexes, Hillary ran first in her party with 31 percent of the vote, followed by newly hyped Sen. Barack Obama (Ill.) at 19 percent, John Edwards, likely benefiting from his wife's best-selling book, at 10 percent, Al Gore at 9 percent and Sen. John Kerry (Mass.), probably suffering from his foot-in-mouth disease, back at 7 percent.

On the Republican side, Rudy Giuliani led with 28 percent, followed by Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) at 26 percent, Rice at 13 percent, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (Ga.) at 7 percent, outgoing Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney at 5 percent and soon-to-be-former Sen.



dick morris

● commentary

ate Majority Leader Bill Frist (Tenn.) at 4.

But since both fields are cluttered with non-candidates, the real relevance of this survey is to demonstrate the impact of a woman candidate on voters of both parties.

Hillary was favored by 38 percent of the women in the Gallup Poll's Democratic match-up but got only 23 percent of the men. On the Republican side, Rice won 18 percent of the women and only 8 percent of the men.

Such a dramatic gender gap, on each side of the partisan divide, illustrates the power of a woman candidate, from either party, running for president.

Remember that women are 52 percent of our population, 54 percent of the registered vote, and usually between 55 percent and 56 percent of actual turnout.

Indeed, so powerful is the female vote that it is credited with swinging two of our last three presidential elections. In 1996, it was the soccer moms who turned away from the abstract "family values" of the Republicans to embrace the more pragmatic and specific child- and education-focused programs of the Clinton administration. In 2004, these same moms, now designated "security moms," turned away

from the bite-sized measures of the Democrats and voted for the tough anti-terrorist policies of George Bush.

Nineteen million single women voted in 2000 and 27 million came out in 2004. If a woman runs for president, it stands to reason that such turnout will rise still further. If single women vote in proportion to their share of the national population, they could account for 32 million votes in 2008. Since women, either divorced, widowed, or never married, voted Democratic by a two-to-one margin in 2004 and 2006, it's likely that this influx of single women will be crucial to Hillary's candidacy, or to Rice's if she decides to run.

In our male-dominated political world, where pundits speak mainly to one another and confirm each other's wisdom, we do not fully appreciate the power of a woman candidate. Single moms, disproportionately in poverty, burdened by the need for good daycare and schools, often rotting in minimum-wage jobs, are natural fodder for a woman Democrat who can identify with their plight and focus on their needs. The cultural outpouring that would likely greet the first woman to be nominated by a party to run for president would probably drive these women out in droves to vote and participate in the political process.

It could be that women get what they want in 2008.

Dick Morris was an adviser to Bill Clinton for 20 years. Email for Dick Morris is dmred@aol.com.

Good grief: It's Christmas

Good grief.

It has been 41 years since the "A Charlie Brown Christmas" special first aired. It was broadcast again the last Tuesday in November, and the show holds more power over me now than it did when I was a kid.

I think I know why.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Americans, bolstered by stability and prosperity, married young and had large families. In my neighborhood, we had six kids, the Kreigers five, the Gillens four, the Greenaways four and so on.

The design was simple then for many folks: Many men and women believed that when they married, they became one under God. They believed their role was to sacrifice for their children, so their children could have better lives than they.

Their mission was to teach their kids good values and to provide them with an excellent education. That's why so many moved into our neighborhood. It was located a few blocks from St. Germaine's Catholic Church and School.

It was a traditional time, to be sure. Most of the dads went off to work while most of the moms kept an eye on both kids and neighborhood.

And although life for adults certainly had its limitations and challenges, there was no better time to be a kid. Especially during Christmas.

At Catholic school, we kicked off Christmas preparations one month before the big day. We put up decorations, sold items to raise money for the needy and practiced for Christmas concerts (we sang real Christmas songs, too, such as "Silent Night" and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing").

We were just as busy at home. My mother was a master at building suspense. She played Mitch Miller's Christmas albums on the stereo most nights after dinner and whistled to the tunes as we hung decorations and talked over what to get for one another. She celebrated the mystery of giving and taught us that being kind and helping others were the best things we could give.

Silly as it may sound today, the television



tom purcell

● commentary

Christmas specials were a real event in our home. We all packed into the family room and plugged in the tree. We turned off all the lamps so that the Christmas lights would shine bright. Then we'd wait with great anticipation for the specials.

Every year I laughed out loud when the Grinch's dog, massive antlers strapped to his tiny head, jumped up on the back of the sleigh, causing the Grinch to grimace. In "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," the Abominable Snowman terrified me, but I was always relieved when he turned out a lovable fuzzy ball.

But the granddaddy of them all was the "A Charlie Brown Christmas" special, a show that captured half the viewing audience when it first ran on Dec. 9, 1965. As it goes, Charlie Brown is depressed because everyone around him fails to see the true meaning of Christmas. Lucy complains that she doesn't want stupid toys or a bicycle or clothes for Christmas, but real estate.

To resolve his depression, Charlie Brown throws himself into work as the director of the

Christmas play. But that soon falls apart, too.

Distraught, he follows a light in the east and finds his way to a Christmas tree lot. The only tree he can find is a small sickly one.

When he brings it back, the others mock him. But then Linus comes to the rescue. Linus tells Charlie Brown he knows the real meaning of Christmas. He tells the story of Christ's birth.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, goodwill toward men," he says, quoting from the Bible.

Suddenly, the other characters are transformed. They become compassionate and concerned. They decorate the tree and transform it into a thing of beauty. They wish Charlie Brown a Merry Christmas and sing a Christmas carol.

This show holds tremendous power over me still because it brings back powerful childhood memories — memories of security and love and the anticipation of Christmas morning.

But I love it for another reason. Despite Christmas being based on the birth of Christ, a historical figure — despite the show's innocence, simplicity and honesty still make it a ratings winner — it would never be made today.

Good grief.

Tom Purcell's weekly political humor column runs in newspapers and Web sites across America. Send comments to TomPurcell@aol.com.

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