

Submitter: Brad Fuqua
On Behalf Of: Philomath News
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB437
To the committee:

Public notices inform the general public about governmental, legal and other matters while ensuring transparency by informing citizens on relevant issues and giving them opportunities to respond.

The key issue at hand here comes down to reaching the public in an effective way. Benton County no longer has a daily newspaper. The Corvallis Gazette-Times moved its operation to Albany in Linn County, cut its newsroom and no longer covers Philomath on a regular basis — you can likely count the number of Philomath-related stories in that publication on one hand over a month's time. Thus, the publication does not provide "consistent, regular coverage of local news AND in which at least 25% of the total news content is locally and originally composed by the newspaper, regardless of whether the newspaper is produced or printed in the local area." (HB3167 SS1(2)(b)).

Enter the Philomath News, a digital news site that covers the community in the same way as a printed newspaper. Publishing and distributing a newspaper does not work in a community the size of Philomath — the production costs far outweigh the level of revenue that would be needed. The only feasible way to continue delivering news to Philomath is through a digital product.

So that's what is done. And Philomath has responded by supporting this news product through contributions and advertising. Philomath News is a legitimate news source for these fine folks and publishing public notices in this product makes too much sense. The high, high majority of these residents will never see a public notice in the daily published in a neighboring county that has almost eliminated coverage of their town. They will have a much better chance of seeing the public notice in the Philomath News.

As a 59-year-old career journalism, it saddens me that the world has changed to the extent that printed newspapers are dying out. I love holding the paper in my hands, the smell of the ink and the finding it on my doorstep each morning. But that world no longer exists. News has gone digital. It makes sense that public notices should be legally allowable in digital news products.

In other words, public notices need to be placed where people will actually see them. You will hear a lot of arguments from the print newspaper industry and the folks they hire to fight for their interests. I won't spend time here fighting their perspectives other than to say that they're grasping at straws and much of what they argue makes no sense. Let's face it — public notices should not subsidize this antiquated type of media business. I do hope legacy newspapers figure out a way someday to fine-tune their revenue streams and come up with effective business models to serve the

public. But mark my words — printed newspapers will no longer exist in our lifetimes. They will be producing digital news products in similar ways that the Philomath News is published today. To me, it's inevitable.

That said, I don't believe this bill should be about hurting the newspaper industry. It's not about that at all. It's about getting public notices in front of Oregonians. They need to be placed where they can be seen. And that means digital, not just print. It all makes too much sense.

Thank you, Brad Fuqua, Philomath News publisher/editor