

GUEST EDITORIAL

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We've all seen them, those oxymorons – postal service, military intelligence, government efficiency.

Well here's a story from right here in North Dakota that's all about spending \$150,000 in taxpayers' hard-earned cash to create something that's already free.

Proponents of SB 2069, which was brought by the Public Service Commission as a "back-stop" to protect against newspapers failing to publish a hearing notice, would give all units of government the option of also posting notices on the Secretary of State's website.

PSC staff claim this is not an attempt to remove public notices from newspapers, but the bill comes with an appropriation aimed at giving a state agency the ability to publish all public notices -- thereby duplicating a service newspapers also provide, and it's free.

Consider:

•The North Dakota Newspaper Association already maintains a public notice website, [www.ndpublicnotices.com](http://www.ndpublicnotices.com) -- which a member of the Senate State and Local Government committee has conceded is far superior to the Secretary of State's website -- at no cost to the state or consumers.

•Newspapers are already REQUIRED BY LAW to publish all of their public notices on this website, at no additional cost to the unit of government and the public can access all notices at no cost.

•The rate of missed public notices is tiny. For instance, the rate of error on 583 administrative rules placements last year by NDNA was .03 percent. None of those few errors invalidated the notice.

•NDNA has proposed a process whereby we will specially handle PSC hearing notices, but commission staff have rejected it. It's worth noting the genesis of this bill was a single missed PSC hearing notice 18 months ago.

Bills like this morph over time. What starts as "may" becomes a "shall." This bill applies to ALL units of government -- cities, counties, townships, not just state government -- and the committee giving this bill a DO PASS has made clear that's where they want this to go.

This bill would, for the FIRST TIME EVER, equate publication on a government website with adequate public notice and once that rubicon is passed, there's no going back.

Once state government has spent \$150,000 of taxpayer money duplicat-

ing a system newspapers are already providing, it will be much easier to make the case those print publications in newspapers are no longer necessary.

Tune in, if you will, to a hearing Friday, where more than one member of the committee made their disdain for newspapers clear along with direct statements about where they hope this goes in the future:

<https://tinyurl.com/jnw-675fj>

Though the committee has discussed SB 2069 several times since the original hearing, no one from the committee has responded to NDNA about a proposed amendment we made, nor invited us back to the committee to explore remedies other than spending \$150,000.

They don't see us as the public's advocate.

They see us as "milk-ing" state government, when the whole point of public notice is to provide information to the public and oversight of government! We know voters understand this, and it's something all of us must now fight to keep.

NDNA research shows voters are adamantly opposed to public notices on government websites. Only 18 percent of North Dakotans said they trust government to be the only source of public notices. Yet, elected officials and state employees are hellbent in duplicating services newspapers are already providing and they're unwilling to work toward a cheaper solution.

Whether you are a local government official, a citizen who believes in keeping public notices in newspapers, or frustrated money is being spent needlessly, please contact your district senator to urge a NO vote on SB 2069.

As I originally testified before this committee, no human endeavor is perfect, but NDNA -- and local newspapers -- have an exemplary record of publishing public notices. After all, if notices don't run, newspapers don't get paid!

The North Dakota Newspaper Association has offered to work with state government to find a way to use our own well established public notice website to achieve the same aim as SB 2069, but the hand we've extended has been rebuffed, the reputations of 73 individual newspapers impugned, and the wishes of citizens ignored.

SB 2069's cost is out of proportion with the risks it aims to negate. Make no mistake, it's aim is to eventually put the fox on guard of the henhouse of government information.



LITTLE PASTURE ON THE PRAIRIE

Radical Love

I just finished listening online to a sermon my Episcopalian friend Whitney Kimball Coe gave on Sunday. She begins her message by telling the congregation that while her decorations, including ornaments, are all packed up and tucked away for another year, her Christmas tree and Christmas lights are still up. It's the coziness of that little tree on the still-long evenings that she can't seem to let go of yet.

Meanwhile, last weekend was Imbolc, an ancient Celtic holiday that celebrates the midpoint of winter. We are now officially on the other side of the darkest part of the year. The nights are still long, but the days are catching up. In just a little over six weeks it will be the equinox, and the days will be longer than the night again. But, honestly, that still sounds like a lot more cold darkness to me.

I've written a column about Imbolc almost every year I've written a column, which is to say over a decade. Imbolc in Gaelic means "in the belly," which referred to the fact that livestock was pregnant and often about to give birth. Historically, by this time of the winter, the stores of the harvest had been depleted, so the new, fresh milk that came with the babies was a necessary and anticipated addition to everyone's diet. This is also when, by the imperceptible rhythms of the sun's dance with earth, the seeds deep in the belly of the soil begin to awaken. In much of the

northern hemisphere, new life is beginning to slowly welcome itself back into the wheel of seasons, but for us surface dwellers, that isn't so easy to observe.

I don't mean to show Whitney up, but we took our Christmas tree down a few weeks ago. We had a real Christmas tree this year, purchased from the County Conservation office, and it was the most beautiful Christmas tree we've ever had. Full and perfectly shaped, everyone who entered our house marveled at it, but by New Year's Eve, the needles were beginning to gather in drifts around the tree's red skirt. All you had to do was accidentally brush past the tree, and another branch reminded you how long it had been since that sweet beauty had known soil.

I'm not sure if our tree would still be up had it not begun its exit via the pine needle diaspora, but most of our other holiday decorations were packed up weeks ago as well. The one sign of Christmas that remains on display is the Nativity. This isn't on purpose, or at least wasn't a conscious decision. Every day as I walk past it multiple times, I think, "I really need to put that away," but I don't do it.

The thesis statement of Whitney's sermon is that she needs to stop controlling the narra-

tive; she needs to put away the artificial lights and let the true light of the world, Jesus Christ, take over at the wheel.

She acknowledges that this is always hard, but is maybe especially hard right now. She goes on to say, "Divine love confronts our human certitude and our plans...each time we are pushed to radical love." Then she delivers this line: "Are we merely inspired by Christ's ministry, or will we allow ourselves to be transformed by it?"

Sitting at my desk right now, picturing the figurine of baby Jesus that I can't seem to pack

away—a tiny plastic toy in a tiny plastic manger that somehow symbolizes huge swathes of western thought and historical movements—I'm thinking about what transformation and radical love require of me. In my faith tradition, radical love means welcoming the stranger. It means questioning my very natural human instinct to see someone who is different or unfamiliar as potentially dangerous. It means praying for guidance when I walk through the dark, cold winter prairie of my fears and griefs.

And I wonder, as Whitney asks in her sermon, if I will allow myself to be transformed and undone by this idea of radical love, which is perhaps the scariest task of all?



Eliza Blue

**DID YOU KNOW...**  
94% of North Dakotans say local newspapers are the **most trusted** source for news and Public Notices!

**Question of the Week**

What do you call them?

- Scotcheroos - 71
- Special K Bars - 21

Next week's question...  
**Who are you rooting for?**

- A. Philadelphia Eagles
- B. Kansas City Chiefs

Total Responses: 92

Submit answer to:  
[jill@gspublishing.net](mailto:jill@gspublishing.net) or answer on our Facebook page.

*This is a weekly feature seeking public opinion. It is not a scientific poll.*