

EDITORIAL

Supporting local newspapers puts community first

HB 368 will harm communities and newspapers

BY JANE ASHLEY PACE
2024 KPA PRESIDENT

Every county in Kentucky has one local business that has been there longer than any other, most more than a century – while some are even closing in on two centuries. In many of these counties, that business is their local newspaper.



I manage two of those local newspapers. The Oldham Era has been in operation for 149 years and is looking forward to celebrating our 150th next year. The Henry County Local has been publishing 168 proud years and counting. I also assist regionally with 13 other area newspapers with similar tenures.

Newspapers are the heartbeat of every community in Kentucky. We exist to inform, to raise awareness, to build community, to be the voice of those that can't always speak for themselves, to cover local government and hold local officials accountable, to help local businesses grow, to enact change, to celebrate achievements and to archive our community's history.

Our founding fathers felt so strongly about the importance of newspapers and the role we play in communities that we are the only profession explicitly named in the Constitution of the United States of America.

There are three ways in which newspapers have effectively carried out some of our most important roles – covering local government, keeping officials accountable, keeping citizens informed and helping transparency exist: public notices, open meetings and open records.

Without these three in place, knowing how your tax dollars are being spent, what bids are available and being rewarded, what decisions your elected officials are making for you, when meetings are being held and what new ordinances are being considered would not be as easily accessible.

There is currently a bill, HB368, that seeks to remove legal notices from newspapers and place them on government websites. Websites that are run by the government themselves. What could go possibly go wrong with that?

When a legal ad is placed in a newspaper, it is placed in the local newspaper, dated and cannot be changed after the fact. In addition, it is placed on a website managed by the Kentucky Press Association where all legal notices in Kentucky can be found easily – kypublicnotices.com.

HB368 seeks to have entities including county and city governments place public notices on their own websites, yet many have only one employee, if any, and can't even keep their current websites updated. I found one city website in my area that hadn't been updated with meetings or ordinances since 2020. Two others had very little information, none of the council members were current and the monthly meeting time listed was listed wrong.

Officials have said they would create their own statewide website for all notices. I would argue that they are going to spend a lot more money creating a website we have already created and maintained successfully. Right now, paid legal notices are currently a very small part of county and city budgets – only 0.16%.

So why change? Is this what is really best for the community?

In counties of 80,000 or more a bill was passed in Kentucky to change the rules of public notices due to the cost of the larger newspapers. Yet, many of those counties, including Boone, Campbell, Fayette, Kenton, Madison and Warren, have decided that newspapers are still the best way to get their notices out and have continued to place them in newspapers despite the change.

Regardless of the county size, public notices should be posted by a third party, and with a newspaper in almost every county (and statewide website already in place) it just makes good, common sense.

Besides the concerns I've already addressed, while legal notices are not the only revenue that keep newspapers going – it is a part of it, and some smaller, rural counties will probably lose their local newspaper if this bill is passed. A community without a local newspaper is a community without a heartbeat, and countless studies have shown in news deserts across this country that there will be negative, long-term effects for the community.

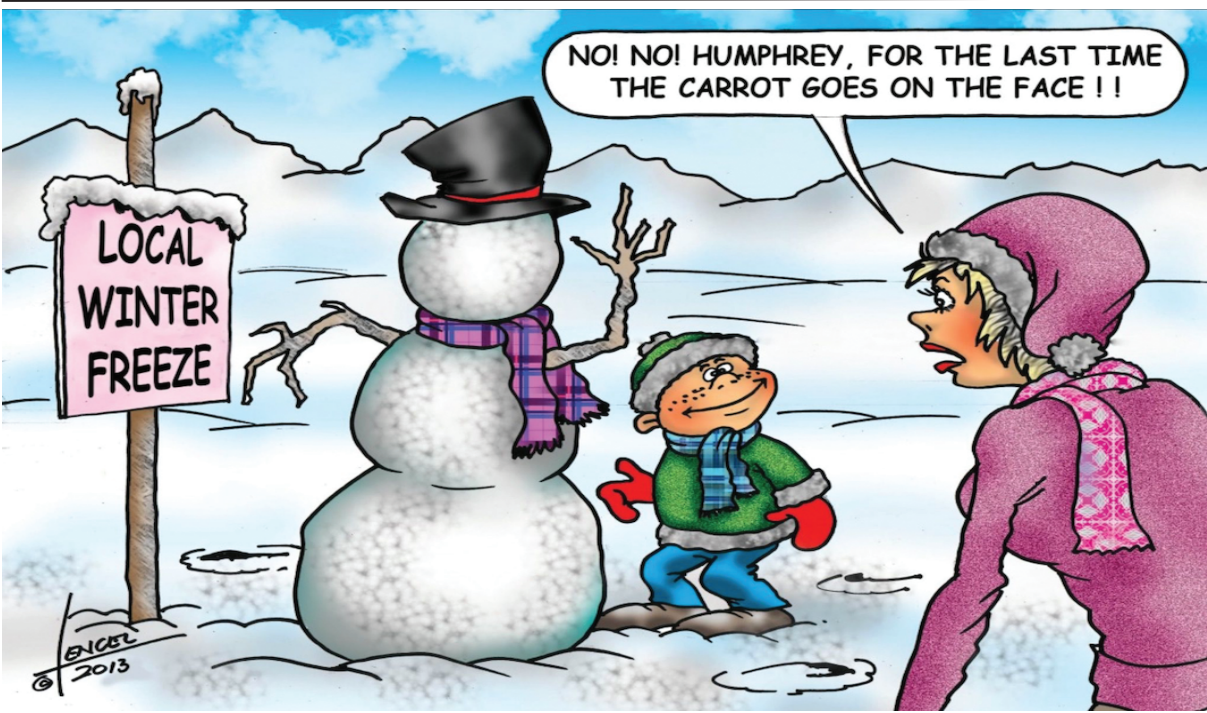
No, it is not the job of the legislature to keep newspapers running but why are they so against doing something that maintains transparency and at the same time, would hurt some of the oldest local businesses in this state?

I'm not blind to the criticism of the media and think that cable news networks have hurt our industry as a whole. I was trained that a journalist is to cover the facts and to try and keep any biases out. I think your local newspapers do a pretty darn good job at still doing that. We have opinion/editorial pages that are open for opinions to be shared and topics to be discussed but they are clearly labeled and kept separate from the news content.

Your local newspaper employees are not pushing an agenda. We are actively involved and serving in our communities. We live, work, play and volunteer right alongside our community members. We take our role very seriously, and that includes publishing your public notices.

Any bill that seeks to change how public notices are handled, or diminishes public meetings or public records, is going to be harmful to the community, and your local newspaper, in the long run. I urge you to stand up with your local newspaper and help us keep these three in place.

Jane Ashley Pace is the publisher of the Oldham Era and Henry County Local, regional advertising manager for Paxton Media and the 2024 president of the Kentucky Press Association.



UNCOMMON SENSE

BY DR. GLENN MOLLETTE

Does the grocery store scare you? Can Washington care?



Dr. Glenn Mollette

Does the grocery store scare you? What about buying eggs? Do you dread driving to Walmart? Do you remember a day when it was fun?

I remember the old days of going to my Grandfather Hinkle's grocery store in old Stidham, Kentucky. Today that would be South Milo Road in Tomahawk, Kentucky. I could buy a Pepsi Cola or Dr Pepper for eight cents. A candy bar was a nickel. An ice cream drumstick was a dime. A bag of chips or a pastry cake was a nickel or a dime. You could buy a lot for a quarter. When I was in elementary school, if I had a quarter, I could buy quite a bit at Fred Mills grocery store, which was located next door to the Tomahawk school. I could buy a Coke, a bag of chips and a French pastry cake. I sold Grit newspapers when I was a kid and I could make \$1 a week. That gave me four quarters. My dad also worked really hard in an underground coal mine.

Those were the days, my friend. We thought they would never end, but they

did a long time ago. Today it would take about five dollars to buy what I bought back then with a quarter. I guess I must be old now, but I don't have to guess about the high cost of groceries.

Groceries are expensive and people are sick and tired of worrying if they will be able to buy enough food to get through the month. There is too much food shortage in America. This means that people have trouble buying enough food to get through the month. This is why there are nonprofit food pantries all over America. Many of these pantries are delivering truckloads of food to communities and hundreds of people line up for a sack of groceries. Ten years ago, it cost \$1000 to sponsor such a project, but today it's closer to \$3500 and growing.

In 2024, the average American spends around \$418.44 per month on groceries, but the cost varies depending on location, household size and personal habits.

Factors that affect grocery costs, according to USA To-

day.

Location: Groceries cost more in some states and cities than others. For example, Honolulu, Hawaii, has the highest cost of groceries in the United States.

Household size: The number of people in a household affects how much they spend on groceries.

Income: Households with higher incomes spend more on food, but it represents a smaller percentage of their income.

Eating habits: Personal preferences impact how much is spent on food.

Shopping habits: Buying in bulk or choosing generic brands can help save money.

How to save on groceries? Create a budget, Stick to a shopping list, Buy in bulk and choose generic brands.

While Americans do all we can to stretch our dollars and shop wisely, we ask our state and federal elected leaders to help us all they can. But do they have the ability to understand? Many of our Congress leaders are multi-millionaires. They probably haven't noticed

much when going to the store.

Senator Mitch McConnell's net worth was reported at \$34 million in 2024, and Nancy Pelosi's net worth was \$120 million in 2024. Richard Blumenthal's net worth was over \$100 million in 2024; Dianne Feinstein, senator from California, has a reported net worth of over \$110 million. Marco Rubio's net worth was \$85 million in 2024. The list goes on. As reported often, our president is a billionaire.

Unfortunately, many Americans' grocery lists are getting shorter because there is only so much a family can afford.

Does anybody in Washington have the ability to care?

Dr. Glenn Mollette is the author of "Grandpa's Store, A Reflection of My Childhood."



BY KYLE LOVERN

Kyle's Corner

Tug Valley residents will rebound from flooding

There is no doubt the communities that make up the Tug Valley area in Mingo, Pike and Martin counties have had their share of disasters when it comes to flooding throughout the years.

Most everyone with a few years on them remembers the historic 1977 flood, the worst flood on record, that literally changed the landscape of the valley forever.

Then 1984 came with more devastating, muddy floodwaters from the Tug Fork and its tributaries. That was the second-highest flood in history – until now – with this most recent disaster, which is now the second-worst flood in our history.

The water crested at Williamson at around 49 feet, just a few feet under the 1977 crest. The 1977 flood is the highest on record and was estimated at 55 feet in downtown Williamson during that cold April.

Those who still live along the river always have to be on alert when heavy rains start to fall in the McDowell County communities of Welch, Bradshaw and other towns. When I heard that the Hurley, Virginia, and Knox Creek area was getting hit hard, I also knew that was not good news for residents in our immediate area.

I grew up in Nolan and have seen many floods throughout the years. I lived through the 1977 flood and was still at home with my late father. As I got older and got into the media professions, both local radio and newspaper, I covered many major and minor floods. In 1984, I helped cover that flood in downtown William-

son with the Williamson Daily News. I spent a night by myself broadcasting from the studios of WBTH-WX-CC, providing flood updates during what was considered a minor flood, but it still blocked some roads and flooded some homes in the area.

So you learn a few things throughout the years when you hear about the rain and conditions at the headwaters of the Tug Fork River.

I told my wife Vicki – before the power went out – that the crest the "experts" predicted would be way off and that this could be one of our worst floods ever. Unfortunately, I was correct in my prediction. In fact, it was the second-highest crest ever.

Many people may have thought they were safe and did not get out when they should have. It is one thing to replace belongings and rebuild, but never take a chance with your life.

There were many brave firemen, volunteers, and others who rescued residents in boats.

Some residents had to wade out in waist-deep, cold river water.

Flooding is a terrible disaster. It leaves behind a mess and destroys everything it touches. It is something you cannot imagine unless you live through it.

Many local government officials stepped up after the disaster, as did many other good Samaritans who have been volunteering to hand out bottled water, food and other supplies.

Of course, infrastructure gets hit hard in times like these. Water, electricity, roads and other much-needed

things are affected and makes it tougher for cleanup. Then there is communication during a time of disaster. In past years, people mainly depended on local radio for up-to-date announcements when they went into emergency broadcasting mode. We tried to tune in to some local radio with my old battery powered transistor radio the weekend of the flooding, but it was only able to pick up one station with canned music format. We sat in the cold by candlelight, but this was not the first time either of us had experienced this.

Of course, nowadays people depend on social media for communication, but when the power and internet go out – we are left in the dark – literally.

Hats off to the power companies who got the electricity back much sooner than expected.

Take into consideration that we got a winter storm with snow and cold right after the flood as people were trying to start the cleanup and repairs – it made it even tougher for the road to recovery.

Personally, Vicki and I were high and dry, but we had many friends that were affected. Then we had both been battling the flu and me with some stomach issues.

It takes a while for things to get back to "normal." For some it will never be the same.

Cudos to those volunteers who have helped out at distribution centers with food and other supplies, along with a number of designated warming centers that were set up in Mingo County at the Williamson Fieldhouse, Mingo Central High School, the Lenore Community Center, the Kermit High Gym, Christian Help of Kermit, Delbarton Town Hall and Opry House, Matewan Town Hall and at Belfry High School in Kentucky. Many churches have also helped out and several of our local athletes from our surrounding schools have pitched in to help with the cleanup. It's great to see our youth stepping up like this.

The Appalachian people of our area are resilient and will bounce back like they have in the past.

Prayers for those flooded and for those who are assisting those who had damage and other issues during this trying time.

Things will be better soon and spring is right around the corner.

(Kyle Lovern is a longtime journalist in the Tug Valley. He is now a retired freelance writer and columnist for the Mountain Citizen.)

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