

Gregg Walker
Publisher
The Lakeland Times
Statement to Public Notice Study Committee
July 26, 2016

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to speak today about a very important topic to citizens of my area and statewide.

I would like to point out to the committee some important facts concerning the publication of public notices and legals in newspapers and the demographics in areas where those notices are being placed.

First, technology has changed how people gather news information. The news market has become more fragmented in the last 10 years than in the previous fifty years. These days, people still read newspapers and watch TV, but now many go to a website for their news, or use mobile phones. Sixty-three percent of all Facebook users now get daily news from their news feeds, while Twitter has become a preferred platform for receiving breaking news.

As technology has changed, newspapers have changed with it. Indeed, no other news medium has adjusted to a fragmented news market better than newspapers, and that goes for the smallest weeklies as well as the biggest dailies. In other words, newspapers are reaching more people today than we ever have. Newspapers are on the cutting edge of technology, and ahead of the curve in most cases.

For example, this past week, The Lakeland Times in Minocqua had a press run of 9,300 for its print edition. We have 7,139 Facebook likes, and, for the week of July 18-24, we had 56,012 unique visitors to our website and 79,984 page views. All those people have access to our public notices, and that is at no extra charge to the government entities placing those notices with us.

In our coverage area, there is no government entity with this ability to reach this number of people the way our newspaper does. The biggest town in our coverage area is the town of Minocqua, and they don't even have a Facebook page; all they have is a basic webpage.

Meanwhile, technology changes ever faster. There is no way towns will keep pace like newspapers. Five years ago, desktop computers and websites were the rage, now they are on the verge of extinction to mobile. And what is the leading news gathering on mobile? Newspapers.

Second, I am flabbergasted that this study committee has no one representing the northern third of the state. Being from the North, it is not new to me that we would be excluded, but to have no one north of Hwy. 29 is a disservice to the citizens of the North

and does not give them the representative voice they deserve.

The demographics of the North are greatly different from those of Madison and Milwaukee, so to exclude that area makes no sense. Print newspapers play a significant role in the daily lives of the people of the North, more so than in some other areas of the state, due to the age of our population and to the lack of good broadband services in rural areas. In fact, some areas in our region do not even have cell service.

As I said earlier, the biggest town in our coverage area doesn't even have a Facebook page. Several of the smaller towns don't have the ability to perform upgrades on technology on a regular basis. And if they have the ability to reach out, counties don't have complete coverage areas due to inadequate cell service or limited broadband in homes.

If this truly is going to be a study group on public notices, you have to include the northern third of the state and the problems of information distribution unique to our area. To exclude us leaves a gaping hole in your study.

Lastly, the one constant that has been a part of Wisconsin over the last 125 years has been newspapers. The history of our state is like a chalkboard that is constantly being erased and rewritten and redrawn. But one of the few items never erased from the chalkboard has been our state's newspapers. Newspapers have been here, constantly serving the citizens of our state. Changing from line-a-type to web presses, from typewriters to computers, and now using the best available technology to bring people the news — and with the news, public notices — our newspapers have served their role as the Fourth Estate well. In Wisconsin, people truly rely on us to give them the information they need to be informed about representative government.

Putting that responsibility in the hands of government officials is the exact opposite of what our Founding Fathers wanted for a representative government.

As this study group continues, I ask you to please look at the northern third of the state and ask the question: Who best informs the public, newspapers or government officials?

Thank you.