

The Honorable Maida Townsend
Chair
House Committee on Government Operations
Statehouse
Montpelier, VT

Dear Rep. Townsend,

Thank you again, and please extend my appreciation to committee members, for allowing me to testify this morning about proposed changes to DR 18-0114.

The testimony and discussion were insightful, but also raised additional questions I hope the committee can answer as it deliberates.

The proposal to include online news organizations as acceptable places to purchase legal advertising does not define an online news organization. The assumption seems to be the proposed change would apply primarily to VTDigger and the Chester Telegraph. However, would not any news organization that had an online presence qualify? Could not this include radio stations, cable stations, television stations, and any online news organization? Examples of the latter could include BuzzFeed, Politico, Vox, Vice, Google News, Breitbart News, Huffington Post, Gawker, Facebook and so on. The internet is worldwide.

Would one online news organization, whether VTDigger or another, provide consistent, professional, local news coverage — coverage that is needed by citizens — that is currently provided by the dozens of weekly and daily newspapers the state's citizens are

fortunate to have? Do we want an online “Amazon” of journalism, in Vermont or elsewhere?

And if the decision as to where to advertise were left up to individual towns, would not consistency of legal advertising be lost? Might not the citizen have to surf the web to find out where his or her town’s legal advertisements were placed, and, perhaps, continue surfing to find where a neighboring town’s legal ads were placed, and whether or not they were the same?

A local example is the debate as to the use of motorized boats on Great Hosmer Pond in Craftsbury. The water body is also in Albany. One of the select boards could post a legal notice about the pond in a local newspaper and the other board could post the same or a different notice on a website. Would this lead to confusion among citizens of the two towns, particularly if some of the residents lived in one of the towns and had a camp in the other town?

The draft proposal includes an appropriation of \$800,000 to establish a centralized rule system. Why is there no indication whether there would be additional costs to maintain such a system? And why is there no economic analysis of the benefit to the Vermont economy of sending almost \$1 million to an out-of-state business, as implied by the Secretary of State’s office?

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my thoughts and questions with your committee.

Sincerely,

Ross Connelly
Editor & Publisher, Retired

The Hardwick Gazette
P.O. Box 58
137 West Church St.
Hardwick, VT 05843