

# Opinion: The futility of making public officials' home addresses private

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Data being removed from government documents will not stop people from finding private information

Overthinking — the tendency to consider with disproportionate concern a public policy issue or development — is a common affliction in political life. What appears to be a relatively benign matter on the surface takes on greater gravity than it deserves, and draws a response based on perceived harm rather than actual peril.

As an example: The package of bills in the Legislature to remove home addresses of a host of public officials, including their immediate family members from official documents, ostensibly as an added protection from potentially personal danger.

Supporters claim it is a necessary step in light of high-profile assaults and harassment of political figures, while opponents warn that scrubbing their addresses from publicly accessible documents chips away at transparency to the overall detriment of taxpayers.

In truth, the added privacy and safety provision, or any erosion of governmental openness, would be negligible at best.

A 10-minute scroll through the internet will nearly always yield personal home addresses and, in many cases, maps or aerial views of them.

governmental operations. What is transparency currently? It is the main unaffiliated.

## Potential logistical nightmare

With 564 municipal governing bodies, 21 county commissions and more than 600 school boards moving their assets, this could be a disaster for families.

Holding or seeking public office has always involved conceding a measure of personal privacy, of opening parts of one's life to scrutiny by voters and the media. It has normally been accepted as part of the trade-off between the need for disclosure of information which might impact on performance and respecting an understanding that there are limits to intrusions on personal matters.

It is not always a clear-cut balancing of interests, and disagreements frequently erupt over exceeding boundaries, either by demanding for too much information or by allegations of unwarranted secrecy.

Those who choose to enter public life must seek the interest and attention of others, and so with a clear understanding of the inevitable loss of some level of privacy. Staff

