

Monroe A. Miller Jr.
19 Big Spruce Lane
Waynesville, NC 28786
June 26, 2014

Subject: Response to Vicki Hyatt Mountaineer Character Assassination Hit Piece article and Editorial.



Vicki Hyatt

This is Vicki Hyatt, who wrote the following two Character Assassination Hit Pieces in the Mountaineer about me.

See: <http://themountaineer.villagesoup.com/p/frequent-county-critic-levels-more-accusations/1199490>
[Frequent county critic levels more accusations, By Vicki Hyatt, Jun 17, 2014](#)

See: <http://themountaineer.villagesoup.com/p/questions-are-ok-vicious-attacks-cross-the-line/1200559>
[Questions are OK; vicious attacks cross the line, Let's disagree respectfully. Jun 19, 2014](#) [unsigned, presumably written by Vicki Hyatt, since her fingerprints are all over it].

Both of these Hit Pieces have been copied into this document. Since there is so much stuff to comment on, I will intersperse my comments, **in bold**, with Vicki Hyatt's text, **in blue**. Comments to these pieces are also included, and again, same applies.

First, the Character Assassination Hit Piece.

Frequent county critic levels more accusations, By Vicki Hyatt, Jun 17, 2014

At Monday's Haywood County Board of Commissioners meeting, the board adopted a \$69 million county budget, approved numerous budget amendments to clear out the fiscal year and defended the county's finance officer against allegations they resoundingly said were unfounded. **Unfounded? Commissioners were blindsided by my public comment and were in various stages of being caught flat-footed. Incidentally, did you notice during the county commission meeting after my presentation, that not only was Swanger fuming, but Kirkpatrick was also fuming? Didn't say much, did he? Want to know why? Immediately prior to the meeting, county commissioners interviewed two candidates for the Junaluska Sanitary District Board, Terry Ramey and a plant named Tom Posey (who won). Commissioners were crucified, especially Kirkpatrick. I recorded the session with Terry Ramey and is now on my web site. Be patient on the download time, and audio lasts about 15 minutes.**

<http://haywoodtp.net/pubII/140616RameyJunaluskaInterview.MP3>

The county's chief and frequent critic, Waynesville resident Monroe Miller, alleged the county school system has been underpaid by about \$15 million under a school funding formula agreed to in 2003.

In the budget adopted for the coming fiscal year, Miller claimed the school system should have received \$18.6 million as opposed to the \$14.6 million approved when the budget was adopted Monday if the formula had been applied correctly.

Miller called upon County Finance Officer Julie Davis to resign immediately, and said if she didn't, the commissioners should fire her.

The issue is not one school leaders are embracing, and the accusations were immediately rebutted by the commissioners. **Which "School Leaders" are not embracing this issue? Was it Bill Nolte, who is straddling the fence so tightly that he was about to cut off blood flow circulation in his legs? Nolte seemed to be embracing this issue during the two meetings he sat in on with me with other School System members.**

"Our board passed a resolution in support of the formula," said Bill Nolte, associate superintendent of the school. "We're funded in a very fair and reasonable way. **It was fair and reasonable until Julie Davis started cooking the books and fabricating/falsifying PPA values. Some counties provide no extra funds and some provide more, but we're glad to have had the formula.**"

Statistics show that Haywood County ranks 21st in the state when considering its per capita population and income rate in supporting public schools. There are 115 public school districts statewide. **There are a considerable number of "Statistics" regarding public schools, and depending on which statistic you are examining, Haywood County is not always 21st. Please specify exactly which statistic you are quoting.**

Nolte said Miller shared his calculations with school officials, but didn't want to comment on their accuracy. **The total calculation is still incomplete, i.e., I still do not have separate confirmation on all of the values needed for a completely independent spread sheet calculation. What I did review with school officials was the blatant falsification of the PPA values during the years 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. Why didn't Nolte confirm that?**

“I’m not a mathematician or an accountant,” he said. “Plus, if he’s referred the issue to law enforcement, I can’t comment a lot on it.” **What? Of course you can comment on it. You pulled this same stunt at the emergency 8:00am meeting with a room full of people. Copies of graphs and data were made (you made them) and distributed to various school officials.**

Board unwavering

The commissioners were firm in their support of the county finance officer.

“I’ve heard him make inaccurate, misleading and inflammatory statements before, but I believe he has topped himself with this,” Chairman Mark Swanger said in reference to Miller’s statements, which he called “utter nonsense.” **Swanger is starting to “bloviate”. Obviously, I hit a nerve.**

Commissioner Kevin Ensley noted there are plenty of checks and balances, including the school system finance personnel and auditors, and said both the school and leaders have amicably approved budgets based on the voluntary formula. **Where are the checks and balances. The only “check” so far has been me. How was the second Budget Work Session, Commissioner Ensley, where Mark Swanger landed like a ton of bricks on Dr. Anne Garrett when she requested a 6.8% increase? Swanger said [re: recording]: “What good is a funding formula if you don’t use it?” You, Kirkpatrick and Swanger were all over Dr. Garrett. How amicable was that?**

Commissioner Mike Sorrells said in meetings across the state, Haywood’s school funding formula is a frequent topic as it has eliminated squabbling over how much of the county’s property tax revenue is dedicated to local education needs. **This has got to be a joke now. Did Swanger and Sorrells go across the state to tell people that as soon as the economy went south, Julie Davis quit using the “Funding Formula”? How does that play now. Will you and Swanger have to go back to all those meeting places now and confess the whole thing was fraudulent?**

“We’ve not had an issue with either board,” Sorrells said. “Of course, they would like more money, and we would like to give more money, but to meet Mr. Miller’s figures, we’re talking about a 6- to 7-cent tax increase.” **Where did this figure come from? Did Sorrells pull this number out of his [Expletive Deleted]? How many years at this increased tax rate would ever restore what Julie Davis has denied the school system. Anyway, Sorrells response comes right out of the democrat play-book. Don’t these guys ever consider eliminating all the deadwood that currently exists in county government? See <http://haywoodtp.net/pubII/140616CrackedTheCode.pdf>**

County Attorney Chip Killian pointed out the school funding formula is not a statutory requirement, just a voluntary guideline devised to take the politics out of education funding. **A “Resolution” is at the bottom of the totem pole regarding enforcement of law, in fact, research is being done as we speak to determine what, if any, laws Julie Davis has broken. Under any circumstances, these Resolutions had been highly touted as an agreed upon mechanism to come up with budgetary numbers for submission into each year’s budget, and the person in charge of this calculation, Julie Davis, was supposed to execute her fiduciary responsibility to carry out these calculations without cooking the books.**

He said arguments between the county and the school system in Union County have become so intense that the legislature was being asked to step in to avoid costly litigation — exactly the kinds of disagreements that had been avoided in Haywood. **Until now.**

Commissioner Bill Upton said he was the superintendent of Haywood County Schools when the school funding formula was devised, and noted making sure it worked the way it was supposed to was the responsibility of both the county and the school system. **It is now a task that Haywood County Taxpayers must also share**

responsibility in. Up to the point where I discovered the fraudulent PPA values being used, there was no person in the school system that could double check Julie Davis' calculations.

To accuse only the county finance officer of wrongly computing the formula is misguided, he indicated, especially considering that all the numbers to be plugged into the formula were provided by the school system, and the many levels of review for the formula. **The PPA values that Julie Davis falsified were not supplied to her by the school system. They were based on a part of the formula that was free-running and independent of the school system, based on the prior six (6) years of PPA before the first "Funding Formula" was ever agreed on in 2003. It is clear Upton does not know what he is talking about.**

Code cracking

During the public comment section of the meeting, Miller said Davis "cooked the books" and falsified components of the formula.

He said he was only able to obtain a summary sheet of the calculations — one that provided few clues as to how the final numbers were derived. Miller told the board he reverse engineered the numbers to arrive at his calculations.

"I cracked the code," he declared.

Davis declined to comment on the issue after Monday's board meeting, but a June 13 email sent to the county manager and board members shed light on the issue. **I have made a Request for Public Information from Ira Dove for Julie Davis' June 13th e-mail.**

"Since you all have been copied on the MM [Monroe Miller] emails regarding the school formula, I wanted you to be aware of what is in my spreadsheet," the email states. "The years MM has referenced below and asked for my calculations, years 08-09 through 11-12, were years that we did not use the formula for appropriations due to the economy. From his perspective, out of ignorance, the calculations aren't working. Of course they aren't, since we did not calculate those years, just allocated what the county could. This explanation was included in the spreadsheet that I last sent to MM." **Julie Davis spreads the blame. There is a "we", not I. Julie Davis is not going to take the fall for this alone. Who was that "we"?? Was it the bookkeepers in the Haywood County School System? The current bookkeeper, Bob Phillips, indicated to me that he did not check the formula's presented by Julie Davis, he presumed they were correct. In fact, no one that I have been able to determine has ever understood these formula's from within the Haywood County School System. Bob Phillips explained that he has been the bookkeeper for a couple of years, and I do not have the name of any prior bookkeepers at this point. Anyway, I figure, the "we", was none other than Mark Swanger, since this whole "Funding Formula" thing was his baby.** [re: <http://haywoodtp.net/pubII/140616CrackedTheCode.pdf>].

It is interesting, that Julie Davis calls me "ignorant". Was this supposed to be common knowledge that Julie Davis did not calculate those years, just allocated what the county could? Where was this ever told to any single person in this county? Perhaps Vicki Hyatt can look in the Mountaineer archives and print out where Julie Davis indicated, well - we are not going to bother using the funding formula for 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. By the way, Julie Davis still used the formula in all the information she provided to me, even during those years, but made the calculations with falsified PPA values. The last change in the "Funding Formula" was signed off by Kirkpatrick in 2009, a year after she started falsifying the PPA values. If there was an acknowledged problem at that point, and they decided not to use the formula any longer during the bad economy, why didn't they simply change the formula to modify the PPA calculation?

While there could possibly have been a mistake made over a 10-year period, Davis said because only she and the school's finance officer were reviewing the figures, she is confident the formula spreadsheet is materially

accurate. There is only one person in Haywood County that has been able to call out Julie Davis on “mistakes”. The first one is where she put an incorrect value entry into the Revenue Neutral Tax Rate Calculation Formula, which she thanked me for finding and made a corrections. Julie Davis rarely makes mistakes. Everything here was intentional. During this period of time, 2003 to present, there have been at least two school finance officers, maybe more. Make a note to check to see who these people were.

School Board Chairman Chuck Francis said his board is in the process of drafting a letter to the county commissioners expressing support of the funding formula and how it has been implemented, thanking them for their support for public education and saying how great Davis has been to work with through the years. **Chuck Francis seems to be tied at the hip to Mark Swanger. I have requested a copy of this “letter” supporting the fact that the school system got screwed between 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.**

“We’ve always asked for more, but we’ve always agreed on the amount,” Francis said. “We didn’t have a problem when the number decreased. With the economic situation as it was, they had to adapt. We understand that.” **From what I can gather, no school board member even knew what the funding formula was, let alone be able to walk through the calculations. They depended on Julie Davis like everyone else did.**

Long history

Miller and his small following have a history of frequently criticizing local government officials. While county officials are the most frequent target, he has taken on issues in Waynesville, Haywood Community College, the Haywood County Fairgrounds and the chairman of the Haywood County Republican Party, too. **Small following? I do not have enough space here to list some accomplishments, but under any circumstances, things are slowly changing in Haywood County, and that is for the better. As far as the HCGOP, there is no one in this county that I will not go after if I feel they are either abusing their power or using there power to intimidate people.**

His findings end up in a self-published, online newsletter, the inboxes of colleagues, the media and select government officials. His conclusions are often reported to state or law enforcement officials and have seldom gone anywhere. **See above.**

“Most information he puts out that can be verified one way or the other has been discredited,” said Swanger. “I don’t take anything he says seriously.” **Information published on www.haywoodtp.net is bullet proof. Start citing examples, Chairman Swanger.**

Swanger called Miller’s attacks abusive. **They are certain direct and go for the jugular.**

“I think appearing in front of the board and demanding that a well-thought of employee be fired is abusive,” he said. “Julie (Davis) is one of the most highly decorated finance officers in the state. I don’t understand why he wants to always tear down something.” **A note to Commissioner Mark Swanger. I will repeat for you why I do what I do. If a person who is elected or appointed to a position of power, and uses that power to either abuse their power or to intimidate someone, I will step forward. You know, we would all be sitting here, fat, dumb, and happy, not having a clue as to what Julie Davis had done, but because you had viciously berated Dr. Anne Garrett at the April 7th Budget Work Session [re: recording], that was the one thing that really pissed me off. You were the inspiration for me to dig as hard as I did to uncover this fraud.**

Swanger said county employees have told him about finding Miller eavesdropping on phone calls or conversations while standing out of sight in the hallways or making unwanted advances such as inviting a female county employee to his home or to have drinks with him. **[?] Who were those county employees? Whose phone calls and conversations while standing out of sight in the hallways was I listening to? How**

did the person know I was listening if I was standing out of sight? Whoever it was that I made an unwanted advance to a female employee, no one ever took me up on coming over for a drink. But that reminds me of my short story, which I don't know if Swanger has read - The mystery Blueberry Pie Woman.

<http://haywoodtp.net/pubII/140610MysteryBlueberryPieWoman.pdf>

Anyway, that was Jamie Powell, and she did not work for the county.

"I don't know what motivates him. Perhaps a mental health professional would have a much better way of knowing why he does what he does and why he does it the way he does it," Swanger said. "I don't know why a person would choose to be negative and abusive when they have the capacity to do good things." **I will repeat for you one more time why I do what I do. If a person who is elected or appointed to a position of power, and uses that power to either abuse their power or to intimidate someone, I will step forward. You know, we would all be sitting here, fat, dumb, and happy, not having a clue as to what Julie Davis had done, but because you had viciously berated Dr. Anne Garrett at the April 7th Budget Work Session [re: recording], that was the one thing that really pissed me off. You were the inspiration for me to dig as hard as I did to uncover this fraud.**

Miller routinely refuses to grant interviews to local newspapers. I have consented to an interview for an organization which prints a paper, but there are not in Haywood County.

These are the comments that were posted for this Hit Piece. Same drill, my comments **in bold**, readers comments **in blue**.

Comments (10)

Posted by: Scott Lilly | Jun 17, 2014 16:31

This is a he-said-she-said article. Was there an error made or not? Is the issue resolved that the only material problem is that the formula was not used in some years? And if that was the issue, why didn't someone just tell Mr. Monroe that to begin with? Was that common knowledge or something done outside of public record?

Thanks for reporting this, but I'd like to see some follow-up independent analysis of the two sides to be able to form an opinion as to where the problem lies -- not so much whose side I want to be.

Referred to law enforcement? Really?

Well said, Mr. Lilly.

Posted by: Scott Lilly | Jun 17, 2014 20:26

Wow. That "long history" section is quite damning. This is a reported news article. If this factual news is to be discredited, then I think the "discredit" part is what is missing. If this story has no merit, then why is it reported as news?

Very perceptive questions, Mr. Lilly.

Posted by: Scott Lilly | Jun 17, 2014 20:34

Speaking of "discredited", The Mountaineer ought to stop using County Attorney Chip Killian as a reference. He has been discredited. (Yet in this article, his contributions are benign.)

Mr. Lilly is spot on target with Killian's comments.

Posted by: John C Sanderson | Jun 18, 2014 18:51

In my opinion, The Mountaineer did a credible job of reporting on this individual's attempt to discredit - and demand the resignation/firing of - "one of the most highly decorated finance officers in the state" over her supposed failure to adhere strictly to a "voluntary guideline" during some years of economic hardship in the county. **This Hit Piece by Vicki Hyatt is totally reactionary to circle the wagons around Julie Davis, like many of her hit pieces. Unfortunately, for Mr. Sanderson, there is only one side of the story told in this article, that of Vicki Hyatt and County Commissioners. The whole concocted story about not using the funding formula was created at the last minute and is full of holes (see comments in the hit piece itself). It is unfortunate that people believe everything they read in the Mountaineer. Of course, this is only one person's accusation, backed up solely by his conclusions derived from "reverse engineering" and "code cracking" based upon some summary figures and absolutely no firsthand knowledge of anything. Conclusions are based on Mathematics.** No one on the Board of Commissioners and no one affiliated with the Board of Education seems to have a problem with the budgets agreed to over the years, even though all of them seem to be unanimous in their wish that more funding could have been available for education. And they certainly don't seem to have a problem with the job performance to date of the Haywood County Finance Officer, Ms. Davis. This is not a "he-said-she-said" article. This is a "he said, and everyone else with any credibility said" article.

The only thing that makes something like this newsworthy is the rather pointed public attack that this individual, Mr. Miller, made on Ms. Davis. Accusations like those he made cannot, and should not, be ignored by the local press. **The Smoky Mountain News is choosing to stay clear of this fiasco.** A person's character and professional standing were attacked in a very public way. The Mountaineer appropriately spoke with a representative sample of those who stand firmly in support of Ms. Davis' and everyone else's attempts to adhere as best they could to these VOLUNTARY guidelines over the years (which was EVERYONE involved, other than Mr. Miller). The Mountaineer duly noted, as well, that Mr. Miller "routinely refuses to grant interviews to local newspapers," so he chose to let his "reverse engineering" and "code cracking" accusations stand on their own merit (or fall on their lack thereof). **I encourage Mr. Sanderson to read <http://haywoodtp.net/pubII/140616CrackedTheCode.pdf>.**

As for that "Long History" section, don't context and historical actions matter? Of course they do, and The Mountaineer's attempt to provide some meaningful historical context to this personal attack on a public official was both appropriate and necessary. Does Mr. Miller's documented history of "frequently criticizing local government officials" discredit his attacks on Ms. Davis? Maybe it does for some readers, and maybe it doesn't for some other readers. But what it does do is provide some very relevant background information - and context - for anyone reading this article who has no knowledge of either Mr. Miller or Ms. Davis. **See the comments above within the Hit Piece.**

And finally: "The Mountaineer ought to stop using County Attorney Chip Killian as a reference"???? A local newspaper should stop interviewing the County Attorney to seek his opinion or position on issues affecting the county? You have to be kidding. **I cannot keep track of all of the extra lawyers these commissioners have hired for the nightmares of trouble they keep getting into. If Killian was so good, why go out and hire extra lawyers. By the way, see <http://haywoodtp.net/pubII/110110AbuseofPower.pdf>.**

Furthermore: "He [Chip Killian] has been discredited." Sounds like someone else is trying to act like Mr. Miller here...and without even presenting evidence derived from "reverse engineering" and "code breaking." That's

what I call very poor form. **This whole issue of denying Haywood County Schools nearly \$15 Million Dollars by a bunch of Democrats has got to be eating people up. After pounding on the NC Executive and Legislative Branches, here we have, in our own little democrat enclave, democrats withholding money from Haywood County Schools (all commissioners are [D], with Ensley being a [RINO]). One has to be a little careful how much they are going to defend these people.**

Posted by: Doris Hammett | Jun 18, 2014 19:07

June 18, 2014
Monroe Miller
19 Big Spruce Lane
Waynesville, NC 28786

Dear Mr. Miller:

This is the first time I have contacted you although for years I could see your road and house on the mountain from my Waynesville Surrey Road home. You have been in my consciousness.

Thank you for your concern for funding of our educational system in Haywood County. You join many others in this concern. Haywood now ranks 21st in the states 115 public school districts state wide. This is a great improvement from 1960 at the beginning of Terry Sanford's Governorship when North Carolina School System ranked among the tenth worse nationwide.

We as individuals can make a difference in Haywood County by working with the system. The Haywood County Public Schools Foundation handles donations to our schools following the requests of the donor. Dr. Frank and I started a fund in 1998 at Haywood Community College with the purpose to assure every graduate of Haywood County High Schools the funding for two years at the Community College. I have worked with the Public Schools Foundation the last three years, first with a small donation increasing over the years as I have found that the staff not only helpful but willing to share my questions and ideas with other educators.

In an effort to improve all the levels of the students in our schools, my idea is to raise the ceiling for all. I have done this by establishing the Excellence in Education Trust which income will be directed as per my requests over the years. I invite you to investigate this means of influencing the education in Haywood County.

Please consider a tax deductible donation to the Foundation to make an impact on our future. Make it in the name of your grandson who died here in Haywood County as the result of a terrible accident.

Thank you for your concern. I hope to make it a positive influence.

Doris B. Hammett, MD
400 Wesley Drive
Asheville NC 28803
dbhammett1@hotmail.com

Obviously, Dr. Hammett has me confused with my dad.

Posted by: Scott Lilly | Jun 18, 2014 21:05

In my opinion, Mr. Miller's methods and tactics are in poor form. Bringing the concern forward may be legitimate - I can't tell from the article though if the concern is legitimate. The point of the concern is overshadowed from what appears to be severe frustration -- or perhaps Mr. Miller is not acting in good faith. Without someone actually discrediting his concern, it stands as something that should be examined -- but done in good faith. **Who in this county can come into a county commission meeting, stand before commissioners, being televised, and video posted on the Internet for the world to see, and accuse Julie Davis of cooking the books and demanding that she resign. Not too many people that I can think of... These people (county, government, etc.) have done these things for so long, that they think they are immune and can keep on doing it. My website, www.haywoodtp.net is loaded with instances of bad people doing bad things, and I am stepping up to do something about it. When these people dig their heels into the ground and remain determined to keep doing what they are doing, the last thing I tend to care about is my "form". I go for the jugular.**

The last time (that I can recall) this paper attempted to discredit Mr. Miller's criticisms it was about someone having too much public service. (Again, I think Mr. Miller's forum and tactic was in poor form.) But you know what, he was right. All evidence then supported the criticism that it was improper to have too much public service. And Mr. Killian's support of an unsupportable position was improper. (Apologies. I should have referenced this article in my previous comments.) The facts were presented here:

<http://themountaineer.villagesoup.com/p/legal-counsel-to-haywood-county-board-of-directors/1143843>

The person who was holding three (3) elected offices was Mary Ann Enloe. Yes, that's right, I name names. I commend your view that I was right, and Killian was wrong again.

So I agree that Ms. Davis's character was unfairly attacked. What I would like is to not return that level of Jerry-Springer-politics in a credible paper. I can get that elsewhere. **Later in this comment section, I presume that Mr. Lilly finally read: <http://haywoodtp.net/pubII/140616CrackedTheCode.pdf> . I was attacking Julie Davis' actions of cooking the books and falsifying PPA values, not necessarily her character.**

The "long history" section was indeed relevant as the backstory -- but only if the objective of the story was character assassination. If the story is about discrediting the accusations, that part is seemingly missing.

Government watchdog people and groups are good. But they ought to operate in good faith. Examine the facts before "discrediting" the charges made. Otherwise, it's just an opinion.

Posted by: Scott Lilly | Jun 18, 2014 21:09

Follow-up: The polar-opposite of Jerry-Springer-politics = Dr. Hammett. I too think it would be beneficial to channel Mr. Miller's high level of enthusiasm and energy into something positive. **I consider the work that I do extremely positive.**

Posted by: J S | Jun 19, 2014 13:03

You can read everything Mr. Miller has to say at haywoodtp.net

I have no opinion on who was right or wrong but at least you can see his "math".

I am surprised Vicki Hyatt or Jonathan Key did not come in and rub out the free advertising for www.haywoodtp.net.

Posted by: Scott Lilly | Jun 19, 2014 14:25

Whoa! That was some heavy reading. It would be hard for anyone to hear his message over the tone of how he delivers his message. But really, let's try to decipher the concern to see if it has any merit. The last time Mr. Miller was so prominently reported in this paper (that I remember), his concern was legitimate. Disturbing to me was elected officials, the county attorney, and this paper seemingly went on auto-pilot in attempts to dismiss Mr. Miller's accusations – and they were all wrong in doing so.

I see these as questions that should be answered:

- 1) There were years the funding formula was not used. Was this done properly? If there was expectation that the funding formula was to be used, was deviation from it done with proper authority and communication? (Forget if there was a legal requirement to use the formula or not – just as a matter of Open Meetings Laws, internal processes and controls, county policy, etc.)
- 2) There was mention that “a mistake over a 10-year period” could have occurred. This ought to be identified and quantified – not just subjectively stated as “materially accurate.”

Once these facts have been discovered, only then should anyone start to wonder why any errors or deviations occurred. People make mistakes. If mistakes were not caught by the many people who should have reviewed the formula and its use, that raises another question down another path.

And as a friendly amendment to the proposal, since Mr. Miller is so active as a watchdog, perhaps he needs a handler to channel his activities into something constructive. Seems like he may have missed his calling as an auditor. Wouldn't it be great for the county to get free internal audit help?

Posted by: Scott Lilly | Jun 19, 2014 14:43

Did Chairman Swanger really ask in a budget workshop, "If you don't use the funding formula, then what good is it?" Was Chairman Swanger in office during the years when the county was allowed to deviate from it? **Swanger said that at the April 17th Budget Work Session. I made a recording of that work session. Vicki Hyatt was present. Swanger was not only in office during those years, he signed the second revision to the Funding Formula Resolution!**

This is the Editorial, presumably written by Vicki Hyatt and approved by Jonathan Key. Rather than responding point-by-point as before, I am deferring the entire response to one that was created by Dr. Windy McKinney, candidate for Haywood County Commissioner. Her response follows the Editorial and is **in bold**.

Questions are OK; vicious attacks cross the line, Let's disagree respectfully, Jun 19, 2014

Since the beginning of this nation, public service has been an honorable profession, whether as an elected leader or as a public employee. That has changed over time, especially with the political polarization at the national level and the inability of Congress to move forward on any issue.

At the local level, however, the situation in Haywood County is markedly different. The public officials are accessible, forthcoming with information and are, more often than not, delighted to talk issues with people who have taken the time to inform themselves about what is happening in their county.

Lately, however, being in a high-level public service position in Haywood County can be like having a target on your back. A small group of extremists has decided our county leadership team is corrupt and has made it a mission to paint scenarios highlighting what they call incompetence and abuse of power — whether it exists or not.

The accusations against Haywood County Finance Officer Julie Davis are a case in point.

Monday evening, one of the critics, Waynesville resident Monroe Miller, presented his “reverse engineered” research into a voluntary school funding formula county and school board leaders crafted a decade ago.

In the televised public comment portion of the board meeting, Miller alleged that Davis “cooked the books” and claimed she falsified components of the formula. Her alleged miscalculations resulted in \$15 million in reduced funding for county schools, he claimed before demanding that Davis resign or be fired.

The irony to his declaration that “I cracked the code,” was that the funding formula had been suspended in 2008 following the deep recession that hit Haywood and other portions of the nation. In the quest for the minutia of the exact calculations for the formula, the question of whether the formula was even in use was overlooked.

That became the basis for highly inflammatory statements against a public servant who has earned the respect of all she has worked with. Both school and county officials have countered the accusations by talking publicly about the stellar working relationship they have with her.

In responding to the remarks, commissioners said had the schools been funded at the level dictated by the formula during the recession, it would have required a 6 to 7 cent tax hike. School leaders say they perfectly understood the economic situation in the county and understood when the school system budget was slashed just like that of other county departments.

The irony of it all is that those who complain loudly and frequently about how the county operates are dead-set against raising taxes.

While Miller’s latest claim is that the school system in Haywood County was cheated out of funds that should have been paid, his past appearances before the board would lead most to conclude he and his followers would have squawked the loudest if the board had kept the formula in place and raised taxes to the extent needed to fully fund it.

There is nothing wrong with questioning our public officials — it ensures a healthy democracy. However, publicly attacking an official without all the facts is inappropriate and crosses the line of the decency, a quality we still respect in Haywood County.

I agree with all of the message/intent of this opinion. Going a bit further, the better we treat our public servants the better quality people might be inclined to serve. One other person I'll bet agrees that public service "can be like having a target on your back" is State Representative Presnell. **Obviously, I don't agree with any of the message/intent of this opinion.**

I would like to respond to the opinion piece in The Mountaineer titled, "Questions are OK; vicious attacks cross the line: Let's disagree respectfully"

First of all, I find it interesting that the author of this piece chose to remain nameless. The anonymity of the piece gives it much less credibility than if the writer had chosen to actually own their opinion, and causes a discerning reader to wonder if the commissioners of the county - or Julie Davis herself - were using the editorial in order to defend themselves against further questions. It seems cowardly to call out an individual by name, but refuse to give your own name.

Also, she (let's assume it's a she) states that "the public officials are accessible, forthcoming with information and are, more often than not, delighted to talk issues with people who have taken the time to inform themselves about what is happening in their county." Perhaps this is true for the author, which again suggests that this piece is an inside job, or written by a puppet of the county's elected officials.

Despite the title of the piece, given above, and the fact that she closes the piece stating that questioning our elected officials is good for a "healthy democracy", she begins her own attack on those who disagree with the commissioners, calling them "extremists" because of their questions, and because they are looking for incompetence and abuse of power. Surely the writer is engaging in just the sort of behavior she decries from the very beginning of this piece, and does not know what a healthy democracy really looks like, perhaps because she has never seen one.

Because asking questions is indeed important to the political process, I think there are a few that should be raised in response to this anonymous opinion piece:

The author states that the funding formula was suspended in 2008. However, at the budget work session, April 17th, 2014 Chairman Mark Swanger himself stated that school superintendent Ann Garrett was out of line in asking for more money for her department because there was a funding formula, and that the formula was irrelevant if she did not chose to follow it. If that formula was suspended in 2008, then why was Mark Swanger using it as a stick to beat Dr. Garrett with in 2014?

Also, what "other county departments" had their budgets "slashed" that year? And why doesn't the author mention them specifically? And how did Mike Sorrells know the exact amount of increase needed (6-7 cents) to cover the shortfall from the under funded schools? Was that an exact figure, or was he speaking off the cuff?

In my own opinion, the author of this piece turns Mr. Miller's inquiries into a personal jab against his stance on taxation, which is of no relation to his questions. His line of inquiry was not focused on taxation, but rather on honesty. First of all he, as a citizen and tax payer of the county, has a right to know where our tax money is going, and has a right to hold our county officials accountable. His point being that the tax payers of this county expect their money to go to the schools, and if it is not, where is it going? Indeed the author makes it sound as if the commissioners would rather lie regarding the use of the funding formula than raise taxes, simply because they did not want him and "his followers" "squawking" over the use of their tax money. Surely the citizens of Haywood County deserve to know where their money is going, regardless of how much Julie Davis and the commissioners fear Monroe Miller and his "small group of extremists", or the ire of the citizens.

In fact, the commissioners should appreciate concerned citizens and take the opportunity to review their policies. No one expects their elected officials to be perfect, and mistakes happen. A better response to Mr. Miller's line of questioning would have been to thank him for his time and attention to detail, and to acknowledge that there should be a review of the formula and its use. That's it. Every citizen has the right and responsibility to expose impropriety where they see it. That is part of the healthy democracy touted in the editorial. However, it appears that the commissioners would prefer to retaliate by proxy using the newspaper, and wonder why they are accused of abusing their power. Perhaps this is why so few citizens actually have the courage to question the commissioners and their policies and why so few people actually engage and attend their meetings. We should all be grateful that Monroe Miller has the courage to do so, otherwise who would help contribute to the health of our so-called democracy?

Dr. Windy McKinney.