

July 9, 2010

A Special Meeting of the Bladen County Board of Commissioners was held on Friday, July 9, 2010 at 5:30 p.m. in room 218 of the Bladen County Courthouse, Elizabethtown, North Carolina. The purpose of the meeting was regarding a personnel matter.

The following members were present:

Billy Ray Pait, Chairman
Delilah Blanks, Vice-Chairperson
W. D. Neill, Jr.
Daniel Dowless
David Gooden
Albert Beatty
Charles Ray Peterson
Lewis Tatum
Larry Smith

Also in attendance: County Manager Greg Martin, Clerk to the Board Sara West and Johnson Law Firm Attorneys Leslie Johnson, Allen Johnson, and William Johnson.

Chairman Pait welcomed everyone and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the recent concerns regarding the Sheriffs Department. He stated that the Board would hear ten (10) speakers and those that would like to speak were to register with the Clerk to the Board. Thirteen (13) speakers registered and all were allowed to speak.

Gary Pait, a lifetime resident of Bethel Township, Bladen County, stated that he was concerned with the decision of the Commissioners and the Sheriff. The reason that the five individuals were not rehired was either personal or political and he asked the Commissioners to consider rehiring the deputies.

Ruth Dockery Vermillion asked if gangs were important because the deputy assigned as the gang investigator was not sworn in. She also stated that Phillip Little was one of two deputies in the County certified in Hazardous Material. She asked if the political agenda was worth the safety of the Citizens.

John David, citizen of Brunswick County and candidate for office of District Attorney for Bladen, Brunswick and Columbus Counties, appeared before the Board and stated that he was concerned for the Justice System. Quality of Justice should not be dependent on political moves. He stated that he felt the safety of children was at jeopardy and questioned safeguards put in place to ensure the safety of the citizens of Bladen County.

Joseph Dockery advised that he was a voting citizen and was not ashamed of Bladen County but was ashamed of the politics that has gotten in the way. Citizens of Bladen County deserved better. He stated that he knew that the Sheriff could only be removed by a Judge or death but he asked for Sheriff Storms to resign. He further stated that citizens have been placed in jeopardy by the actions of this week and that it was hard to work in a County without support.

Michael McKinley asked the Board to confront the issues. He stated that there were all types of violations going down. He quoted Dr. Martin Luther King "the ones who remain silent are as dangerous as the one who commits the crime". He also stated that he knew most of the deputies that were fired and asked that they be reinstated. He also thought that Mr. Benston ran a clean campaign.

July 9, 2010

Aaron Cox stated that he was not an elected person and began by quoting President Obama "we are in a season of silliness." He asked why are we here tonight. It depends on which Board member you talk to. He advised the Board members that their only control over the Sheriff was the budget and he thought that no one played politics more than those on the Board.

Ilka McElveen stated that people chose in the election who they wanted and they did not ask for Earl Storms. She asked if Mr. Storms could do the same thing as the younger officers. She said that Steve Bunn retired and the Board and Benston are our leaders but she felt that they were not making the right decisions.

G. C. Bryan appeared before the Board to say that we needed to pray and that people have jumped to a lot of conclusions. People need to talk face to face. He asked why you would not hire good quality people. He feels there is a problem within the Sheriff's Department. He referred citizens to North Carolina General Statute 162 to learn everything you need to know about the Sheriff's Department. He feels that the five (5) deputies need to be reinstated and that Herman Dunn should not be in the Sheriff's Department.

Rochester Blanks advised that it was time to move on and quoted his mama "if its not broke don't try to fix it - the more you stir it the more it stinks." He stated that it started on July 1 when Storms was appointed Sheriff and Chief Deputy Little was rejected.

Richardson Robinson of the Ammon Community stated that he was proud to be here and to get this off his chest. There has been insubordination and mistakes have been made. Mr. Storms was sworn in and promised nothing but that he would be fair. He told the commissioners that they voted seven (7) to two (2) and they did their job. He feels that Storms was wrong and mistakes were made.

Karen Ruffin advised that she was a lifelong citizen of Bladen County. She supported neither Bryan nor Benston in the primary but was on Benston's side now. There has been too much backbiting and two facing among so called Christians. She stated that she was standing up for what is right and Mr. Storms did what he needed to do.

Horace Munn stated that Storms was appointed as Sheriff and he had accepted it but felt the Board was not willing to accept its own decision. He advised that Storms was duly appointed Sheriff, five (5) people were not sworn in and two (2) of the deputies that were not sworn in violated the Hatch Act. He felt the Board should let Sheriff Storms do his job. He also stated that speaker Jon David was trying to capitalize for political gain.

David Hursey stated there was a lot of blame to be passed around including Steve Bunn and the nine Commissioners. He advised that he supported Eric Bryan in the election but Prentis Benston was the winner. He stated that you should not fire hard working people. He further stated that if acting Sheriff Hubert Kinlaw could not serve as sheriff then Phillip Little should have been appointed. He felt that Mr. Storms was not properly serving the citizens of Bladen County.

July 9, 2010

Upon a motion by David Gooden, seconded by Delilah Blanks the Board entered Closed Session in accordance with N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a)(3) Attorney-Client Privilege and (a)(6) Personnel.

Upon a motion by Daniel Dowless, seconded by Lewis Tatum the Board exited Closed Session and re-entered open session.

Chairman Pait stated that the Board had been unable to locate Sheriff Storms and he could not get a majority of the Board to call for Storms' resignation or an investigation. He advised that the Board appreciated their attendance.

Commissioner Lewis Tatum stated that he was not speaking on behalf of the Board, but that he felt Earl Storms should resign for the good of the County.

A motion was made by Delilah Blanks, seconded by Larry Smith, approved to adjourn at 6:50 p.m.


Billy Ray Pait, Chairman

ATTEST:


Sara S. West, Clerk