

Commissioners

From A1 ed 3-2 to "suspend all future funding and freeze existing fund balances provided by the county to Martin Community College for the purpose of paying salary and/or settlements to Dr. Ann Britt effective immediately."

After nearly an hour of sometimes heated discussion, Commissioners Joe Ayers, Tommy Bowen and Elmo "Butch" Lilley voted in favor of the motion to suspend the funding. Commissioners Dempsey Bond Jr. and Ronnie Smith cast dissenting votes, and asked their votes be recorded by name.

The meeting began with Martin County Manager David Bone offering an assessment of the ongoing situation at Martin Community College.

"As you're aware, in November the State Board of Community Colleges released a report about Martin Community College," Bone said. "The report was based on information from the 2014-15 audit report for the college as well as site visits that occurred in September."

"In the Nov. 18 report, the State Board of Community College outlined several areas of concern involving administration and governance at Martin Community College," he continued.

Bone said the state asked for a response by Dec. 16, and the MCC Board of Trustees responded on Dec. 9. He further stated the State Board of Community College met to review the MCC response.

"In the State Board of Community Colleges' response, the board recommends new leadership at Martin Com-

munity College immediately," Bone said. "Additionally the State Board announced it would withhold state funds to support the Martin Community College President's salary effective Jan. 1 until such time as an acting or interim president takes over as leader of the college. The state board also recommended Martin County follow suit."

Bone said the county does not make personnel decisions regarding MCC, but did provide nearly \$1 million in funding for the college, including some money paid toward the community college president's salary.

Bowen asked whether the state was asking commissioners to take any sort of action.

"The state board is withholding funding for the president's salary as of Jan. 1," Bone said. "They are basically asking Martin County to take similar action regarding local funds."

Bowen said after the issues at MCC were settled, the county would need to have a good working relationship with the State Board of Community Colleges.

"We need to do whatever we can to stay in good with the state board because they do make the final decisions," Bowen said.

Ayers echoed those thoughts.

"Mr. Chairman I've been hearing complaints, gathering information and looking into this matter for well over two years now," he said. "I was glad to hear the state step in and help rectify the problem out at Martin Community College. I appreciate them coming in, and I believe we need to act on their

recommendation."

Ayers said he had spoken with the state board chairman, and believed the state wanted the college to succeed.

Smith said he disagreed with the meeting, saying it was happening too soon.

He asked Clerk to the Board Marion Thompson to read an email from Jackie Gillam, Chair of the MCC Board of Trustees. In the email - dated Dec. 29, according to Smith - Gillam said the trustees had not received a response from the state board, and did not expect to until after the holidays.

Smith said the MCC Trustees should be allowed to meet before the commissioners took any action.

Bowen said he disagreed, and that the commissioners would need to deal with the state board after it was all over.

Smith said the commissioners would deal with the state board through the community college.

"The community college has not been given the opportunity to address these issues according to chairperson Jackie Gillam," Smith said.

Bond said he was a trustee at MCC. He said that restricted him as to what he could say because much of the information has been handled in closed session.

"We have not - the board of trustees - has not looked at this material that has come down from the state," Bond said.

Lilley, who serves as Chairman of the Martin County Commissioners, said the state board had asked for commissioners to back them.

Bowen said he was concerned Bond had not brought back information to the commissioners concerning the troubles at MCC.

Bond said the items in the newspaper were about issues handled in closed session, but Bowen disputed the information.

Bowen said, "This thing has been going on at that college a long time. You could carry us into closed session and talk about it."

"You have never brought anything back to us for us to know anything different than what we read," Bowen added.

Bond asked if anyone asked him about it, but Bowen said the county allowed time for board reports at every meeting.

Bond said commissioners couldn't discuss personnel at MCC in closed session, but Bowen said it was about finances, not personnel.

Bond asked what portion of Dr. Britt's salary the county paid. Bone showed commissioners the budgeting information from the county and said the \$16,500 for management in the budget was for Dr. Britt's salary.

Bone said there are a number of counties that provide a supplement to the community college president, and Martin County had paid the MCC President since before he (Bone) arrived five years ago.

Smith said if the county did not know for sure, he didn't want to touch the money in case it was not for Britt's salary.

Following that discussion, Ayers made the motion that was passed, but he made it clear the motion only affected the president.

As part of the motion, Ayers added that if it passed, "failure to comply will result in the college jeopardizing future partial and all funding from the county."

Bond said the county would be involved in something it didn't need to be involved with if they passed the motion. He strongly suggested it was better to allow Britt to retire in March as planned.

Smith also reiterated his opposition to the motion.

Bowen strongly disagreed with Bond and Smith.

"I think that's why we're meeting Friday afternoon at four o'clock is because we're all concerned with Martin County and what is going on," Bowen said. "If somebody doesn't do something fairly soon, we're not going to have a college, and that's why we are meeting today - to try to save a college. We're not here meeting trying to destroy one or shut one down."

Bowen said the board was showing they were willing to do whatever it took to keep the college.

Smith asked whether there was a letter asking the board to take action, and was told there was not, but the information was forwarded to the board.

"As I said, we are making a big mistake," Smith said.

Lilley said there was a corrective action plan provided by the state, and Smith said it should be left to the MCC trustees.

"I think we owe it to the citizens of Martin County to take action," Bowen said.

He said the community wanted the board to take some action, and not allow the college to be closed.

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Proposes to Expand Wildlife Conservation in North Carolina

(Windsor, N.C.)- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks public input on its proposal to expand the acquisition boundary for Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge.

"The Roanoke River corridor offers important bottomland hardwood habitat to many species of birds, mammals, fish and plants," said Matt Connolly, manager of Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge. "This proposed expansion would offer the Service opportunities to work with local landowners to conserve the lower Roanoke River ecosystem and provide refuge for animals in the event of increased pressure from population growth and sea level rise."

The Service currently manages 20,978 acres along the river where it focuses conservation efforts for bottomland hardwood forests and associated habitats. Animal species that are of particular concern include Cerulean warbler, Prothonotary warbler, Swainson's warbler, Great Blue heron, Anhinga, Wood duck and Black duck. The river is an important habitat for American sturgeon and Striped bass as well.

Service work in these areas follows a two-pronged strategy: supporting interested landowners in their land management and acquiring land for Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge through purchase and donation from willing landowners. This proposal would increase the area in which the Service can work with willing landowners in the southern reaches of the Roanoke River from Roanoke Rapids to the Albemarle Sound.

This proposal is to expand the acquisition boundary of Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge. A refuge acquisition boundary is an area in which the Service can acquire interest in property either through fee title purchase or through easements or cooperative agreements. Being within an acquisition boundary does not change any landowner rights or responsibilities unless and until a landowner decides to sell all, part or an interest their property to the Service. Landowners still manage their land as they always have and may sell to anyone they choose at any time. Boundary expansion areas allow Service managers to have conversations with landowners interested in selling their land or exploring options like easements or cooperative agreements. Without being included in the acquisition boundary the Service cannot explore those options.

The refuge acquisition boundary currently includes 33,000 acres with the Service owning 20,978 acres. The Service is considering adding an additional 250,000 acres to the acquisition boundary with authorization to purchase up to 50,000 acres and purchase easements up to 100,000 acres. However, exact acreage of the proposed expansion is yet to be determined, as the Service considers the extent of rare species populations, conservation efforts by other organizations, and landowner interest.

The refuge currently falls within Bertie County, North Carolina. The expansion would include areas within Bertie, Washington, Martin, Halifax and Northampton counties. The Service is currently seeking public input on the proposed expansion. There will be five open houses across the region to receive comments and answer questions about the proposed expansion.

Open House Schedule:

Monday Jan 23rd Halifax County:	6:00pm-8:00pm TJ Davis Recreation Center 400 E. 6th Street Roanoke Rapids, NC
Tuesday Jan 24th Martin County:	6:00pm-8:00pm Martin County Extension Office 104 Kehukee Park Rd Williamston, NC
Wednesday Jan 25th Bertie County:	6:00pm-8:00pm Windsor Community Building 201 S. Queen Street Windsor, NC
Thursday Jan 26th Northampton County:	6:00pm-8:00pm Northampton Recreation Center 9536 NC HWY 305 Jackson, NC
Friday Jan 27th Washington County:	6:00pm-8:00pm Washington County Extension Office 128 E. Water Street Plymouth, NC

Comments may also be emailed to roanokerivermwr@fws.gov; mailed to U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 430, Windsor, NC 27983; or telephoned to 252-794-3808.

This event is a fundraiser sponsored by FRIENDS of the S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series. See the website for complete details. Individuals requesting accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should contact the Department for Disability Support Services at least 48 hours prior to the event at 252.737.1016 (voice, TTY).