

## EDITORIAL: Two lawmakers do right thing in regard to public notices

By

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So often in this space, legislators are in the crosshairs. Since we tend to think government is already too big and since what most legislators do is pass new laws, we often end up at odds with lawmakers.

Not this time.

Cleveland County should be bursting with pride over the actions of its two house members.

Reps. Tim Moore and Kelly Hastings championed an effort to defeat legislation that would have severely undermined the public's right to know what its government is doing.

In taking this stance, Moore and Hastings bucked party leadership that was hell bent on attacking newspapers and, in the process, growing governmental power at the expense of public accountability.

The issue at hand was a push by some in the General Assembly, led by Henderson County Rep. Chuck McGrady (R), to end the statutory requirement that government entities publish public notices in newspapers.

McGrady has been a part of multiple bills aimed at eroding this requirement. He has attempted to argue with a straight face that this is not an attack on newspapers, but he does not persuade.

His latest attempt would allow the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to put some of its meeting notices on its own website.

But Moore and Hastings and others in the House saw through McGrady's transparent ploy to hide the government's business from the public.

Rep. Marilyn Avila, a Republican from Wake County, offered a substitute amendment to McGrady's bill. The substitute bill is very similar to bills that passed on near-unanimous votes in Tennessee and Florida. The bill would preserve the public's right to know about government meetings by retaining the requirement that these notices be published in newspapers, but adding the requirement they be published on newspaper web sites as well. Additionally, the bill (HB755) capped the rates charged to the government for this service.

You may not know it, but newspapers are actually reaching more people than ever, when print and on-line readership is combined. And newspaper online sites alone dwarf the traffic of government websites. Burying these notices on multiple government websites is just patently wrong.

Thankfully, Moore and Hastings saw McGrady's actions for what they were – a petty attempt to attack newspaper and cause collateral damage to the public in the process.

This was not small vote for our two representatives. The Speaker of the House, Thom Tillis, conferred on the house floor with McGrady on a number of occasions shortly before the vote. Most observers believe he was in favor of McGrady's bill.

So, Moore and Hastings were going up against the most powerful man in the house

and their own party leader.

But they still did the right thing, which should warm the hearts of county residents.

The Avila amendment passed 68-41, which forced McGrady to withdraw his bill from consideration. The issue is now dead.

We congratulate Moore and Hastings for this courageous vote. Moore, as chair of the powerful rules committee, worked behind the scenes to help pave the way for Avila's amendment. And Hastings challenged McGrady's inclusion of Gaston County in another "local" bill attacking the public's right to know.

Both of them deserve your thanks for standing up for you amidst withering pressure.

Do you remember seeing those political attack ads that end "Call Representative such and such and tell him you oppose ...."

Well, today we want to encourage you to call Reps. Moore and Hastings and THANK them for their vote on HB 755.

They deserve your thanks.