

# **Part X: The Cleveland Community College Scandal Saga— Do Nothing Board of Trustees: A Scandal all by Themselves!!! –Report and evaluation by Robert A. Williams**

In the Star reports on the looming departure of long time Cleveland Community College President Dr. L. Steve Thornburg and other articles you hear very little about the overall scope of the problems at CCC. If you saw the recent edition of Political Smackdown you hear CCC Board of Trustee member Wes Westmoreland more or less repeating the CCC Executive Vice President Dr. Shannon Kennedy “party line” that the “dual enrollment program” (now called Career and College Promise Program-CCP for short- a phony but politically correct term for what is apparently a scam) is actually a good thing. The whole Board of Trustees, by a majority vote, say things are well at CCC and if there is anything wrong, Thornburg’s exit will miraculously cure everything.

If you peel back the scandals at Cleveland Community College you find CCC (as well as Cleveland County Schools and the Commissioners) are rotten to the core and many heads need to roll. This article will drill deep into the CCC Board of Trustees. The other Boards will be the subject of additional articles in the near future.

The Cleveland Community College Board of Trustees:

Greg Melton-Appointed by the Cleveland County Commissioners-

Term in Office ends in 2017.

Vice Chairman Greg Melton is presently running the CCC Board of Trustee meetings now that Chairman Ellis Monroe has resigned in disgust because the Board will not take the necessary action to clean up the mess at CCC. We will start our review of the Board of Trustees with Greg Melton because our findings and investigations indicate Mr. Melton apparently has the most unethical and conflict of interest issues of all the other Trustees put together.

Let's start this off by defining "Conflict of Interest," a major component of being unethical, in a way most people will understand.

Mark Twain is probably the most read American writer in history, known for his homespun wit and wisdom. In Mark Twain's Corn-Pone Opinions Twain said "You tell me whar a man gits his corn pone, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is."

In Greg Melton's case, Melton gets his corn pone (bread, money or paycheck) from working at his daddy-in-law's place, Holland & Hamrick Architects. For years now, Holland & Hamrick Architects has been involved in well over \$100 Million in Cleveland County business, which includes almost all of the building construction and remodeling at Cleveland Community College, Cleveland County Schools and County Government Buildings. (Gardner Webb too, but that is another story.) A partial listing of the County Government connected building construction Greg Melton and Holland & Hamrick Architects have been awarded includes: The LeGrand Center, The Bailey Building, Shelby Middle School, CCS Central Offices, The New North Shelby School Project, Kings Mountain Intermediate School, The Old Courthouse-Earl Scruggs Center Renovation, The new Health Department, The Burns and Crest High School Auditorium projects and other work. Recently the Cleveland Community College awarded Holland & Hamrick Architects the contract for the Advanced Manufacturing Center which drew a

letter of complaint filed with the CCC Board of Trustees from another local firm which is well known, well awarded and much more experienced with this type of construction. This letter was provided by sources, is a public document and is presented at the end of this article.

The work noted above is worth well over \$100 million with Holland & Hamrick most likely getting a 5.5% fee which amounts to \$5,500,000. And Greg Melton is getting a cut out of that. Greg Melton's daddy-in-law is also the immediate Past Chairman on the Cleveland Community College Foundation and a Board of Advisors member at Gardner Webb. Conflicts of Interest, certainly the "appearance" of a conflict of interest, seems to abound in Greg Melton and daddy-in-law Roger Holland's likely unethical and maybe criminal connections with Cleveland County agencies.

In regard to the above, there can be no doubt that Greg Melton's gets a lot of his corn-pone out of his firms work involving County business, including business from Cleveland Community College. The fact that Greg Melton is on the CCC Board of Trustees, where he is supposed to be looking after the best interest of CCC as well as getting his pone from CCC represents a sure fire conflict of interest when the CCC Board of Trustees are making business decisions regarding awarding contracts for building construction projects. There is also lots of reasons (\$\$\$) that Greg Melton does not want to rock the boat when TOP CCC administration members need to be fired because of personal problems and all other problems and issues are resolved.

There are other things involved here that nobody else has ever mentioned. The quality of work CCC, CCS and the County gets from Holland & Hamrick. Let's look at one example in particular that is an offshoot of one of the lesser mentioned recently disclosed scandals at CCC.

The Wet Server Scandal:

A "server" is an electronic piece of equipment or electronic component used in the internet and for data processing purposes using low voltages computer type "chips.". A "Data Center" is a building containing many servers. Cleveland Community College has a computer system using a computer room and multiple servers. Special cooling is required for Computer Rooms and like many other electric and electrical systems, water leaking onto and into servers will destroy the operation of the server without external visual damage once the water is removed.

It has been reported that an air conditioning unit had an "accidental leak" that dripped water onto a number of servers at CCC that ruined the servers. The report went on to claim the damaged servers were removed from service and replaced under an insurance claim. However, the damaged servers were installed in an area set aside for a grant application. Visitors, including Vice President (at that time) Joe Biden's wife and a Presidential Cabinet Secretary were shown the damaged servers and fraudulently told the damaged servers were a vital part of a computer system CCC was seeking a grant for. CCC, as the allegations go, received the grant money and applied some large part of that money to other purposes. In a recent CCC Board of Trustee meeting the Board rejected that allegation and found that all accounting of grant money were done properly. Basically they wrote the whole thing off with little to no investigation of the allegation.

However, I smelled a rat in all this. As an engineer myself I remembered the April 9, 1963 sinking of the USS Thresher. At the time the Thresher was the premier nuclear powered submarine in the US Navy. It was later determined that during deep dive testing a seawater leak sprayed water on an electrical panel supplying power to operate the ships nuclear reactor causing the reactor to suddenly shut down. The submarine was lost in over 8,000 feet of water and all 129 people aboard perished. Since that incident in 1963 and up

until today every engineer is taught that electrical equipment and water do not mix. Part of that lesson that applies to data centers and servers is that every effort must be made to ensure that condensed water from air conditioning units must not be allowed to drip onto the servers. That means air conditioning units located in computer room ceilings must not be located above servers and the condensed water must be drained or pumped away by a good system and building design.

As this relates to CCC, the rat I smelled was the possibility that the architect that designed the computer room at CCC where the servers were located had positioned the cooling units directly over these particular servers, and either the condensate drain line had plugged up or the condensate pump had failed, and the condensate drain pan filled up and overflowed, dripping water onto the servers, thus destroying them.

I did a little snooping around and found the CCC cooling unit in question had a little condensate pump that failed. AND Holland & Hamrick Architects had designed the room and located the cooling units above the servers.

Folks, this was no accident. It is clearly a mistake or oversight, representing shoddy workmanship by the Holland & Hamrick Architects, of which Greg Melton is one of the architects.

More examples of shoddy workmanship by the Holland & Hamrick Architects on Cleveland County projects include the specifications for the new Health Department as well as the new North Shelby School Project. In both of these projects the Holland & Hamrick construction documents specify obsolete and inefficient HVAC chillers. Such chillers are the single biggest and most costly piece of equipment in the HVAC system and the construction documents specify equipment that use a banned refrigerant and controls that are inefficient and prone to fail prematurely.

In the case of the Health Department, I brought this situation up to County Manager Jeff Richardson. Richardson was angry because I brought up the problem. Next thing I know I look at the construction documents for the new North Shelby School Project and find the same problem-obsolete and inefficient chillers were specified. I brought this up to the entire School Board and again nothing was done to make Holland & Hamrick update their specifications. Apparently Holland & Hamrick cuts corners by issuing the same old obsolete specifications for County projects to maximize their profits and nobody does anything about it.

Other issues with county building construction projects involve the building foundation soil that require additional work and millions in additional costs. Shelby Middle School, the new Health Department and the new North Shelby School Project come to mind. Reports about Shelby Middle School indicate the floors developed major cracks within the first year. Also, outside flooding and stranding water in certain areas are reported after heavy rains-lots of soil erosion too. Roof leaks at the new Health Department. Cost overruns in about every project. The loud roaring noise in the auditorium in the Central Offices about every time the HVAC kicks in during a school board meeting, yet Holland & Hamrick gets the job for the auditoriums at Burns and Crest High Schools.

Now, the kicker in all of this is I don't just go around looking at building construction drawings and specifications for the fun of it. A major HVAC equipment manufacturer representative in Charlotte I once dealt with, when he found out I live in Cleveland County, asked me why his company was not allowed to bid on the chillers for the new Health Department in Cleveland County. As a part of my work in the nuclear construction business I had been responsible for developing drawings and specifications for HVAC systems, including chillers. I was also responsible for reviewing contractor bids and selecting construction companies. I knew

all the Building Codes and the ins and outs of chiller design, including Computer Room cooling. I knew where the problem areas were, including contractors trying to cut corners, and how to make sure all the problems were fixed up-front. So, I decided to look into this and you are now reading about what I have found.

There is more to this conflict of interest issue. Especially the "appearance" of a conflict of interest issue. All ethics policies and even North Carolina law prohibit conflicts of interest, even the appearance of conflicts of interest. How did Greg Melton ever get appointed by the County Commissioners to serve on the CCC Board of Trustees in the first place? Why have none of the other CCC Board of Trustees as well as the School Board never raised this issue and dealt with it? Why has Holland & Hamrick gotten basically all the construction work for Cleveland County agencies for around 20 years-especially after all the budget cost overruns on about every project they are involved with? Why has Cleveland County agencies, and their Boards, NOT checked behind Holland & Hamrick work and found the mistakes and shoddy workmanship that myself and others have discovered?

Well, this brings up several other concerns. Like who makes sure there are no kickbacks involving Holland & Hamrick? I have attended school board meetings and commissioner meetings and even offered my engineering services for free to help the school board get the new North Shelby School project built according to all applicable Codes and Standards as well as develop some sort of cost control process. The school board was not interested. The school board was especially not interested in cost control. They even said "money was no object."

Later I discovered the new North Shelby School Project was not even needed. The Shelby Middle School, built for 800 plus students only had 400 students. The 80 students attending the old North Shelby School could easily be fit into an empty

wing at the Shelby Middle School. It was like the school board had to have a new North Shelby School just to funnel taxpayer dollars to Holland & Hamrick and for no other good purpose. I could go into the Commissioners GIVING to Roger Holland, Greg Melton and another partner the old Doran Mill property valued at \$1.6 million for nothing, allowing them to strip the old wooden beams from the old mill building, sawmilling the beams for flooring for the NewGrass Brewery owned by Roger Holland, Greg Melton and David Dear, as well as selling an alleged \$1 million in scrap metal and then turning the property back over to the county.

All of this, including the attached letter below, indicates problems and top level personnel issues that the CCC Board of Trustees have refused to do anything about. Just like all the other issues they have covered up that has been recently publicized by myself and others.

And this long article has reported about only one CCC Board of Trustee, Greg Melton. I will write another article or two regarding the other 11 Trustees. But I, myself, have already concluded that the level of scandals that are coming to light will likely require getting rid of most to all of the present CCC Board of Trustees, some school board members and some Commissioners too.

As far as the donors to CCC with their names in big letters on the various buildings, I can only suppose they want their names OFF those same buildings before the TV news comes out in regard to the mounting scandals. Perhaps they want to continue their donations with the requirement that CCC takes their names off the building.

Stay tuned. We are not even close to fully reporting the scandals at CCC.

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Nov-15-2016.pdf"]