

Lewis Explains Keeping Vehicle Auction Contract Private

■ Responds to News & Observer article.

By OONAGH McQUARRIE
Of The Record Staff

State Rep. David Lewis, responding to a Raleigh News & Observer article, discussed his decision to prevent the state from taking over a program currently being contracted to a local company.

Rep. Lewis added technical corrections to a bill that became law in the final minutes of the legislative session which prevented the state government from taking over the contracts to tow and auction vehicles seized in DWI cases and other traffic-related incidents.

Currently, the state bids out these contracts to private companies, one based in Charlotte handling the western part of the state and another owned by Rickie Day of Erwin, Martin Edwards and Associates, which handles the eastern half.

Rep. Lewis' change to the bill ensures that contracts are bid out to private companies when those contracts expire next year.

The State Surplus Property Agency had expressed interest in taking over the repo and auction contracts, saying it could save the government money by handling things internally, and another Republican, Rep. George Cleveland of Onslow County, filed a bill in March that would have allowed the agency to take over.

On March 31, the House Regulatory Reform committee signed off on Rep. Cleveland's bill, sending it to the finance committee. On April 1, Rep. Lewis' campaign received a \$5,000 donation from Mr. Day, according to campaign reports obtained by the Raleigh newspaper, and on April 2, Rep. Lewis added a "serial referral" to the Rules Committee, which Rep. Lewis chairs.

"If I had known Rickie was going to write the check I'd have asked him not to," Rep. Lewis said. "I don't solicit money when I'm in session, and Rickie never told me he was going to write the check. I've got the finance team in Dunn, they get it recorded and put in in the bank. I didn't even know Rickie had contributed until the end of the reporting period."

Rep. Lewis said he had fundamental problems with Rep. Cleveland's bill.

"The Surplus Property program is so poorly managed that the Department of Revenue has now pulled out of working with them and has contracted that out to private contractors," Rep. Lewis said.

The Department of Revenue reclaims cars that have unpaid tax bills and auctions them off.

"I didn't in any way guarantee any individual would get the contract, not in any way, shape or form," Rep. Lewis said. "All I did was take out language that said something to the effect that the department could pick and choose which counties it wanted to do itself and which counties it wanted to put out to bid, but that language staying in there, it would imply legislative intent for the department to go and grow state government, when in fact, I don't want that."

Rep. Lewis said the Surplus Property program did not present a business plan showing how it would handle the complicated process of auctioning off seized vehicles, but if in the future the department presented one, he would be open to considering it.

"[Problems with Department of Revenue] were the kinds of things that no one could give me an answer to as to why the department thought it could do a better job than the private contractors who were doing a good job," Rep. Lewis said. "I would certainly welcome the chance to see [a plan]. They asked in 2013 for \$750,000 in state funds to run this program, they didn't ask for that this time, but the fact they asked for extra money the first time means they aren't equipped to handle the program."

Rep. Lewis also criticized Rep. Mike Hager, a Rutherford County Republican and House majority leader, for his role in the News & Observer story.

"It's extremely disingenuous of the majority leader to criticize a member for adding a provision to the technical corrections bill when he himself asked for nine separate corrections to be added," Rep. Lewis said. "He knows that's the way business has to get done up here toward the end of the session. It was a cheap shot and I don't appreciate it."

Harnett Honors

By TOM WOERNER
Of The Record Staff

The Harnett County agriculture community came together Tuesday night to honor outstanding contributors to the farming industry at the annual Farm City Banquet.

An entire room full of people at Ron's Barn outside Coats watched as multiple awards were presented.

The Pope family of Coats was honored with the prestigious Farm Family of the Year Award. The family grows small grains, tobacco, chickens and cattle at their large farm.

Bobby Pope accepted the award on behalf of his large family, who was on hand for the event.

"Most of all I want to thank God for the opportunity to farm in Harnett County," Mr. Pope said. "I also want to thank the people of Coats, we couldn't have done this without them."

In addition to their farm, the Pope family is also known in the local education world. Mr. Pope's wife, Margaret, was a longtime English teacher at Triton High School.

Popular and now retired agriculture teacher Craig Senter was presented with the Friend of the Farmer Award. Mr. Senter, who

lives in the western part of the county, taught agriculture at Western Harnett High School. While at the school he was a leader in the FFA program. He now contributes through the Sandhills Antique Farm Equipment Club. He said he did not expect to be honored.

"I wondered why all my family was here," Mr. Senter said. "I do not deserve this award. I count it as a privilege to work in the agriculture business in the county. Now I am retired and I have even more time to enjoy agriculture in Harnett County."

Harnett County Extension Director Tyrone Fisher presented the award.

"When I think of this year's winner I think of his smile and his sense of humor," Mr. Fisher said. "He is a friend to all the farmers of Harnett County."

The third major award of the night, the Agribusiness of the Year award, was presented to Harnett Trading Company of Dunn. The business, located in Dunn, is



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Dine And Stroll

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Wisteria owner Karl Bauer has also recently opened the new coffeshop and teahouse, The Cellar, on Wilson Avenue. The Cellar will be open, serving lattes, hot chocolate and delicious pastries.

LadyBugs in the Attic owner Mindy Wright has already hosted her North Wilson Avenue store's Christmas open house, and said that the antique and vintage shop will be open and ready for the season. Ret House Interiors and Almost Antique on Broad Street has new Christmas items, and Memories in Stitches, a Broad Street boutique with custom embroidery and quilting, will also welcome evening shoppers. They

will be joined by the delightful Joyce Jones and Virginia Beasley a few doors down at Jordan's Jewelry Store.

Just a couple of blocks away the Breezeway Café at 100 E. Divine St. will introduce Chef Caanan James and the delectable culinary creations he calls "Rockin'Roll SushiFusion."

"We are very excited to see our merchants pull together to offer this night of shopping, dining, networking — and, just fun!" said Dunn Area Chamber Executive Vice President Tammy Williams. "I have enjoyed every Third Thursday/Dine and Stroll that I have attended, and encourage other people to come out and see what our downtown has to offer."

Faith

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"A step above" translates to "an image of excellence, integrity and credibility," according to the National Association of Private Schools website. Essentially, some private schools, especially institutions as small and focused as Faith Education Academy, can run into problems with state and federal mandates.

The National Association of Private Schools (NAPS) accreditation program ensures a certain standard has been met and opens up future opportunities for students

it's up to you to make the right choices."

Erwin Mayor Patsy Carson was next. She presented the school with a congratulatory proclamation.

"What an awesome group of kids," she said, looking around the room.

"I applaud you at what you've accomplished. Look at what you've done, it's just awesome! Public schools could learn a lot from you. You're so lucky to be here and have what you have. (Faith Education Academy) knows what its doing here and you all are doing the right thing."

DAILY DIGESTS

Lucky Dog Bingo Is Friday

Play Lucky Dog Bingo Friday. There will be...