

**Online POLL** Should schools crack down on students' cellphone use?  
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# OPINION

## LAST WEEK'S POLL RESULTS

Do you plan to attend Downtown Day in Spruce Pine?  
Yes: 46% No: 46% Maybe: 8%

### OP-ED

# Hospital sale brings big risks, big opportunity



Victoria Loe HICKS

A big change is coming to Western North Carolina: Mission Health System plans to sell its six hospitals to HCA Healthcare, the largest hospital chain in the country. Mission is a nonprofit, meaning the money it makes must be put back into its operations. HCA is a for-profit corporation.

That means HCA answers to its stockholders, who expect it to make money for them. It is also huge in comparison to Mission: 177 hospitals spread across the country.

In some ways, the deal could be good for our region: a corporation the size of HCA can often cut better deals with insurance companies and drug and equipment manufacturers. So, it is likelier to survive in this era when many hospitals can't.

But in some ways, HCA seems like a bad fit. Almost all its hospitals are in big cities or their sub-

urbs. Only a few are rural hospitals like the four in the Mission system: Angel, Highlands, Transylvania and Blue Ridge.

Dr. Ron Paulus, head of the Mission system, has acknowledged that it is Mission Hospital in Asheville that HCA is primarily after. "HCA is not doing this transaction because of Angel and Highlands," he told journalists in Franklin.

How, then, can rural people believe HCA will understand or care about their unique needs or respect people in communities quite different from their own? Will HCA have the patience and goodwill to craft healthcare models that suit the smaller, more isolated areas that characterize Western North Carolina?

It may be that we must accept Mission's being acquired by a larger system, and HCA may be that buyer. But we have the right to ask these questions and get meaningful answers. After all, the smaller hospitals owe their existence to people in their communities.

There is one very large potential upside to the HCA deal. Because Mission is a nonprofit, the money generated by the sale must go into

another nonprofit. It would be a foundation that would do two things: make grants for projects designed to help people in the region be healthier and make sure HCA lives up to the promises it makes in the sales agreement.

With at least \$1 billion, a foundation like that could do a lot of good. Already, though, there's a big problem: Members of Mission's board of directors believe they get to pick the people who will shape and run it. That suggests that rural areas will have almost no voice.

Just consider: Mission's board has 19 members, and only two are from outside Buncombe County. But 70 percent of the people Mission is supposed to serve live in the smaller counties. That is just plain wrong.

If Mission's board appoints the foundation board, why should we expect it to be any different?

It's essential that the foundation board have generous representation from the people it is supposed to help. They built these hospitals in the first place. They are best suited to understand what their communities want and need.

One person can make sure the

sale of Mission and the creation of the foundation are done in a way that truly serves all the people of the region.

That's North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, who must approve the agreement hammered out by Mission and HCA.

It's critical for Stein to hear from people who live here what they want and expect from the deal. One group working to get his ear is Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare, or SEARCH.

SEARCH is based in Yancey and Mitchell counties, but we hope to link arms with people from throughout the region to make sure rural needs are addressed.

We're confident that people in every corner of Western North Carolina care as much as we do and are as alarmed as we are. So, consider this an invitation to become partners and allies in this effort.

If you're interested in learning more, find us online at [searchwnc.org](http://searchwnc.org) or on Facebook at SEARCH-wnc). If you want to work with us, we'd love to hear from you at [searchwnc@gmail.com](mailto:searchwnc@gmail.com).

**Victoria Loe Hicks lives in Mitchell County.**

# When bad news is still good news

During the first Business and Industry Appreciation event this past Tuesday hosted by the Mitchell County Economic Development Commission, EDC Director Mickey Duvall said projecting a positive image of the community is vital to successful economic development.

I could not agree more.

One of, if not the main catalyst in properly and successfully doing so is the local newspaper.

Sure, advertisements in magazines and on websites can urge people to come here, but the local newspaper is the mirror that reflects a community's mood either daily or weekly.

Is it along those lines where I feel even a bad news story in the newspaper can act as a positive reflection of a community. Not only does a front-page story about a murder or some other crime show a commitment to true journalism, it shows that the members of a community expect and value the truth, even when the facts aren't as positive as we would like. It would be a disservice to our readers and to journalism if we bury a



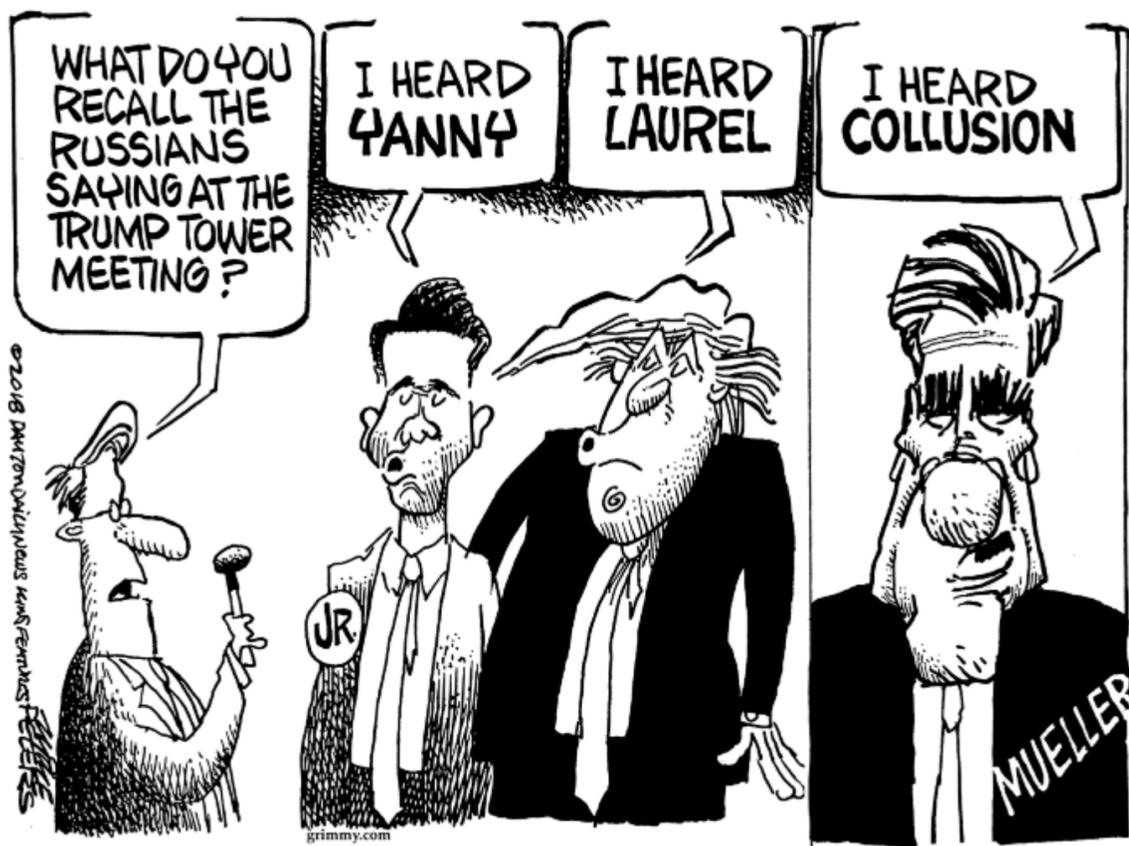
Brandon ROBERTS

story people need to know about to simply keep up an image. The idea that nothing bad ever happens in a community is not one many people are inclined to believe.

Luckily, we live in a place where the good news far outweighs the bad. If someone stops in Spruce Pine for gas, to eat or to take in the views and reads a News-Journal, I am convinced, even if said paper has a not-so-positive story on the front, he or she will leave with an overall favorable view of this community simply because that's the community in which we live.

If someone is trying to sell Mitchell County as a great place to live and work, extending your arm and handing them a copy of the Mitchell News-Journal will go a long way in doing so.

**Brandon Roberts is publisher and editor of the News-Journal.**



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bailey Reunion is June 17

The 36<sup>th</sup> annual reunion of the descendants of Edmond Bailey begins at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, June 17, at the First Baptist Church on Burnsville's Town Square.

Edmond, a soldier in the French and Indian War, was one of six members of a Virginia militia company to survive the July 9, 1775, Battle of Fort Duquesne in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

He resided thereafter in Wilkes County and is likely buried in Yancey County.

Edmond's children were Ansel, who married Elizabeth Bradley; John, who married Rutha Ellis; William, who married Elizabeth Baker; Mary, who married Elijah Aldridge; David Cox Sr.; another daughter, who married Isaac Cook Sr.; Charles; and Susannah, who married Jarrod Simpkins.

This year's program will briefly review photos of previous reunions, DNA evidence for the family from 10,000 B.C., and how the family got to England and the United States with a major focus on a possible new line of cousins and how several cousins, with their photos, have made significant contributions to area governments.

**Lloyd Bailey Burnsville**

### Our very own swamp

It's sad to see North Carolina become as swampy as Washington, D.C., isn't it?

Did you know one of the foremen of building the new Raleigh swamp is our very own Ralph Hise? After reading Ralph Hise's "Legislative Update" in the Mitchell News-Journal, it's obvious he's running for higher office and has left rural North Carolina's needs behind. I thought we could use an update on what Ralph Hise is really doing in Raleigh.

For the first time in modern history, our North Carolina budget is being written behind closed doors and guaranteed to pass with no legislative hearings or citizen input. The level of secrecy by Republican legislative bosses, including Hise, is disgraceful.

I thought the NC House of Representatives writes a budget with public oversight and hearings. Then, that version of the bill is sent to the Senate, which may then pass their own version or accept the House's version. After that, both the House and the Senate work out the differences in public and pass a version along to the Governor, right? Oh, you're wrong. The new Raleigh swamp rules include hatching a budget in secret and not considering input from any other North Carolinian.

Does this budget reflect our needs and rural Western North Carolina values? No. For example, there will be \$35 million only allotted for school safety after Gov. Cooper requested \$135 million for hiring new school counselors and mental health professionals to prevent troubled children from becoming mass shooters. What about teacher pay? Health care for

rural North Carolinians? Gerrymandering reform? Unlikely. The process the Republicans are following shows the complete lack of concern our current legislative leadership has for our children and rural North Carolina. They would prefer their partisan bickering ways over transparency.

Our representative in the state Senate is in the thick of this "only in Raleigh" swampy secrecy. It's no wonder he's now known as "Raleigh Ralph." Can you imagine the shellacking Mitchell County Board of Commissioners Chair Matthew "Vern" Grindstaff would take if he and the Mitchell County Commissioners hatched a budget in secret and passed it without any public input? He and the others would be run out of the county and never elected again.

After a loss of more than 500 jobs in his district and currently under investigation for possible campaign finance violations, "Raleigh Ralph" Hise and his bosses are now ramming a budget down our throats that puts their political supporters first and rural North Carolina last. Truly sad.

If you don't believe me, ask Ralph Hise. Why are there no public hearings on this \$23 billion budget? What are you hiding from us in this budget? What are you going to do to fix health care and schools in rural Western North Carolina?

Getting to Ralph is tougher these days since he spends all his time in Raleigh running for higher office.

**David Wheeler Spruce Pine**

## MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

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### Our Mission

The Mitchell News-Journal is published with pride for the people of Mitchell and adjoining counties by Community Newspapers Inc., Athens, Georgia.

We believe strong newspapers build strong communities - "Newspapers get things done!" Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers.

This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.

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Periodical postage paid in Spruce Pine  
Regular yearly subscription rates: \$27 in Mitchell, Avery & Yancey Co.; \$37 for seasonal residents of Mitchell County; \$47 for out of county  
Postmaster: Send address changes to: Mitchell News-Journal, P.O. Box 339, Spruce Pine, NC 28777. In the event of typographical errors in advertisements, the Mitchell News-Journal is responsible only for the space occupied by the actual error.

