

Mayor Dupree Seems Perplexed: Council Tables Appointment of New Judge and Explains to Mayor the Municipal Court Problem “is systemic”.

The Hattiesburg city council unanimously tabled a vote today blocking the appointment of a new judge over the municipal court. Hattiesburg Mayor Johnny Dupree seemed perplexed at the decision. The council explained to Mayor Dupree that the municipal court has systemic issues and can't be fixed by merely retraining or moving four employees. There is no pro-tem judge in place; so the city will be scrambling to find a new one in the mean time. The three part-time judges make \$50,000 annually. The new permanent judge has a proposed salary of \$120,000 annually. Councilwoman Deborah Delgado felt that this salary was too high, given what other state level judges made.

The council went on to pass its budget four to one, and upon closing the meeting, citizen Joseph Rawson attempted to address the council to speak, but was shut down by Councilman Kim Bradley. This hearing was a special hearing and citizens were not allowed to address the council. Mr. Rawson is appealing the council's vote to approve the budget. Rawson feels due process still has not been followed. Mr. Rawson first identified the council's violation of the open meetings act of 1972 when they had a budget hearing during working hours. The law stated that budget hearings be held during “non working hours”. The Hattiesburg Patriot reported Mr. Rawson's complaint and as a result of his attention to detail, the council had to hold a new hearing. Mr. Rawson is expected to address the council at next week's citizen forum to explain

his appeal.

After the meeting the Hattiesburg Patriot asked council President Kim Bradley if he felt the state auditor should look at the books of the Hattiesburg municipal court and check receipts with deposits. He seemed to be in agreement with having a more complete investigation. The mayor refused to speak to the Hattiesburg Patriot and quickly skedaddled when asked if he felt the state auditor should investigate further. The mayor's \$50,000 assistant, Mr. John Brown interjected asking my name. I asked Mr. Brown a question, but he skedaddled as well. Apparently he still stands by his position in a telephone call that no one practiced law without a license at the municipal court, and challenged the Hattiesburg Patriot's knowledge of the law. The Hattiesburg Patriot has several attorneys who advise us and who have reviewed the internal affairs report.

Mayor Dupree told WDAM, WHLT, and the Hattiesburg Patriot in a previous press conference that he can "handle criticism," and that's why he "gets paid the big bucks." However the bucks aren't big enough to answer the Hattiesburg Patriot's questions. After all, our questions are not the "softball" type questions he gets with other news outlets. We have to shout them out and watch him run. That's transparency for you.

The full video of the meeting can be seen below. If you want to skip forward you will need to pause the video, let it load, then skip ahead. The first part of the meeting covers the Municipal Court. The middle part of the meeting covers the budget, and the very last part is an interview with Kim Bradley and a skedaddle by Mayor Dupree.

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