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9-12 group is voice for those dissatisfied with government

By Becky Johnson • Staff writer

Haywood County commissioners have seen their share of hot-button issues this year.

First came the proposed nuisance ordinance, with angry citizens accusing them of communist rule. The momentum rolled over to budget time, when a 1-cent property tax increase once again demoted commissioners to the role of punching bags to blame for today's economic hardships. Just when it seemed that storm blew over, new fingerpointing arose over the county's recent propensity for landing itself in lawsuits.

A handful of dedicated county watchdogs seem to have taken up permanent residence at county commissioner meetings, poised and ready to speak out on any topic on the county's agenda, or to create their own issues when need be.

The local dissidents have converged with a national grassroots movement called the 9-12 Project, which is building steam to change the course of what they see as a misguided country. A loose-knit chapter of the 9-12 Project has formed locally, providing a vehicle for dissatisfaction of all sorts, chief among them the growing national deficit and unresponsive elected leaders beholden to special interests.

"They feel like government is not listening," said Bruce Gardner, a Haywood County organizer of the 9-12 movement.

The name 9-12 Project aims to conjure the conviction the country shared in the days after the 9-11 tragedy. The movement was spurred by the massive spending on Wall Street bailouts, auto bailouts and the stimulus spending, Gardner said.

"All it does is steal from our kids and grandkids and puts them in financial slavery," Gardner said.

Gardner thinks the momentum will keep building and says their numbers locally are growing.

"I hear people complaining every day about what is going on," Gardner said. "The 9-12 Project can put them to work."

Gardner said the loose-knit group has formed committees that focus on different issues, holding what he refers to as kitchen table meetings at each other's homes on a weekly basis. Gardner says the group is non-partisan. In fact, they are fed up with both parties, he said.

"You are seeing an awakening of the silent majority right now," Gardner said.

As for the local county commissioners, they are a captive audience during a public comment period held at the start of their twice a month meetings. The first meeting in August featured a broad range of complaints.

One speaker wanted the county to stop applying for stimulus money, suggesting every community in the country should refuse to take it. Another railed against socialism and called on the commissioners to accept voluntary term limits for themselves. Yet another wanted to know if the county had an emergency plan for an electromagnetic pulse disruption set off in the upper atmosphere by terrorists to knock out wireless communications. And yet another demanded the county prepare a PowerPoint presentation for the public on expenses racked up during renovations to the historic courthouse.

One thing is for sure, it's keeping commissioners on their toes and the meetings a lot more lively. Stay tuned.

For additional information about the group, go to 9-12projecthaywoodcountync.ning.com or call Gardner at 828.506.5007 or Linda Bennett 828.421.7279.

Cato Institute leader comes to Haywood

Robert Levy, a renowned intellectual, political analyst and philosopher affiliated with The Cato Institute, will give a talk at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 22, at Haywood County Community College auditorium.

The program is being put on by the 9-12 Project, a local chapter of a national grassroots movement of those dissatisfied with the country's current track.

As chairman of the Cato Institute, Levy is an iconic figure who advocates for limited government, individual liberty, free markets and strict adherence to the Constitution. Levy's speech will be called "Losing Liberty, Expanding Government."

"His appearance in Western North Carolina presents a rare opportunity to hear and meet a true patriot whose voice is highly respected among policy makers and jurists," said Bruce Gardner, who organized the event. "Voices of studied wisdom are rare and are certainly needed given our current circumstances."

*Levy will publish *The Dirty Dozen: How Twelve Supreme Court Cases Radically Expanded Government and Eroded Freedom*, which explains Supreme Court decisions of the modern era that expanded the government's reach in layman's terms.*

The program will begin with patriotic music, videos and a guest appearance of one of the nation's founding fathers.

Doors open at 3 p.m. Seating is limited to 1,000. 828.506.5007.

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