FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, December 14, 2021

This is the final and formal response from the Custer County Board of Health (BOH) to Jordan Hedberg, editor of the Wet Mountain Tribune, regarding his writings concerning Dr. Brown, Custer County Public Health Director (PHD). The Board asks that this response be printed in full by Mr. Hedberg, without edits or deletions, and on the front page of the Tribune. This press release will also be sent to the Sentinel and The Valley Beat and will be posted on the county webpage.

On December 6, 2021, during a regular meeting of the BOH, County Attorney Clint Smith reported on the final resolution of an ethics complaint that had been filed against Dr. Clifford Brown, by Jordan Hedberg, the editor/publisher of the Wet Mountain Tribune. In his complaint Mr. Hedberg made some very serious allegations about Dr. Brown, saying that he had committed a criminal act by using forged academic records when applying for the position of PHD and that he was unqualified to serve as the PHD because he did not have a Master’s Degree in Public Health (MPH). Despite the Board of Health repeatedly refuting these allegations, Mr. Hedberg persisted in his accusations and filings. The Colorado Independent Ethics Commission has dismissed Mr. Hedberg’s filings.

For more than a year, Jordan Hedberg has ignored or rejected all efforts by the Board of Health and the County Attorney to explain why Dr. Brown’s MPH does not matter. Here is a summary of the relevant facts.

1. The Board of Health determines whether an applicant for the position of Public Health Director is qualified. The statute that sets forth the qualifications reads as follows: “A public health director may be a physician, physician assistant, public health nurse, or other qualified public health professional.” The statute does not require an MPH in public health.

2. On July 27, 2020, the Board of Health met in a closed workshop to interview Dr. Brown. He was the only applicant for the position. Dr. Brown’s MPH was not a topic of discussion in the workshop; the members of the Board focused solely on his long and distinguished career in public health and were satisfied that he qualified as a public health professional by virtue of his many years of work in that field. At the time of his hiring Dr. Brown had more than 19 years of service as a Public Health Officer for the US Commission Corp and he was serving as Public Health Officer for the Sells Indian Health Service.
3. The Colorado Department of Public Health (CDPHE) is an administrative agency of the State of Colorado. As such, it has the authority to adopt rules and regulations to promulgate and put into effect statutes duly adopted by the General Assembly. CDPHE reviewed Dr. Brown’s application and the action of the Board of Health in determining that he was qualified for the position and approved it. The issue about Dr. Brown’s MPH was of no concern to CDPHE; it also determined that he was highly qualified based on his years of actual experience in public health.

4. Tribune editor, Jordan Hedberg, accused Dr. Brown of committing the serious crime of forging academic records without ever having seen those records. Records which were never used by Dr. Brown to get the job or to keep the job.

5. Mr. Hedberg still refuses to accept the decision of the Custer County Sheriff and the District Attorney not to file criminal charges against Dr. Brown because there was absolutely no evidence of a crime.

Dr. Brown has been instrumental in providing health information to our community. Although most are focused on his work with COVID-19, Dr. Brown also assists with health concerns such as lead contaminant testing for children, maternal health, regional emergency planning, air quality, trash passed over property lines, and dead animal testing. For the past year Dr. Brown has had his professional career, his character, and his integrity dragged through the mud by the Wet Mountain Tribune. Our community and Dr. Brown deserve better. Your Custer County BOH is giving you “the better” by joining the Colorado Independent Ethics Commission, the Sheriff, and the District Attorney in formally considering these matters closed.