

MINUTES SPECIAL MEETING COUNTY COUNCIL MARCH 26, 1979

A special meeting of County Council was opened by Chairman Phinney with the invocation by Mr. Crain. All Council Members were present.

The purpose of the meeting was to ratify the decision made on the 1979/80 School Budget, and was turned over to Mr. Ables, Chairman of the Budget Committee, who moved to fund the School Department 80 Mills at 3% ratio assessment of residential property. Dr. Earle seconded the motion which was unanimously carried.

Mr. Ables stated he wanted the Superintendent of Education and each trustee to know the Council was unanimous in their decision. A copy of Mr. Ables statement is attached.

STATEMENT BY HUGH ABLES, CHAIRMAN OF THE BUDGET COMMITTEE, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL
AT SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNTY COUNCIL MARCH 26, 1979, 3:00 P.M.

In its meeting on Thursday, March 22, 1979, the Budget Committee of the Oconee County Council issued a complete statement for the benefit of the public explaining its actions with respect to the 1979-80 school budget. A copy of this statement is attached. Council's purpose today is merely to confirm the action of the budget committee in a public meeting of Council.

Under the S. C. Constitution, the recently enacted "Home Rule" legislation and applicable opinions of the S. C. Attorney General, County Council's function with respect to the school budget is limited to the levying and appropriating of school tax. In other words, it is our function to set the millage rate to be applied to the operation of the schools during the 1979-1980 school year. Based upon our review of the school district's proposed budget, our discussions with various school officials and our evaluation of available county resources, we have determined to assign 80 mills for school operations during the 1979-80 school year based upon a 3% assessment on residential property. This allocation represents an increase of $10\frac{1}{2}$ mills over the preceding year. We have been advised that this action will make it possible for the school district to provide its employees, both professional and classified personnel, with substantial increases for the 1979-80 school year. We are further advised that the increased funding will return Oconee County to the top 20% of the districts in South Carolina for pay purposes--a position we hope to sustain and improve in years to come.

Finally, we wish to make it clear that our action today constitutes an expression of confidence in the school board, district administration and the overall school program in Oconee County. We do not seek to directly involve Council in daily school operations.

Again, we wish to express our support for the vital public function which we believe the schools perform. We hope our actions today will reassure all concerned of our continued commitment to the education program in Oconee County.

STATEMENT FROM HUGH ABLES, CHAIRMAN OF THE BUDGET COMMITTEE, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL, MARCH 22, 1979:

The Budget Committee of the Oconee County Council met today, March 22, 1979, to formally consider the 1979-80 school tax for the School District of Oconee County. It is the responsibility of this committee to make a recommendation for formal budget action by the Council based upon our review of the facts and figures supplied to the Council by the school board, school staff and other interested parties. Pursuant to the S. C. Constitution (Article 10, in particular), the recently enacted "home rule" legislation and applicable Attorney General opinions, the Council's function and, therefore, the function of this committee, is limited to the levying and appropriation of the school tax. I.e., our responsibility is to determine the school district's millage rate for next year.

Accordingly, a majority of the budget committee (a committee of the whole) has determined to recommend to Council that ⁸⁰~~79~~ mills be assigned to the school district for operating purposes during the 1979-80 school year. This action will be officially considered by Council on first reading in a special meeting on Monday, March 26, 1979. The recommended allocation by the committee represents an increase of 10¹/₂ mills (\$600,000 +) over the millage assignment for the past year and will make it possible for the school district to provide its staff, both professional and classified personnel, with substantial salary increases for the 1979-80 school year. The committee's understanding on this point has been confirmed by Superintendent Fred P. Hamilton.

Council has given the school board request top priority because of the importance all Council members attach to the county's educational program. We acknowledge and appreciate the willingness of

the school staff to reciprocate our commitment to them by making sacrifices in their own program. All of the budgets submitted to County Council provide for reductions in staff and operations. It should be emphasized that even with the additional millage the school budget will include no "frills". In fact, we regret that some highly desirable programs will be curtailed next year. Nevertheless, the Council must balance the demands of our educational program the present level of county services and our desire to minimize the tax burden on our citizens. Similarly, county departments have experienced belt-tightening as well this year.

We are also aware that our teachers are making, and have made, personal financial sacrifices in recent years to teach in our county. We are informed, however, that the budget proposals presented to Council, to be considered by the board next week, will return Oconee County teachers to the top 20% of the districts in the state for pay purposes--a position which we hope to sustain and improve in the years to come.

It should be noted that the increased financial support for the school district does not include any retroactive pay features nor does it contemplate salary adjustments during this contract year, a practice which we believe is incompatible with good business and orderly government. Specifically, the retroactive proposal was rejected for two other important reasons: (1) The Attorney General's March 6, 1979 opinion raises substantial legal questions concerning such a proposal; (2) Such an action would invite, if not a-sure, law suits against the county, delay needed action for school operations and waste government resources. We are aware of no responsible legal opinions to the contrary.

We are convinced, however, that the overwhelming majority of the

teachers in our county and the majority of our citizens recognize this recommendation as responsible and progressive. While we fully support the right of dissent we expect and must demand that all county employees, and certainly all teachers (who teach by their own example) faithfully discharge their contractual obligations and refrain from any illegal or disruptive actions. In our view, under no circumstances should the school district permit or tolerate any employee behavior incompatible with professional requirements and the rules and regulations of the district. The school board, superintendent and his staff will have the full support of the Council in taking whatever actions are required to maintain the orderly and continued operation of our schools.

Finally, it is our understanding that the school board will take action on their budget at a special meeting on Tuesday, March 27, 1979.

Thank you.

Hugh Ables, Chairman
Budget Committee
Oconee County Council