

PTA President Speaks Out

(Cont'd from page 1)

through there 20 years ago... so like a good outsider I went home and shut my mouth.

Over the years I did make a few inquiries around about the School Boards then in office, but not much came of it, cause hardly anyone knew when they met. I did hear about a few townspeople that had raised heck about some teachers, but nothing was ever in the paper and it always seemed that some mysterious and silent operation took over and that the schools operated outside the realm of public inquiry. Course I was getting my county tax statement regularly each year and paying the same and was still thinking that the operation of a public school system is just what the term says. public ... but I didn't say anything because "that's how it's done here!"

As the Burnsville School kept getting more and more decrepit I kept wondering why something was not being done about it but if I ever wondered out loud to anyone I was told that 1) the county people didn't want a new school in Burnsville and 2) there wasn't any money to do anything.

So being a lawyer and a law abiding person I just sat silently by and waited for those persons charged with the legal responsibility to do something. I even went to a book and read in the Constitution of North Carolina, Article I, section 28: "The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right." Course I figure now the State probably figured my kids and their classmates were getting an education, so it didn't matter where they were getting it--safety wise or health wise. So I remained silent.

Every year, gentlemen, I watched the Burnsville School getting worse and worse, and wondered why the School Board, as the local arm of the State in these matters didn't do something. When this present school board took office, I confess that I felt some optimism. At least they did announce their meetings--most of them, and I had heard that they were making every effort to upgrade the requirements for teaching in our schools. I also realized at that time that not every problem inherited by this Board could be solved in one day or even a hundred days, but I did anxiously wait for them to begin on the Burnsville School.

One year ago this month, at a meeting of the Burnsville School P.T.A. my 10 year silence came to an end. It ended, because deep in my heart I became convinced that unless the citizens of this community raised a cry of outrage at the conditions our children were forced to endure, the majority of this School Board would not in the foreseeable future do anymore than to treat the cancer of the Burnsville School with band-aids. That in the absence of an all-out effort by the citizens, this Board would continue the established policy of evading its responsibilities to the Burnsville School.

Was I wrong in coming to that conclusion, gentlemen? Did this Board call any qualified official to make a fire and safety inspection of the school? Did this Board ask for an electrical inspection by a qualified official? Did this Board act without pressure from a citizens' group to have the disrupting surplus food distribution center removed from the school grounds? Did this Board take prompt and concrete action to meet the conditions that the State Fire Marshal said would have to be met before the 2nd floor of the school could continue to be occupied--a report that was in the hands of the Board in March of this year? Would this building ever have been re-inspected by the same state official to see if there was a compliance with these conditions as late as last month if local citizens had not demanded the same of that official?

So that brings us up to date. We all know a countywide plan has been approved by Raleigh so that we may spend some \$330,000 in state money for new school construction. That plan is in two steps--it is not two plans--but two steps. The first step calls for constructing 10 rooms at Cane River, moving East Yancey there and moving Burnsville School to East Yancey. No county funds would be involved in step #1. The second step, or final plan, calls for the eventual construction of a central high school somewhere in the county financed with a bond issue of some million and a half dollars which would have to be approved by the voters, to be paid back with local taxes.

I talked with one member of this Board who stated that he did not favor taking step #1 but to go to step #2. I asked him how we would be able to float such a bond issue when the same is apparently in excess of what we would be able to float based on the county unencumbered assets. He stated that the passage of the sales tax county-wide would finance part of the bond issue, so with that in mind let's recall the special election held last November on the sales tax. This member's home township voted against the tax 92 to 82. Another board member's township--a member who has not expressed himself to date on either step #1 or #2 voted a whopping 249 votes against and 11 votes for. In fact if you take out the Burnsville vote the out-county vote was a whopping 2 to 1 against the tax. At the same time Burnsville was voting .. and I might say voting at a time when there was no state approved plan for building any school or rooms in the county

--voting a whopping 421 votes for 106 votes against. Now, I'm for sure no politician, but I'll make a political prediction that if our children have to stay in that school-- or if they have no school to go to at all because it won't be allowed to reopen next September--Burnsville Township will not vote 4 to 1 for the sales tax to offset an out-county vote against it.

I understand that opposition has developed against the bussing of Micaville and South Toe high school students to Cane River. Could I state here that honestly I feel that if the 10 rooms were added to East Yancey, the same opposition, and just as strong, would develop in the Cane River, Bald Creek and Bee Log sections. Bussing has become a dirty word in the country, but unless we go back to the Dark Ages and build 11 high schools in the county somebody somewhere is going to have to be bussed and a considerable distance at that. And while we're talking about bussing, where is that future magical and mythical center of the County where a projected consolidated high school is to be built. Where is anyplace in Yancey County where no one is going to be subject to rather long bussing. I would ask these people : "What are the educational advantages of one--even if temporary--one high school with a curriculum programmed for 850 students rather than two 400 plus pupil high schools duplicating basic courses and unable to offer the advanced courses so necessary in this modern age?"

I have heard statements that people are concerned that the added rooms would be insufficient, overcrowded, that the physical facilities would be inadequate. I think that Mr. Wilson will confirm the fact that all building plans for these ten rooms will have to be approved by the State Education Planning Division and that they will demand compliance with rigorous standards.

There are, as I see it, at least 2 more reasons for moving to step #1 without delay. This \$338,000 released to us for construction is losing purchasing value at a rate close to 5% a year. That figures out to about \$16,000 for every year we delay.

And the final argument. Perhaps Mr. Wilson has more information on this point, but we are led to believe that if the necessary structural repairs, which I think we will admit is throwing money away on a dead horse, are not made to the upper Burnsville School--if some \$34,000 to \$70,000 in local money is not forthcoming to make these repairs and structural alterations, that building will not be allowed to open next September and what will be done with our children then?

Gentlemen, all of those officials that I have complained to have urged us to work with our local school board. May I say in all sincerity that there is nothing that all of us would rather do and will do. If any member here tonight can give me one reason outside of political considerations, or this nagging bussing problem--that we'll always have if we ever get to a one high school county--why step #1 cannot begin right away, I will willingly return to my role of silence.

NCAE Meets October 29

The Yancey County Local Unit of the North Carolina Association of Educators will be holding the second meeting of the school year in the cafeteria of Cane River High School beginning at 2:45 p.m. on October 29. Dr. H. C. Evans, recognized as an outstanding educator and president of the Lees McRae College at Banner Elk, will be the speaker.

After the talk by Dr. Evans, there will be a business session for the purpose of discussing several topics of interest to the teachers. Refreshments will be served by the Home Economics Department of Cane River High School.

In addition to the meeting at the opening of this school year and the one announced above, two more meetings of the Local Unit N.C.A.E. are scheduled before the end of school. Plans are being made to send delegates to the N.C.A.E. State Convention next spring. Funds from membership dues will be applied toward the expense of sending delegates to the convention.

Officers of the local association are James C. Byrd, President; Ronnie Proffitt, Vice President, and Wilhelmenia Hensley, secretary-treasurer. Building representatives help provide leadership in each of the schools in the county.

NOTICE

Clearmont P.T.A. will meet at the Clearmont Elementary School on Monday night, October 26th at 7:30 p.m. Mrs. Mary Wilson, who is with the N.C. Heart Association, will give a talk and show a film on the "Heart Sounds Screening Program." Parents are urged to attend.

PUT A STRONG MAN WHOSE VOICE WILL BE YOUR VOICE IN THE STATE SENATE.

RE-ELECT

BILL POWELL

**Republican
STATE SENATOR**

Nov. 3, 1970

**TO REPRESENT OUR 31st. DISTRICT
YOUR VOTE ON NOV. 3rd
WILL BE GREATLY APPRECIATED**

Buncombe - Madison - Mitchell - Yancey

