

Mr. CUMMING. I would like to know that.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Chairman, irregardless of how the Board feels as to executive session and open session, I want to go on record that this be a public meeting as such, called for public interest, to handle public matters, and nothing be withheld from the public.

Mr. CUMMING. Getting back to one point that you mentioned, speaking of teachers, hiring and firing, if I, as a citizen of this county, wanted to sit in at a meeting where the teachers were being procured, I don't think the Board could prevent me from doing it.

Mr. RICH. Well, the Board does sometimes meet in executive session.

Mr. CUMMING. I will leave, but, actually—I am leaving on your statement there that your instructions from Washington are that this meeting you will not meet with any citizen of Spalding County sitting in on it other than members of the Board.

Mr. RICH. And the school officials.

Mr. PARKER. Joe, and the other citizens here, we recognize your feelings in this matter. The members of this Board have nothing whatsoever to hide. Before any visitors leave, I would, on behalf of our Board, like to make a brief statement, at which time, in order to avoid any further delay, we will ask the cooperation of our interested citizens and taxpayers that they leave in order that the meeting might proceed. But before you leave, I would like to read a brief statement, my personal statement, to open this meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss with representatives of the United States Office of Education alleged inadequacies in our school desegregation plan. Board members have received copies of letters recently dated June the 7th, July the 11th, and July the 18th. We understand that certain other school systems in Georgia have received similar letters. Before the meeting gets under way, I want to review briefly for these representatives what has transpired in Griffin-Spalding County. When the Courts directed that the school districts make a prompt and reasonable start toward desegregating the schools, this Board acted promptly and in good faith to determine from all possible sources a plan that would constitute compliance and that would still give our children, both white and black, the best possible educational opportunities.

At this point I want to get the record straight. There has never been a group of public spirited citizens who worked harder or more conscientiously to do what was fair and just for all. The Court ordered plan and a voluntary plan based on freedom of choice was studied for long and difficult weeks; colored and white citizens were consulted at great length. The decisions to follow a voluntary plan based on freedom of choice was based on our feelings that the people themselves should have a free choice in selecting the school where they felt their children could get the best opportunity. This choice has been given to everyone on a fair and equal basis as prescribed by the United States Office of Education. In the 1965-66 school year 68, or 2.1% of the negro students were freely given permission to attend schools that were formerly all white. Because of the dedicated work of these Board members, our administrators and teachers, and the public in general, there was not a single incident in this county throughout the school year. When the 1966 guidelines were issued, re-registration was held in exact compliance with the rules, and 161, or 4.8% of the colored students requested attendance on a desegregated basis for the coming year. Assignment has been made on these choices without exception. We submit that this is a reasonable progress towards peaceful, orderly, and intelligent desegregation of the schools in compliance with the law. I appreciate your position here, and I also appreciate your cooperation.

Mr. RICH. I might add that we appreciate it also, and we certainly would encourage that the Board and the Superintendent do talk to the members of the press and members of the public about what has transpired.

Mr. OWEN. Just let me ask one question to get the record clear. Mr. Chairman, the way I understand it, this meeting was called as a Board meeting, as a public meeting. Now, the Board is not going into executive session, but since Mr. Rich has stated that he is forbidden by his instructions from Washington with this rule to inform the Board as to what he has come down here to tell us, that our visitors are leaving voluntarily without this Board actually excluding them, and we are still in public session as far as the meeting goes, but they are leaving voluntarily.

Mr. PARKER. That is correct. Now, is there any visitor that understands it otherwise? Thank you very much.