

SCHOOL DISTRICT CHAIRMAN ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

JAMES L. SOLOMON, JR.

On January 4, 1977, James Solomon was elected chairman of the Richland Country District One School Board and delivered the following speech which was published in The State newspaper.

It was unusual for a new chairman to give an acceptance speech, but Solomon's election was unusually significant. Solomon was the first African American elected to chair the School Board of District One, which was the state's third largest school district.

Solomon was assuming the chairmanship during a challenging time of transition. The school board had spent the past few years ensuring that the school system was compliant with civil rights law ("achieving a unitary school system", in Solomon's words), and was now taked with addressing concerns about how the resulting structural changes would impact the schools' ability to provide a high quality education.

When something outstanding happens to an individual one of the most compelling impulses is to say something. Not to just say anything but to say something. Something to show appreciation, something to assure and reassure, something to indicate to concerned people what they might expect as a result of this outstanding happening, whatever it may be.

To be elected chairman of the District One Board of School Commissioners is a significant event in my life. Consequently, I like most other persons in such a situation, have this compelling urge to say something.

First, I wish to say that I thank my colleagues on the board for this expression of confidence, and I pledge to do utmost during the period that I serve to warrant your trust, your confidence and your support.

Second, I feel that there is a need to assure all those who make up our community that Richland District One Schools are in good hands. I have come to know each member of our present board personally over the past few months and during this period I have also gotten to know many of the professionals in the district. I can say to you without the slightest reservation that the district is in good hands. Each of my colleagues on this board is an intelligent and rational adult who is immensely concerned with the welfare of this district. I believe that the chief motivation of each of these persons is to provide through proper board action the leadership and direction which will result in the best possible educational opportunities and experiences for

all of the children of the district, and which will enable the district to serve the total community in an efficient and effective manner.

I believe that the collective wisdom of the people as reflected through the election process is manifested in the choices made both in the election two years ago and the election this year. And, with the continued support and assistance of the people of this community, this school system will make significant progress under the leadership of this board.

I also believe, that we have in this district a group of competent, dedicated professional and support persons. The kind of persons that will faithfully carry out the policies of the board and will work with the board in molding each component of the professional and support staff into a more effective and efficient team. Supportive of one another and dedicated to the proposition that the education of our children is the sole reason for the existence of this district.

Third, I feel that there is a need to indicate to people what they might expect from me as a result of my election as chairman. I wish to begin by saying that I have but one goal and that is to serve to the best of my ability. I believe in right, I believe in fair play, I believe that one must never compromise his integrity. I believe in loyalty and support to the district. I believe that it is equally important in implementing board policies to consider the spirit of the policy as well as the literal policy statement. Of course it is the board's responsibility to make certain that each policy is understood, and it is the administration's responsibility and duty to implement the policy in spirit and in fact.

I believe in respect for people because of what they are, not because of who they are. That is, I believe in the dignity of human kind and that this dignity commands respect.

I believe that improvement and excellence in our educational system must be self-generated at the district level. I also believe that it is unlikely that public school education will receive all the resources which are seen as needed to achieve the level of excellence desired, (hence, we must set priorities). Consequently, I will recommend to the board that we conduct a comprehensive program and management evaluation and review.

The program evaluation should include a review of people and facilities as well as the material and equipment needs of specific schools, and might be conducted by task forces of citizens in a manner similar to the review of Lyon Street School last year. I will recommend that the management review and evaluation be conducted by an independent consultant selected by the board. This will relieve the administration of this additional burden and this might insure a greater level of objectivity.

Together these evaluations will suggest future policies and programs for better meeting the education needs of our children in the most effective and efficient manner.

There has been considerable discussion and concern for both the number of minorities and women employees at certain levels in the district, and their

pattern of promotion to advanced position levels. I will recommend that the board set as a goal to improve opportunities for minorities and women to move into professional, administrative, and supervisory positions within the district.

Discipline and violence in schools is a nation-wide problem and continues to give all of us concern locally. I will recommend that the board develop a policy designed to improve discipline in our schools. My personal belief is that if discipline in our schools is to be significantly improved, students must improve their self-image, their desire to achieve and their respect for the acceptable modes of conduct which the school and the community beyond the school require. That is, I believe that improved discipline entails a mutual respect among students and others and requires students to assume responsibility for their behavior.

I believe in input from parents, teachers, administrative community persons, other district employees and students in matters concerning the schools. Also, I believe that the teachers in our district are, for the most part, dedicated and loyal. I believe that improved communication with our teachers and an improvement, to the extent possible, in salary and benefits will result in a harmonious working relationship in District One and that as a result there will be neither the need nor the desire for collective bargaining.

I believe that the board, the administration, teachers and students working together in a mutually supportive manner will make this district the model for the state which a capital city district should be.

In summary then I would say that achieving a unitary school system was our paramount goal during the past few years. Now we must reassess the educational opportunities available to our students as well as the facilities now available, and those needed in the near future. Then we must develop long range plans for returning to a higher degree of excellence in educating the students of Richland One.

In so doing we are required to take into account the morale and welfare of the teachers and support staffs of the district, the disparity in the number of minority women administrators and supervisors in the district, the diverse needs of all students: and the complexities of our pluralistic society including the changing behavior patterns of today's youth.

Our challenges are great, but the potential for meeting them exists, hence, success is attainable. Let us, the board, the professionals and support personnel of the district, the students, the parents, and all who reside in the district pledge to work together in meeting these challenges. If we truly commit ourselves to such a pledge, history will show that we in our day met the demands which our times required of us.

Acknowledgements. This text is based on the news article "Solomon Statement Upon Assuming Post" in *The State*, January 5, 1977.