



Duval County Public Schools

November 8, 2013, Special Meeting

Mr. Fred "Fel" Lee, Chairman
Ms. Becki Couch, Vice Chairman
Mr. Jason Fischer
Ms. Cheryl Grymes
Dr. Connie Hall
Ms. Ashley Smith Juarez
Ms. Paula D. Wright
Dr. Nikolai P. Vitti, Superintendent

ATTENDANCE AT THIS SPECIAL MEETING OF THE DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD with Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent of Schools, Ms. Karen Chastain, Chief Legal Officer, Mr. Fred "Fel" Lee, Chairman, Ms. Becki Couch, Vice Chair and Board members: Mr. Jason Fischer, Ms. Cheryl Grymes, Dr. Constance Hall, Ms. Ashley Smith Juarez and Ms. Paula D. Wright, present.

Call Meeting to Order

[CALL MEETING TO ORDER - SPECIAL MEETING](#)

Minutes: The Chairman called the Special meeting to order at 3:18 p.m.

[COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE](#)

Minutes:

Mr. Henry Russ said I'm here to support Nathan Bedford Forrest. I am not in favor of a name change. Nathan Bedford Forrest was a very honorable Civil War General. There's a lot of negative stuff out there and most of it is not substantiated. The bottom line if you're charged with something as serious as what Nathan Bedford Forrest is charged with which were capital crimes of the time, he could have been adjudicated guilty and could have been hung or shot. The bottom line is, and people need to pay attention to this, he was taken before a Congressional investigation in 1871 by none other than

William Sherman and a northern Congress. They took testimony for quite some time and finally determined that Nathan Bedford Forrest was NOT guilty and he was exonerated of the crimes at Fort Pillow and he was NOT associated with the KKK. Anything else that you hear from any of these other speakers can not trump a Congressional investigation. They had no reason to come to any other conclusion other than the truth in this matter and I respectfully ask that you understand that and keep it in the back of your mind. If there's a little voice in the back of your mind that is saying, "...*maybe these people are right!*" I encourage you to do some study on this matter. Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Stovall said I appreciate the opportunity to speak, today. I wanted to first say that when we were here on Tuesday night, something was said that our group, the Jacksonville Progressive Coalition and I'm not a member of that group, were referred to as communist. I want to tell you a little bit about who I am and why I support this cause. Whom I am is a central committee rep for the Democratic Party where that party has passed a unanimous resolution supporting this name change. I was also fortunate last year to be appointed by Mayor Alvin Brown to the Jacksonville Human Rights Commissioner. We're also no stranger to controversy as some of you may have heard what we've gone through with the Commissioner and another fight we've had a year or two, ago. If you look through the surveys that were turned in on Tuesday, you'll see that every member of the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission also signed asking for the name change. We want to do this for no other reason. We are civically engaged citizens and it's the right thing to do. Thank you.

Mr. Rodney Hurst said I'm representing the NAACP in addition to myself and others. One of the things about history that you cannot refute and that is research and documentation will always give you the information that you are searching for. When I hear someone who comes to the podium and says, "*I have the only truth; everything else is incorrect...*" then it makes me wonder where does that research come from. So, lets talk a bit about Nathan Bedford Forrest, Lt. General in the Confederate States of America Army which is a foreign army that was in opposition to the United States of America, that is number one. Number two, more than 600,000 people killed - 600,000 soldiers for the United States Army killed. Nathan Bedford Forrest was the founder of the Ku Klu Klan (KKK). Documentation that Nathan Bedford Forrest was the initial Imperial Wizard of the KKK - Documentation the Pride and Passion Foundation in the Industrial Information Councils of the South. Nathan Bedford Forrest was also a slave trader and that is found in a lot of different instances including an historian and sociologist named Dr. James Lowen who wrote a book entitled, "*Lies My Teacher Told Me What Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*". When you talk about naming a school after someone, there has to be some redeeming value that says that we are going to affix this name to a building and we want you to take pride in doing that. Nathan Bedford Forrest was affixed to the name of a high school in 1959. In part, because of a reaction to the *Brown* decision integrating the schools. Now, we can talk about all of the philosophy that we want. You look at the negatives about Nathan Bedford Forrest and wonder why he was not brought up on charges...President Andrew Johnson gave a blanket amnesty to all of the Confederate soldiers during the war. None of them were brought up on charges. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Lavario said I am a graduate of Nathan Bedford Forrest High School in 1963 and I'm against of changing the name of our school. Thank you.

Professor S.L. Stoll said you've already heard from me and my opinion. I am a sociologist and not a historian but despite what you hear, there are really, really good historical records available. This book was written in 2005 and there are 160 pages of references; just references in this book from Northern and Southern causes. Nathan Bedford Forrest was the Commanding Officer during the Fort Pillow massacre. It documents how his soldiers did nothing without him telling them to do it. It is unquestionable that he was responsible for the Fort Pillow massacre. It's also unquestionable that he became the first Grand Wizard of the KKK. It's unquestionable that he was a slave "catcher". Are you aware that we had dog catchers and slave catchers in the South? He was a slave catcher and then he became the largest slave trader in Tennessee. One of the things you hear from the apologists is "*How, if he was such a bad guy, how come black people came to his funeral?*" I love this part in this book and I know that reading is important for the kids, so I'm going to read this to you by Andrew Ward, "*At his funeral, Jefferson Davis served as a pall bearer and expressed his regret that he had not recognized Forrest's genius earlier. Many whites took comfort in the fact, that about 500 black people came to Forrest's funeral and that several who were approached by Forrest's admirers expressed their respect for him. Considering the fact that by 1877, African Americans made up almost half of the city's population, documented by Memphis, 500 was not a large number and no one knows exactly what compelled them to attend. Some may have attended to greet imprisoned relatives from Forrest's plantation as they shuffled by in convict garb. Others may have come out of respect for, perhaps, but just as likely out of curiosity, relief or a need to make damn sure that the former slave catcher, slave trader, scourge of Fort Pillow, Grand Wizard of the KKK and pioneering convict labor contractor was at long, last dead!*" Do the right thing.

Ms. Terri Neal said we've debated N.B. Forrest, the man, repeatedly so I won't revisit that. Instead, I ask the Board to focus on the main red flags in this issue. First, remember why this name was chosen for this school. To protest segregation and to perpetuate bigotry and hatred. Secondly, remember the letters Board members received from the KKK just weeks ago urging the Board to retain this name. The KKK is a known hate and domestic terrorist group. It's famous for and unashamed of its dislike for not only African Americans but Jews, Catholics, non-Protestant faiths, many immigrants and what we now call the "GLBT" Community. If this name is not changed, the Board in effect will stand with the Klan. How can this Board then promote diversity and tolerance to students and employees and this city, at large? Finally, the cost and effort to change this name has been criticized, as wasteful. The waste actually isn't incurring in 2013. It occurred in 1959 when the name of Forrest was initially foisted upon students and a community who didn't want it. Money and efforts spent to correct an injustice is never a waste. We're dealing, today, with an injustice sanctioned by an intimidated School Board 50 years ago. I urge you to vote to reverse this insult so the same won't be said of this Board 50 years from now. Thank you.

Mr. Dave Nelson said I've been involved in this campaign since the 1990's. I have my briefcase articles and speeches since then pertaining to Forrest and changing the name of the school. I can't imagine anyone of you who wants to get this over with more than me because particularly in the years of 2005-2008, this was going on. So many times, I would close my store and spend hours and hours over at N.B. Forrest High School talking to the teachers and students, administration and the press. This week, alone,

Channel 4 has been in my store four times for hours filming and interviewing these books that were not printed in 2000 but in the 1860's -1870's about Forrest, about Fort Pillow, about the Klan, and about any of the major issues that we're talking about, now. They taped some of this and it's been on television. This week, someone brought by to give you all a disk that has Dr. Blanton from Jacksonville University, going into deep detail about Fort Pillow. I believe I'm on there, Henry Russ whom you heard earlier, and some other people. If you did not receive the disk, let me know and I will furnish you with another one. If you did receive it, please look at it. This can be over by you saying, *"No, we've been down that road; we've done this thing for years; we've looked at the historical facts; we've seen the old documents and so forth and we're just not going to do that any more. We've done it and it's over with and we voted to keep the name."* The students voted to keep the name and I do have the original tallies and documents from the Forrest High School principal in my brief case. In my store on St. Augustine Road I have a conference room and I've been there for 20 years where I have students, professors, teachers from JU, UNF and UF who come into my store read these books, make their lesson plans and reports and research. You can't find these books in our libraries. You are welcome to come into my store, as well.

Mr. Opio Sokoni said I'm from here and lived on the northside in Sherwood and Arlington where I went to Lake Lucina Elementary; Atlantic Beach and attended Mayport and Fletcher; I ultimately graduated from Andrew Jackson High School. I went into the Navy the day after graduation and spent five years. Then, I attended Norfolk State University where I earned a Political Science degree; I went to Howard University and received a law degree; came back to Jacksonville and earned a Master's degree at the University of North Florida and I'm now in this issue right here. I'm now the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference which is the organization that Dr. King organized along with a number of people. During that time, Dr. King was called a "communist". He died in Memphis, Tennessee and this is the place where Nathan Bedford Forrest made his stand. When Dr. King took that bullet in the head, he fell to the ground. They killed the man on that day and I'm standing here because they only killed the man; they did not kill the idea or what he was about. Those people who are for Nathan Bedford Forrest, we love them. The people who were in the KKK back then during King's life, we love them. We don't hate the person, we hate the act. Many people have relatives that were in the Klan back then and they are ashamed of those things. So, people here today who support Nathan Bedford Forrest, we don't hate them but love them and we believe that their children and grandchildren will be happy for what we're doing here, today. Nathan Bedford Forrest was at Fort Pillow. He was the head of the troops that day. He never apologized and the buck stopped at him. Those things can not be refuted. There was the blood and slaughter and the river did run red. Please change the name so when I go abroad, again, I don't have to hear about this the same way our Superintendent has when he travels. We want to be proud of our city and be proud of you. Thank you for bringing this matter up and I do believe, now, you will do the right thing. Thank you.

Mr. Bodie Catlin said I am excited about being here, today. I was born in Jacksonville in 1948. My company is a fourth generation business; my wife and kids were born here and grandchildren. Back in 2006-2007 when I stood in front of Forrest High School, I made a comment, *"Where will this ever end?"* You haven't been in a meeting with these people. They want to change the name of Forrest, Robert E. Lee and they

won't stop with Forrest. If you go along with this and change the name of Forrest, believe, they will be after every other Confederate General's name in Jacksonville. I think that is absolutely pathetic. Some want to change the name of Jacksonville. You hear about the surveys that were turned in. Let me tell you about my survey. I took 442 surveys and I told my people and I'm a member of the "Friends of Forrest", I want your name, phone number, work number and everything about you on my form. The competition was having kids in their Sociology classes fill out survey after survey and your name can be optional. I'm sure you'll recognize some of these names: Bill Gay, Bill Gay, Jr., W.W. Gay, Henry Beckwood, Buck Autry, Ron Autry, owners of Miller Electric, Ed Witt, Billy Nimnicht, John Coxwell, Randy Evans, Don Pittman, Michael Corrigan, Allen Fickling, Hugh Powell, Cecil Powell, Billy Parker, former School Board Member...I could go on for a long time. If you want to know the difference between the "Friends of Forrest" and the other group, go to their Facebook page and that's where you can learn about them. We keep on hearing about Fort Pillow. Well, Forrest tried to get a surrender and a week before that battle began, one of Colonel Hurst who was running the camp at Fort Pillow, took one of Forrest's men, had his face skinned, his nose cut off, his jaw disjointed and his privates cut off. Another one of Forrest's men, after cutting off his tongue, punching out his eyes, splitting his mouth on each side of his ears and inflicting other mutilations, what would you do if that happened to your men when you went into a battle? I ask that you think about that. Thank you.

Mr. Biko Misabiko said I'm from the Jacksonville Progressive Coalition and I'm personally going around in Jacksonville conducting a survey about the name change of N.B. Forrest High School. The first question I ask is "*How do you feel about Nathan B. Forrest?*" Some students know who the person was and some don't. Some want the name change and some don't. We need to move on as the history will always be there. We need to educate the students and change the name of the school.

Mr. Robert Montgomerie said I'm here with my friends from the Jacksonville Progressive Coalition and my own organization, Duval Progresses. I have a Bachelor's degree in Political Science, Class of 1990 from Suffolk University. I support the name change. Now, changing the name of the school does not going to change the history books. We all know that Forrest was a General; we all know he was in the Confederate Army; we all know the Civil War happened and we all know the bad side of his history. Tuesday, I gave you a few gory details along with everyone else. Changing this name means accepting and embracing something new and getting rid of a few institutions that have, in my view, divided this community. I believe getting rid of the name Nathan Bedford Forrest High School gets rid of the idea of white privilege and white supremacy and that's why the name was changed to begin with...it was changed due to opposition of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. It wasn't about commemorating a great Southern Warrior or Southern culture. It was about telling Washington, DC, "*We're still in charge down here.*" I think on that basis, alone, is a perfect reason to change the name of the high school and I encourage all of you to vote on it, today. Let's do it and get this monkey off our back; it's been too long. Thank you.

[APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 8, 2013, AGENDA](#)

Motions:

That the Duval County School Board approve the November 8, 2013, Agenda as - PASS submitted on November 6, 2013.

Vote Results

Motion: Cheryl Grymes

Second: Paula Wright

Rebecca Couch	- Aye
Jason Fischer	- Aye
Cheryl Grymes	- Aye
Connie Hall	- Aye
Ashley Juarez	- Aye
Fred Lee	- Aye
Paula Wright	- Aye

General

[1. RENAMING OF NATHAN B. FORREST HIGH SCHOOL NO. 241](#)

Attachment: [Dr Hall Forrest Letter to the Board - 11-05-13.pdf](#)

Minutes: Speakers:

Dr. Connie Hall, Board Member
Mr. Jason Fischer, Board Member
Mr. Fred "Fel" Lee, Board Chairman
Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Karen Chastain, Chief of Legal Services
Ms. Ashley Smith Juarez
Ms. Paula D. Wright, Board Member
Ms. Cheryl Grymes, Board Member

Motions:

That the Duval County School Board accept the written request by the Honorable Dr. Constance S. Hall, District 5, to initiate the renaming process for Nathan B. Forrest High School No. 241, pursuant to Policy 8.59. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Cheryl Grymes

Second: Ashley Juarez

Rebecca Couch - Aye

Jason Fischer - Aye

Cheryl Grymes - Aye

Connie Hall - Aye

Ashley Juarez - Aye

Fred Lee - Aye

Paula Wright - Aye

Adjournment

[ADJOURNMENT](#)

Minutes:

The Special meeting adjourned at 4:21 p.m.

Isd

Superintendent

Chairman