

SCHOOL NAME IN QUESTION - ADVOCATES VIE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, CIVIL WAR HONOR

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Richmond's next Civil War battle could center on J.E.B. Stuart Elementary School.

The first exchange of volleys occurred at a School Board meeting last month, pitting board member Carol A.O. Wolf (3rd District) against Henry Kidd, a national officer with Sons of Confederate Veterans.

Wolf has proposed renaming Stuart Elementary in honor of two prominent Richmond civil-rights lawyers, Oliver W. Hill and Samuel W. Tucker. The pair challenged segregation in the Prince Edward County school system, which was one of the systems involved in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case. The 1954 case led to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that declared racial segregation of students illegal.

Kidd told the board during its public comment period that while he has no problem with honoring Hill, "Richmond has seen enough division and arguing through the past years over our history." He listed the renaming of the Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart bridges and the stripping of Robert E. Lee's name from the local Boy Scouts council, scheduled for sometime in 2004, as examples.

"Trying to rename J.E.B. Stuart School is once again trying to slap one portion of society while honoring another," Kidd said. "We have an obligation to treat everyone with dignity and respect. Renaming the school is not teaching our children properly. 'We don't care about one segment of society,' is what this says. It makes children who are of Southern ancestry and culture feel inferior.

"Do not rename J.E.B. Stuart School. J.E.B. Stuart was a man who gave his life defending this city."

The board voted 5-1 with three abstentions against starting the process to rename the school. Wolf cast the only yes vote, while board Vice Chairman Stephen B. Johnson (5th District), Charles H. Nance (2nd District) and Reginald M. Malone Sr. (7th District) abstained.

After the meeting, a disappointed Wolf called the board's action "a demonstration of cowardice in the face of the Confederacy," along with "a fear to face the future."

Nance said he abstained because he thought this proposal was "premature."

"Without any reference to the Confederacy or history or anything else, we ought to reflect on the names of our schools. Do they inspire the community today?" he asked. "I will be willing to accept some slings and arrows or whatever we may receive. But I'm not sure we're ready to start that process tonight."

Wolf later said she has no desire to remove Stuart's name from the cement into which it is etched, nor does she wish to deny Richmond's Confederate history.

Rather, she said, as a way to honor "two of the titans of the civil-rights movement," she favors the placement of Hill and Tucker's names near Stuart's and for the school to be known as Oliver W. Hill-Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School.

"The more powerful symbolism is to juxtapose Richmond's role in the Confederacy with its prominent position in the civil-rights movement," Wolf said.

Immediately after the vote, Johnson withdrew a proposal to start the process of renaming Clark Springs Elementary. He had suggested it be named in honor of Thomas Cannon, a retired Richmond postal worker who has given more than \$140,000 in \$1,000 checks to individuals and foundations.

In a board discussion that preceded the Stuart vote, Wolf said she was approached by several members of the school community and other 3rd District residents expressing a desire to change the name.

She said now would be a good time because the board also has to start the process of coming up with names for the new schools that will result from the consolidations of Armstrong and John F. Kennedy high schools, and Onslow Minnis and Mosby middle schools.

The board voted 8-0, with Wolf abstaining, to start the process of naming the consolidated East End high schools and middle schools. Those reconfigured schools are scheduled to open next September.

Before the Stuart vote, South Richmond resident Dolson Anderson told the board the consolidated East End high school should be named in Hill's honor. Kidd said this would be a good solution by honoring both Hill and Stuart.

"No other Richmonder, Virginian or American has done more to provide students with an equal opportunity to education than Mr. Hill," Anderson said. "The historical rivalries [at Armstrong and Kennedy] can be united into new energies for excellence under the banner of Oliver W. Hill High School."

Wolf later said she is not opposed to naming separate schools after Hill and Tucker. But she said that with Albert Hill Middle School in Richmond and J.R. Tucker High School in Henrico County, she wanted to ensure that Oliver Hill and Samuel Tucker's names would not be lost in the shuffle.

Also, she said, Hill and Tucker will be forever linked in history because of their role in the Brown v. Board decision and their partnership in the Hill, Tucker & Marsh law firm.

And their names belong on a school in the 3rd District, as opposed to the East End, because Tucker, who died in 1990, was a 3rd District resident, and Hill, 96, lives there, Wolf said.

The night after the vote, Wolf spoke at a meeting of the Stuart Elementary Parent Teacher Association. She encouraged parents, pupils and others interested in changing the name not to be discouraged by the board's vote affirming the school's name.

"Even though the board faces considerable challenges right now," Wolf said, "I will ask that the citizens of the Third District come forward and request that the board reconsider allowing the parents and children of J.E.B. Stuart [school] to plead their case."

- **Caption: Photo**

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