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Mr. Guy Rhodes, Editor
Letter to the Editor
The Tuskegee News
103 S. Main Street
Tuskegee, AL 36083

Dear Editor:

Additional facts are necessary to Macon County School Board Mary H. Hooks' letter in The Tuskegee News June 5 edition justifying further attendance to state, regional, and national conferences.

Parents and grandparents of Macon County school-aged children want no less than Macon County School Board member Mary H. Hooks desires; a quality education for all students.

I agree with Ms. Hooks pointing out, "These are tough economic times and we are faced with tough choices in our spending..."

With "tough economic times" directly touching everyone in Macon County, I remind Ms. Hooks of her travel attending school board conferences across the nation.

In 27 months, Hooks attended conferences in such tourist attractive cities as San Francisco (Apr 2011), Asheville, North Carolina (Jul 2011), Boston (Apr 2012), Orange Beach (Jun 2012 and Jun 2013), San Diego (Apr 2013), and Destin, Florida (Jul 2013) thereby running up a tab of nearly \$13,000. For these conventions, regrettably she and the other Macon County School Board (MCSB) members find it appropriate to stay in expensive resorts such as \$663.78 (2012) for a two night stay and another \$849.15 (2013) three night resort stay.

In my opinion, Hooks' 10 conferences along with an additional 34 trips by the other school board members costing about \$44,000 during the same 27 months is nothing short of abuse of public trust and demonstrates unethical stewardship of my tax dollars. For example, one in-state conference cost Macon County taxpayers \$4,250 for accommodations alone!

Knowing we continue to have two failing schools and a decreasing enrollment, I fail to see the dividends of taking \$22 per student countywide to finance attendance to 44 conferences in a little over two years.

Last year approximately 700 students were enrolled in our two failing schools, Notasulga and Tuskegee Institute Middle School. Looking at these students and the \$57,000, we will never know how these students would have benefitted from upwards to \$75 each in additional classroom supplies, books, and teacher aids.

As a footnote, the majority of this travel took place before January 2013 when the state mandated school board continuing education.

It is appalling to realize our school board member public servants have seen more of the United States in 27 months, compliments of county taxpayers, than most in Macon County will see in their lifetime. And, we still have students in failing schools!

Yes, tough financial times are among us. Not solely for the MCSB but for everyone living and working in Macon County including Macon County employees and retirees, our deputies, our teachers, and unemployed and retired property owners paying property taxes or seeing their property auctioned at the annual tax sale for unpaid taxes.

To grasp onto how tough our economic times are, consider these facts.

1. Macon County unemployment is 8.2% compared to 6.2% statewide.
2. Macon County residents are so financially stressed that one hundred per cent of our students are eligible for free or reduced school meals.
3. Only six counties have a lower median family income than Macon County.
4. State funding per student has decreased 20 percent - second only to Oklahoma.
5. Sixty percent of county property taxes go to the school board.
6. Nearly 6,800 Macon County households received \$932,000 in public and non-public assistance in March of this year.

Common sense and good stewardship of my tax dollars should prevail within the guidelines of the new state law. Therefore, I offer the following improvements for best use of my tax dollars for our students in the classroom, extra curricula activities, and athletic teams while complying with state law.

1. When necessary and financially sound, permit a board member to attend a conference to provide a report of highlights and "new strategies" to the board.
2. Reimbursement should be on the state employee per diem basis instead of full reimbursement for expensive meals and accommodations.
3. School board members should take full advantage of on-line group and individual educational opportunities offered by the Alabama Association of School Board in lieu of expensive airfare, registration, meals, and accommodations.

For further detail and copies of actual documents, including the \$331.89/night resort receipt, and a chart showing yearly travel and expenses incurred by each Macon County School Board elected public servant, visit <http://frankdillman.com/macon-schoolboard-travel.htm>.