

**CLEMSON UNDER FIRE**

**Lawsuit  
over  
funds  
advances**

**Officials accused  
of stockpiling  
\$80 million in cash**



**John  
Monk**

News columnist

jmonk@thestate.com  
(803) 771-8344

Clemson University, striving to be one of the nation's top 20 public universities, often seeks media attention. But not the kind it received this week in U.S. Judge Matthew Perry's courtroom.

After a four-hour hearing in which Perry heard numerous allegations that Clemson's top officials mismanaged public money, the judge ruled that a lawsuit brought by a former confidant to the school's board of trustees could go forward.

Clemson said it is disappointed and will answer the charges aggressively.

The civil suit names most of Clemson's 13 trustees and several top officials, including president Jim Barker, as defendants.

"We are prepared to move to the next phase, where we will have an opportunity to respond to the allegations in the complaint, which are false and completely without merit," university

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spokeswoman Cathy Sams said. She also called the charges "inflammatory."

Not since the late 1980s, when former USC president Jim Holderman's handling of taxpayer money came under scrutiny have a major South Carolina university's inner financial workings been the focus of such public attention.

The Clemson suit, brought by former trustee executive secretary Gene Troutman, alleges

president Barker's administration stockpiled \$80 million in cash from 2001 to 2007 while yearly hiking tuition from \$5,090 to \$9,000.

Troutman, 57, was fired last summer after two years and three months on the job. Troutman alleged he was fired because he questioned huge salary hikes given to officials close to Barker and urged a "watchdog" be created to oversee finances, including the disposition of the \$80 million stockpile. Troutman seeks damages and reinstatement to his \$147,000-a-year job.

In court filings and public state-

ments to date, Clemson has characterized Troutman as a "disgruntled former employee" who didn't have a good working relationship with trustees and who went outside channels. The university says it has plans for its cash.

Troutman's lawyer, Joel Collins, a Clemson alum who has given thousands to the school, said two of Clemson's top officials support Troutman.

Collins repeated many of the lawsuit's allegations in Wednesday's hearing, saying:

■ One top official who pressed for more financial accountability, Alan Godfrey, has been shunted to a

"doing-nothing" job, but still makes \$140,000 a year. Godfrey could not be reached for comment.

■ Another top finance official, Scott Ludlow, was pressured to leave after his requests for more financial controls were rejected. Ludlow, now a top finance officer with the S.C. Technical College system, told The State in an interview the charge is correct.

■ Barker helped oust Troutman and didn't want Troutman to create a watchdog over university finances.

The lawsuit has attracted the attention of state lawmakers, including Sen. John Courson, R-

Richland, who is chairman of the Senate Finance Higher Education subcommittee.

Declining comment on the lawsuit's merits, Courson said that, generally, how much unspent public money held by public universities is a matter of concern.

"I think we're obligated to our colleagues, and more importantly to the citizens of this state, to make sure they are getting the best bang for their higher education dollar," Courson said.

Troutman's lawsuit argues he was wrongfully dismissed and that trustee chairman Bill Hendrix

publicly and falsely defamed him. Hendrix denies the allegation.

During Wednesday's hearing, Judge Perry left open the possibility he could dismiss Troutman's case or transfer it to the Upstate, a locale Clemson prefers.

For now, the next step will be for Clemson to file a formal answer to Troutman's charges.

Perry also noted Clemson has campuses all over the state.

"You look around everywhere, and Clemson is everywhere," Perry said.

And now Clemson is in federal court.