

Batiste happy with State Board's progress

The president peers out over his bifocals at the board members as they cast their roll call votes. Sitting at the head of the table, he casts a commanding presence.

Aye, aye, no, no, aye... the members announce their votes in turn. When the vote is done the president announces the verdict and drops his gavel.

All eyes are on the president as they await his next move.

Being the center of attention is not all that uncommon for Alvin Batiste, the president of the Oregon State Board of

Higher Education.

He has been president since June of 1985 and a member of the board since 1978, however, the next six months will be the last of his eight years.

Batiste is used to the glare of television lights, the intrusions of reporters, and the delay, decorum and frustration of public service.

And while he is used to the formality of governmental procedures, he still sometimes stumbles over the procedural intricacies of parliamentary procedures. Occasionally he will move an item to

vote when it is only being amended. Then, he will have to backtrack under the direction of the board's secretary and reroute the motion through its proper course. But that is not to be unexpected from a president chosen from the ranks of a volunteer board.

Otherwise his board meetings run with efficiency.

That his meetings run smoothly is not unexpected of Batiste, who is frank but friendly in his demeanor. He has always seen himself as a "good soldier." In fact, he has needed a soldier's sense of discipline to get to where he is now, he says.

The son of a laundry business owner, Batiste was born and raised in a Hispanic neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas.

"I was always disciplined," Batiste says. "I never had problems living within the constraints of what was proper."

While his family was not poor, neither were they well to do. He says he grew up pressing clothes.

"I took pride in hard work at an early age," Batiste says. "I never lived at a time when I didn't have that."

He also says he grew up thinking independently. "There were very few black families in our neighborhood in San Antonio," says Batiste. "In fact, I've never lived in an area that is predominantly black."

This independence may account for his candor and the noticeable absence of liberal buzzwords and rhetoric in ad-

ressing the issues of equity and fairness, which have come before him in his term as president.

While he is clearly not demagogic in his approach to these issues, still he has helped facilitate the board's recent progress in the controversial areas of affirmative action, equal opportunity and wage discrimination.

In the past six months since he became president, the board has made public its support for the principles of affirmative action, it has established goals for the involvement of women and minority contractors and it is addressing the poor representation of women and minorities throughout state higher education.

The progress the board has made in these areas, he says, is a result of the Penk trial and is long overdue. But he takes no credit for the new policies.

"These things would have happened with whomever had become president," he says.

In addition, he prefers to discuss these issues in the terms of fairness because it gets away from the notion of mathematical quotas. "Fairness applies to everybody, both the minority and the majority," Batiste says.

He says he is proud of the State System's progress in those areas, but he has never seen his appointment to the board by Governor Bob Straub as a mandate to deal only with the issues of minorities.

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Alvin Batiste

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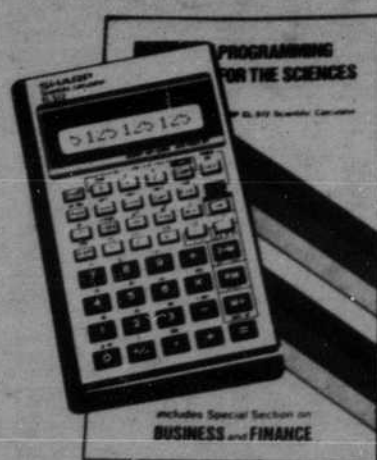
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