

Racial comment annoys Democrats, Republicans alike

By Angela Muniz
Emerald Editorial Editor

Oregon Republicans and Democrats are in a political upheaval regarding House Republican leader Randy Miller's racial comments at a luncheon Thursday.

In a speech to the Rubicon society, a national organization of moderate Republicans, Miller said, "We have lost the second-most Republican district in the state to a non-Caucasian Democrat in the past three elections."

Miller was referring to District 31 in Salem currently held by Rocky Barilla, the first Hispanic elected to the Oregon Legislature. Before 1986 the seat was held by Jim Hill, now one of two black senators, for two terms.

Scott Bartlett, with the Lane County Democrats, attended the luncheon and reported Miller's remarks. Bartlett said, from his perceptions, the quote was not taken out of context.

"I'm not a mind reader, but I got the impression that Miller felt the seat, by rights, should be held by a white Republican," he said.

Bartlett also noted the entire speech was "devoted to cheap shots at Democrats and Goldschmidt. In its entire context it seemed he was blaming everything on the Democrats."

However, Miller said the comment was referring to the prejudices Barilla and Hill have overcome to be elected. "Made in context it was as a Republican looking to a district where we may make gains in the next election," he said.

The campus reaction to Miller's comment has not been positive. Both Tim Cushing, chair of the College Republicans, and Randy MacDonald, chair of the University Democrats, were not surprised at the remark.

"I'm disgusted," MacDonald said, "but knowing Miller, I'm not surprised. As chair of the University Democrats I deplore racist remarks by the second-highest elected official in the state of

Oregon."

MacDonald believes Miller's statement is "indicative of where he's coming from and where the Republican party is coming from. The statement was inexcusable no matter what party it's from."

Cushing also was not surprised and agreed that Miller needed to choose his words carefully. "I'm angry and upset. But it doesn't surprise me. Lately nothing in the Republican Party surprises me," he said.

Political parties should look at the qualifications of a candidate and not his or her race, Cushing said. "He should be more representative of his party," Cushing added, "He made a mistake, a big mistake."

Tim Chase, an active member of the College Republicans, suggested Miller was recognizing the ability of minorities to vote. "The channel we should take is to encourage this voting," he said.

Although Miller has not drawn positive attention to the Republican Party, Cushing does not believe it will

seriously hurt the College Republicans. "We are not Miller's club, Reagan's club or a conservative club. We are a Republican club and we support Republican candidates after the primary."

Miller said the Democrats have singled out his comment as a publicity stunt. After the speech, Miller answered questions for 15 minutes and remained for another 30 minutes to answer questions one on one, he said. "There was not a single whimper seeking clarification," Miller said.

Miller apologized to Barilla and Hill Thursday evening, but does not believe his comment was racist.

"I apologized because it is more important to me to retain my good relationship with Barilla and Hill," he said.

Cushing was glad to see a quick apology, but Bartlett said Miller should apologize to all Oregonians.

"Oregonians won't ever be ready for 'Miller Time.' That would be back in the 19th century. We've already passed through that ugly time," Bartlett said.

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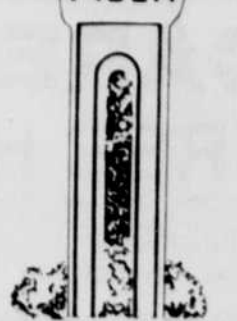
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