

Miller: Role as Helena's first black mayor no big deal

HELENA, Ark. (AP)—Dr. Robert Miller says he almost resented the headline in the local newspaper the day after he was elected the first black mayor of this eastern Arkansas city.

"You don't have to tell anybody down here that I am black. They all know it," said the 67-year-old physician, a local fixture who has practiced family medicine at his clinic here for 33 years.

Miller defeated Sandi Ramsey, administrative assistant for the last two mayors, by 224 votes Nov. 3 to succeed Mayor Joann Smith, who lost a race for state representative. Miller was sworn in this month.

"I am appreciative that I won, but I don't understand all the rah, rah, rah," Miller said

last week. "My program is not black or white, but what's right or wrong."

His campaign for mayor was based on a simple platform, Miller said — "to make Helena better, cleaner, safer."

But he also sees himself as a bridge between blacks and whites in a town where blacks make up about 60 percent of the 7,000 residents.

Politics run in Miller's family. His wife, Trudy, was elected to the seat he held on the Phillips County Quorum Court for 24 years. His son, Brian Miller, 33, was elected Helena city attorney.

Robert Miller's sister, Maxine Miller, is part of a black majority on the Helena City Council that was bolstered by the victory of

another black candidate, Bobby Martin.

The mayor-elect says while his election and the black council majority will make it easier to pass legislation, he expects cooperation from the city's three white aldermen.

"I've known them for a long time, and they want to do what's right," he said.

Though racial harmony was not the central theme of his campaign, Robert Miller said "people thought that if Dr. Miller was elected, there was a better chance for racial harmony."

"I told my supporters that they would not have to worry about racial disharmony if I was elected," he said.

Miller attended graduate school at Tennessee A&I College — now Tennessee

State University — in Nashville, but was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1954 and was sent to Korea in 1955. He was a captain in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division.

After the Army, Miller entered Meharry Medical College of Nashville and graduated in 1964. After medical school, Miller interned at Northeast Hospital in Philadelphia before returning home to start his practice and political career.

In the 1880s, his grandfather, Abraham Miller, a former slave, served in the state House of Representatives.

In the 1920s, Abraham Miller's wife, Eliza Miller, started the Eliza Miller School and donated money to help keep Helena afloat during a financial crisis.

Multicultural

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students who are more socially conscious and active and prepared to work together in a diverse environment.

"As a university, UNLV's goals 5 and 7 include creating a 'just' and 'inclusive' environment. How do you have a just and inclusive environment and not have a just and inclusive curriculum?," said Delshanna Jones, graduate student and the University's Sexual Assault Program Coordinator.

She attended the forum and took one of Spencer's classes as an undergraduate. She said that she and many of her classmates at the time felt that his class was one of the most rigorous at the institution.

A University committee first proposed how the multicultural requirement would fit into the core classes in 1997. The latest proposal suggests that the requirement be included but "not add to the total number of core credits. Courses...may also be used to meet a humanities, fine arts, social science, or University Colloquium requirement...."

"People confuse multicultural classes with multiculturalism," said Velicia McMillan, director of Multicultural Student Affairs at UNLV. "The latter is a philosophy that teaches tolerance and inclusion. Multicultural classes aren't about forcing people to get along. They are meant to educate. What people do with the information is up to them."

The curriculum hasn't been changed in 14 years. At the Faculty Senate session, several underlying problems prevented the assembly from coming to a conclusion, including whether or not to extend the amount of credits by three or to just replace humanities or social science requirements with the multicultural units.

Dr. Carol Harter, UNLV President, set the tone for debate. Although acknowledging that the curriculum is after all "the faculty's business", she related how she taught African-American literature in 1969.

"It was amazing to see the epiphanies that the students would have," she said. "Students came to an understanding

of our diverse world, coming away with a deeper respect for another culture."

Harter even whipped out statistics that said that 62% of high school graduates in Nevada will be non-white by 2012. She urged the faculty to consider that when voting.

No one came out in complete opposition to a multicultural requirement, but a handful of senators weren't satisfied with the proposed "how" of making the curriculum inclusive.

Business professor Tony Townsend, for instance, insisted that the business school already had multicultural coursework "sprinkled" throughout their requirements.

Hopefully, the fate of multicultural studies at UNLV will be decided at the next Faculty Senate meeting on Feb. 9.

"I think the community needs to get more involved," said Jones. "They need to write and call and show their support for multicultural classes. They should know the University is in the process of denying any access. The Latin Chamber, NAACP..., local churches, everyone needs to get involved. That's the only way the faculty will take notice."

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