



OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SENATE

Wednesday, 4 March 1992
Special Meeting (Sixth)

MINUTES

Senators Present: This being a special meeting (held at an unusual time, with short notice, and with no formal votes to be taken) the presiding officer and secretary made no attempt to record senatorial attendance. There was a goodly assemblage, however, composed of many interested members of the university community as well as persons from the Senate.

Summary of Actions:

1. Report on Board plans for the conclusion of the presidential search (Trustee Sims)

Mr. Kleckner called the meeting to order at 8:07 a.m., remarking that the early hour had been chosen to accommodate Mr. Sims's busy schedule of meetings. He then turned over the podium to the chair of the Board of Trustees.

Mr. Sims said that he had wondered, when invited to meet with the Senate what he could report that might add to the community's knowledge. The Board had tried to make this presidential selection process so participatory and open that there would be little to announce, particularly as he recognized many of those present at this Senate meeting as observers of the previous day's public Board interviews with the four finalists. What might be new and interesting was the plan for team visits by Oakland representatives to the campus or system headquarters of each candidate. Two teams would be leaving that day and the next, one headed to Oregon and Alaska and the other to New Hampshire and Tennessee for the purpose of talking face to face with people there about the candidates' performances. Reports of those interviews would be distributed to the Board before the 11 March selection meeting. He hoped that the Board's choice would then accept the university's offer, though additional time might be needed to negotiate the actual contract. Following these announcements, he invited questions.

Ms. Briggs-Bunting inquired about the 11 March Board meeting, wondering whether the vote would be preceded by open discussion among trustees. Mr. Sims responded that that depended on what Board members might want. He could not predict the actual dynamics of the meeting. He expected, though, that all four names would be placed in nomination and that balloting would continue until someone secured the necessary five votes (perhaps with the lowest scoring candidate eliminated after early rounds). When Ms. Briggs-Bunting mentioned the University of Michigan's legal problems as a result of closed discussions, Mr. Sims indicated that Oakland's Board had not been influenced by events in Ann Arbor but was firmly

committed to an open process. In reply to Ms. Briggs-Bunting's query about whether there would be any attempt to facilitate discussion among Board members, Trustee Sims indicated that a forum would be there if they wanted it. They have never considered any closed meeting on the candidates.

Mr. McKay then changed the subject to the final stage of voting, hoping that the president's appointment would not depend on the minimal five votes. He would like our new leader to come to Oakland with full Board support. Mr. Sims thought a final vote by acclamation probable.

Ms. Rush then asked what would happen if the Board should split, if nobody got five votes, or if our first choice should take a different offer. Would we then make an offer to the Board's second choice? Mr. Sims said he would prefer for the record not to designate anyone as number two until it turned out to be impossible to negotiate a contract with the first choice. Mr. Dahlgren asked if Mr. Sims planned to secure a confirmation of intended acceptance from each candidate before the Board meeting, and Mr. Sims assured him that he would ask for such assurances by mid-afternoon next Wednesday.

Ms. Scherer, wanting to know how the Board was using the community's written evaluations of the candidates, was informed by Mr. Sims that each trustee has been provided with copies of this material to read as he or she sees fit. He himself had chosen not to examine it before yesterday's interviews but would study it before March 11. Mr. Riley then asked whether there was still time for further faculty-staff input. Mr. Sims had expected that the only information still to come would be reports on campus visitations.

Recurring to the previous day's interviews, Ms. Muir inquired why Trustee Sims had asked each candidate about the importance to the university of a president's holding academic rank with tenure. Mr. Sims indicated that he knew of universities that no longer appoint the president as a faculty member and wondered whether the Board might gain some flexibility by breaking with tradition. He had discussed the matter with candidates when they visited his office last month and raised the issue again at Board interviews. The finalists had advanced good reasons for Oakland University's adherence to academic tradition. Ms. Muir wondered whether there was any possibility that the Board might also be considering a fifth candidate. Mr. Sims knew of none.

Mr. Winkler, noting that Mr. Sims had the advantage over his Board colleagues of having met each finalist during last month's campus interviews, wondered whether other trustees would have gained enough sense of each person at yesterday's sessions to make an informed decision. Mr. Sims hoped that they had; in business, personnel decisions must often be made quickly.

Ms. Briggs-Bunting then returned to the thorny question of what would happen if nobody won the necessary five votes. In that worst-case scenario, Mr. Sims supposed it might be necessary to reopen the search. Mr. Wilson asked by what kind of voting process a majority would be determined. Results might be different if each candidate were voted upon separately than if each voter had to choose one from among all four. Mr. Sims expected all names to be on the floor simultaneously, with each trustee voicing her or his first choice from the first round. Mr. Wilson later advised that, if deadlock developed, it would be better to take additional time to choose among the two or three strongest candidates rather than to abandon the existing field of four qualified finalists by reopening the search. He considered reopening an expedient to be

resorted to only when no qualified candidates emerge.

That interchange prompted Mr. Stevens to double-check as to whether votes would be written or spoken. Mr. Sims planned on a voice vote. Mr. Stevens objected that a voice vote allows the first participants to sway their colleagues. He preferred that written ballots be collected and tallied. Opposing this suggestion, from Mr. Sims's perspective, was the public's right to know how its public servants vote. In response to Mr. Stevens's advice that the Board think carefully about the implications of its voting process, Mr. Sims professed a strong opinion of each trustee's capacity for independent judgment. He said that Board members had considered various methods and chosen this one. Mr. Winkler supported Mr. Stevens, and the dean reiterated his concern. He would not want a process to interfere with the chances of the best candidate's being selected. When Ms. Briggs-Bunting mentioned a method used by the Search Committee that entailed each person's writing down his or her last choice so that the weakest candidate could be eliminated, Mr. Stevens urged the trustees to consider that method of winnowing the field. Another suggestion came from Mr. Stamps, who pointed out that voters could write their own names or initials on the ballot so that positions might be known but not until after everyone voted. Mr. Winkler declared that faculty members have been remarkably pleased with how well the selection process has been carried out so far and that the Board should be commended (applause); he exhorted Mr. Sims to carry on in that spirit. Testing public opinion on this matter, Mr. Sims asked for a show of hands to demonstrate how many persons preferred written ballots. Surprised to find nearly unanimous support for that method, he promised to consider the Senate's advice seriously. Mr. Stevens then expressed his hope that the process would go forward as well as it had up to this point. Ms. Briggs-Bunting noted that the kind of written elimination votes that had proven their effectiveness at earlier stages of this process might be considered as polling rather than formal voting. In any case, she would encourage trustees to use a show of hands to confirm their final appointment by acclamation.

Ms. Muir, remembering that Richard Meyers had mentioned during his Board interview that trustees at Western Oregon State College had appointed him president with two specific charges (one of them to save the college from conversion to a prison), wondered whether the Board would negotiate specific instructions about any issue (micromanagement, for instance). Mr. Sims thought that micromanagement had become a fashionable word for talking about people having trouble meeting their objectives. The Board would give no instructions on that matter. When Ms. Briggs-Bunting then asked what the Board would ask the new president to do, he said they would direct that worthy simply to run the university.

Mr. McKay then turned attention to the campus visitation teams, asking who would serve. Mr. Sims reported that each team (one for each side of the Mississippi) is composed of three persons--a Board member, a dean, and a faculty member from the Search Committee. Headed east will be Trustee Sharf, Dean Urice, and Professor Briggs-Bunting. Venturing west will be Trustee Fischer, Dean Fine, and Professor Edgerton. When Mr. McKay asked whether they would conduct interviews individually or as teams, Mr. Sims deferred to Ms. Briggs-Bunting to explain their plans. She said that the teams had agreed to conduct interviews as a group except when meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of each school or system, in which case our trustee would carry on alone. At the close of the discussion, Ms. Otto mentioned that there will be a faculty forum on the presidential search Friday afternoon. If it should happen that participants at that gathering might wish to forward advice to the Board, she inquired whether there was still time for it to be considered. Mr. Sims assured her that the trustees would try to make use of whatever counsel reaches them. He then left for a Board committee meeting, with general applause.

Having no other business to discharge before the regularly scheduled 12 March Senate conclave, Mr. Kleckner adjourned the meeting at 8:38 a.m. with thanks to all who attended.

Respectfully submitted:

Jane D. Eberwein

Secretary to the University Senate I-N

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