
PROLOGUE

Recognizing the dangers in our great expectations

Our new president-designate violated one of the cardinal rules of politics when he came to the campus on April 27 for the public announcement of his selection as the University's 13th chief executive—but he did so with impunity. "Always hire a small hall," the old pols would have admonished David Boren, "then you're never embarrassed by the size of the crowd." In this case, there was no need for concern. Holmberg Hall auditorium could not possibly have held any more well-wishers.

They did not come expecting startling revelations. (In fact, as a ranking member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Boren could be justifiably concerned about the University community's inability to keep a secret.) And they did not come out of curiosity about the man, as has been the case in the past when new presidents were introduced to the University family. This was someone everyone knew—an alumnus, Rhodes Scholar, former college professor, legislator, governor and a U.S. senator for the past 16 years.

The crowd betrayed just a touch of wonder that he would trade his seat at the table of the Senate power brokers for one behind the desk in Evans Hall. Boren's close friends realized, if others did not, that the educator always has lurked beneath this politician's mantle and that the OU presidency has held a great attraction for him. But most envisioned him in that role in his later years, not at age 53, while still occupying the most secure seat of any member of Congress.

Perhaps that is what makes Boren's appointment so satisfying to the Sooner faithful. After a decade of depending upon benefit packages and golden parachutes to entice candidates to high-level positions, here is a man who just plain *wants* the job, as his remarks reprinted on Page 3 attest.

The enthusiastic response to Boren's appointment—on the campus, throughout the state and among our scattered alumni—is understandable. Outgoing, affable, tireless, an inspirational speaker and a savvy politician, he has the attributes required of the modern university president. He both comprehends and reveres the scholarly world. He esteems teaching and respects research—and he likes students. He is a master of the legislative process as well as the mechanics of private fund raising and has been a willing and welcome participant in both. In short, you can take him anywhere.

Lest our enthusiasm for Boren slide into euphoria, however, it is only fair to mention that in living up to his advance billing, he faces at least one major obstacle. For all his considerable abilities, he cannot perform miracles. The answer to many of the University's problems lies in adequate funding, and unfortunately the state of Oklahoma possesses a finite amount of resources to satisfy an infinite number of demands. To improve the place of higher education on the state's list of priorities—public and private—will require time, effort, dedication—and yes, patience.

Luckily, not all our institutional needs require fiscal solutions. The president-designate already has served notice of his intention to create a new atmosphere for learning and working at OU, one based on mutual goals, mutual respect and cooperation. He wants to put the welfare of the University first, re-emphasize undergraduate education, honor teaching, focus on serving students and reinvolve the disaffected, both on campus and off. Some would label this attitude teamwork—the sort that the national champion Sooner baseball team called "25 guys pulling on the same rope."

Early reaction to Boren's appeal for the "family" approach has been encouraging. Faculty, staff and students alike are optimistic. *The Oklahoma Daily*, in an unusually warm editorial comment on the Holmberg happenings, concluded, "Creating a remarkable future for a remarkable institution became not just David Boren's agenda . . . it became everyone's agenda."

In keeping with his reverence for the institution's historic traditions, Boren wants to move the presidential residence back to Boyd House, directly across from the campus, and private individuals have responded quickly and generously with contributions toward its renovation. Early in the selection process, Boren sought the advice of presidents emeritus George L. Cross and Paul F. Sharp. Later he enlisted the popular provost emeritus J. R. Morris as interim president to begin laying the groundwork for his administration even before his arrival in November.

Boren shows no signs of reluctance in asking for help to achieve his goals for the University. And he is going to need all the help he can get.

A few months ago, the suggestion was made in this column that the OU Regents require presidential candidates to complete "I want to be president of the University of Oklahoma because . . ." Well, David Boren has done that—on each of OU's three campuses and on the op-ed pages of state newspapers and even in *The New York Times*. Frustrated by the factionalism and strident partisanship of the Congress, he has decided that revitalization of our nation must come from the grassroots up, not from Washington down. For Boren this means salvaging the young people of this country, a task better accomplished as a university president than as a U.S. Senator.

—CJB