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Alum Rock schools deserve honest trustees

You might know Esau Herrera as the Alum Rock school trustee who pressed the superintendent for a plum job in the district, didn't get it and then cast the deciding vote last week to fire him.

But to me, Herrera will always be El Parquero.

Some people in San Jose's East Side will remember how another Latino trustee once tried to run Herrera down with a car because Herrera wouldn't go along with the militant majority — well, that's how Herrera told the story. Yet others will remember the grand jury report that lambasted the whole Alum Rock board, including Herrera, for its bickering.

But he'll always be El Parquero to me.

In Spanglish, a parquero is someone who parks your car, protects it from thieves and will feed the parking meter until you return.

Herrera earned the nickname nearly a decade ago.

I was a member of this news-

See **RODRIGUEZ**, Page 4B

RODRIGUEZ | Schools deserve honest leaders

Continued from Page 1B

paper's editorial board when we endorsed him in a 1992 election for Municipal Court judge. He was an egomaniac, but he also had a respectable record of community leadership, and the courts clearly needed more minority judges.

What we didn't know was that Herrera had racked up dozens of unpaid parking tickets, which is not a habit we want in our judges. That's when El Parquero's genius for double-talk and evasion emerged. Not only did he deny doing anything wrong, he claimed he was the victim of a "police mugging" and a set-up by political opponents.

Amazingly, that's what he's saying today about his latest embarrassment.

Herrera was caught on tape lobbying former Alum Rock Superintendent Joe Carrillo for a job as a special administrator: "I think we make a good team, Joe."

I called Herrera for an explanation only to get El Parquero on the line.

If it's legal, it's OK

First, he didn't see anything sleazy about an elected school trustee angling for a powerful administrative job. El Parquero is one of those politicians who believe that if it isn't illegal, it's morally OK.

Then, El Parquero accused Carrillo of setting him up. This was how he explained it: Carrillo, suspecting that Herrera wanted to oust him, talked about a possible job and then withdrew it. Then when Herrera did vote to fire him, Carrillo could challenge his dismissal by saying Herrera acted in self-interest.

I asked if the superinten-

dent was really that Machiavellian?

"It was devious," El Parquero said. "It was calculating. I guess that's Machiavellian, isn't it?"

Esau Herrera is his own worst enemy, an intelligent man whose lack of ethics overshadows his record of helping local schools and charities. Alum Rock schools, where you will find the lowest test scores and the highest poverty, deserve trustees with integrity and honesty. Herrera lacks both qualities and should resign immediately.

El Parquero's meter has expired. Call the tow truck.

Carrillo had to go

As for former Superintendent Joe Carrillo, the tough reformer deserved the boot. Give him some points for getting rid of some bad apples and unqualified personnel, but his dictatorial style and scorched-earth approach cost the district too many good and popular educators. After only seven months, an army of offended parents, teachers and community leaders were calling for his head.

The Alum Rock school board finds itself worse than ever, humiliated and desperate for a miracle. That was and remains its problem, believing that a superintendent-Messiah could actually raise test scores by 15 percent a year.

The next Alum Rock superintendent should have high standards and a gentle touch, a nice guy who still can make hard decisions about curriculum and personnel. He or she won't make wild promises and will stick around for more than a few years. The last thing Alum Rock schools need is a self-declared reformer who will use the district as a steppingstone.

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Herrera