

# Sonya Christian chosen to serve as sixth chancellor of the Kern Community College District

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After a nationwide search, the Board of Trustees on Monday named Bakersfield College President Sonya Christian as chancellor of the Kern Community College District.

- Alex Horvath / The Californian

They tried to keep their choice a secret until the name was announced publicly at the Weill Institute in downtown Bakersfield on Monday.

But, in horse racing parlance, one of three finalists for chancellorship of the sprawling Kern Community College District seemed to be a sure thing, a cinch, a lock, a shoo-in.

"I can tell you about this individual's educational experience, their resume, and you'd know exactly who it is I am talking about," Romeo Agbalog, president of the KCCD Board of Trustees, told the modest crowd of faculty, administrators and local dignitaries.

Agbalog soon cut to the chase, however.

"Certainly as I describe this district, we know we need talented people with the brains to keep this operation going. This time the district chose somebody with heart," he said.

"I'd like to introduce to you the next chancellor of the Kern Community College District, our sixth chancellor, Dr. Sonya Christian."

Christian, who has served as Bakersfield College president since January 2013, joined the district 30 years ago as a mathematics faculty member. She also served as department chair and dean until December 2002, when she moved to Oregon.

But at Monday's event, she called Bakersfield her home.

"In 2012 I returned home as the 10th president of Bakersfield College. I returned home to the Kern Community College District," Christian told the gathering to enthusiastic applause.

She thanked outgoing Chancellor Tom Burke, who she will be replacing. Burke and Christian are expected to meet in the next couple of weeks to discuss a transition plan, said district spokeswoman Marlene Heise.

The chancellorship is a big job. The district covers close to 25,000 square miles in parts of five counties. It includes Bakersfield College, Cerro Coso Community College in eastern Kern County and Porterville College in Tulare County.

Christian said she is taking on this new challenge in "really unusual times," when stability in leadership and district finances is as important as it's ever been.

"We're coming out of a pandemic," she said. "There is definitely an unpredictability in the economic forecasting. Technology seems to be changing by leaps and bounds almost every day, and there are definitely stressors on the national landscape, the state landscape and even in the community."

This is a time for higher education to "really step up and step in," she said.

The district has long been a "beacon of hope" and "an engine of economic and social mobility."

Former Congressman Bill Thomas, a Bakersfield Republican who served in the House of Representatives from 1979 to 2007, was at Monday's event.

He called Monday "a great day."

"I came to Bakersfield in 1965 to teach at the college," Thomas told The Californian. "And I've seen all kinds of terrific professionals come through and continue to make Bakersfield College one of the top community colleges in the state."

Christian is the chair of the accreditation team for the entire state of California on community colleges, Thomas said. And that means she might very well have taken a position at the state level.

"We are so lucky to get to keep her here," he said, "rather than going up to the state level or beyond."

"I'm very excited," Thomas said.

Christian asked employees in the district — and by extension, the entire community — to join together, to "lock arms and do mighty things."

Despite the challenges that surely lie ahead, Christian remained passionate and positive.

"So what does the future hold?" Christian asked.

"At the Kern Community College District, we predict the future by creating it," she said.

"That's what we do."

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