

UC Suffers a Major Setback: Tien's loss is bad news for system - and for state education

UC Berkeley Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien's announcement that he will resign his position next year is a terrible blow to anyone who cares about California higher education. His resignation poses a challenge and we hope some soul-searching by the UC Board of Regents.

Tien, along with also retiring UCLA Chancellor Charles Young, is champion fund-raiser. He has been the most prolific one in UC Berkeley history, helping bring \$780 million to the campus during the past six years.

The loss of Tien's philanthropic talents is significant because UC plans to announce a \$1 billion campaign this fall in order to accommodate a rapidly rising pool of students and to compensate for the \$300 million in state revenues the system lost between 1992 and 1995.

But more important than the loss of Tien the fund-raiser is the loss of Tien the academic leader, the student mentor, the education visionary who sees California's future promise and embraces it. He warned along with Young and others that rolling back affirmative action--in a state with a huge minority population but only a small percentage of that population enrolled in the UC system--was an unwise move. The regents, pressing a political agenda unfazed by the warnings of the state's most knowledgeable educators, rolled back affirmative action anyway.

Tien, the first Asian American to leader top ranked university, was more interested in results than headlines. He won wide acclaim for reducing affirmative action tensions with his "Berkeley Pledge," a plan to offer assistance to students according to family income and education.

Finally, Tien's departure adds to a further erosion of the UC system of veteran leadership. Young devoted 27 years to the UC system; while Tien spent 29 years at UC Berkeley before becoming its chancellor in 1990. With their departure, the administrator with the longest tenure will be UC Riverside Chancellor Raymond Orbach, who was appointed only four years ago.

Early statements by UC regents have not suggested recognition of the importance of choosing successes of Tien's caliber. UC Regent Ward Connerly, for instance, said of Tien's departure: "While we lose some institutional memory, we (will) bring in somebody who is eager to try new things."

The regents must think bigger than that. The board must look for leaders who share Tien's talent with students and faculty, skills at fund-raising and most important, his vision for a UC system that must take California beyond the tenure of one governor and one board of regents.

(LA Times Editorial, 7/11/96)

Reprinted by permission of the
Los Angeles Times