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By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 22, 2014

Current and former University of Massachusetts trustees expect a strong, competitive stable of candidates from around the globe to vie for the university presidency after the strides made by outgoing chief Robert Caret to bolster the system's stature.

Caret, 67, announced Wednesday that he will vacate the top post at UMass to lead the larger University of Maryland system. Since taking the UMass helm in July 2011, he has earned high marks for lobbying lawmakers to boost funding for the state's five-campus system and for his tireless advocacy of the value of public education.

Perhaps the only gentle criticism among officials is that Caret is leaving too soon. His predecessor, Jack Wilson,



ROBERT CARET, OUTGOING PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS.



held the job for eight years.

Before that, William M. Bulger led UMass for seven years.

Governor-elect Charlie Baker wants the next university president to be “someone who is in it for the long haul and who is dedicated to the UMass system,” said Baker spokesman Tim Buckley. Baker also wants “someone who can think creatively to make higher education more affordable,” Buckley said.

The governor appoints UMass trustees, who have final say on selecting the university’s president.



Caret headed to Maryland

Caret will become the next chancellor of the University of Maryland system, officials said.

Baker's goals for higher education, Buckley said, include better leveraging of online learning opportunities, increasing cooperative and internship options for students, improving connections between colleges and employers, and granting more degrees within three years.

With Caret expected to begin his new post in July, the UMass board will launch a global search for his replacement next month, said Henry Thomas III, the trustees' chairman. "We're a world-class institution, so we should have a worldwide search," he said.

He said the prominence UMass has established over the past several years should help to draw a host of attractive candidates for the post. During Caret's tenure, enrollment rose, public and private funding for the university increased significantly, and the university made dramatic gains on prominent college ranking lists.

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*An enormous contribution from
outgoing leader*

"We really have an opportunity here to do something even greater than what we've done so far, and I think Bob Caret has laid a beautiful foundation," Thomas added. "He contributed enormously to our profile and the brand enhancement we've had."

Although applicants far and wide may come calling, there is a seemingly strong mix of qualified homegrown talent as well, according to people familiar with local higher education. Martin J. Meehan, chancellor of UMass Lowell, Michael F. Collins, chancellor of UMass Medical School, and J. Keith Motley, chancellor of UMass Boston, are considered potentially attractive options.

Meehan, a former congressman who was mentioned as a potential candidate during the search that selected Caret, said he is focused on, and happy at, UMass Lowell.

In a statement, Collins said: "I have full confidence in the UMass board of trustees and will offer my wholehearted support as they find another great leader for the UMass system."

Motley, who previously served as UMass vice president for business, marketing, and public affairs, said in a statement that he is "committed to serving the University of Massachusetts in the most effective way I can."

Thomas said those involved in the university's search process will aim to be "totally open-minded."

"If we have talent locally that can do it, we shouldn't penalize them because they're local, and if we have talent from afar, we shouldn't penalize them for that," he said.

Thomas said the board will kick off the search in January with a special trustees meeting. The university will establish a search committee made up of trustees, faculty, students, and staff, and will hire a search firm, he said.

Thomas expects that a new president will be chosen by the time Caret is scheduled to officially step down.

The presidential search that chose Caret took 10 months as it considered 50 candidates and interviewed 14 of them.

State Representative Tom Sannicandro, the House chairman of the Joint Committee on Higher Education, said he hopes the next UMass leader will bring creative ideas for how to fund the university system and to improve affordability, graduation rates, and access, particularly for minority students and those from low-income families.

He said he wants the best leader possible, regardless of where he or she is from or how long the person stays in the position. "I think the person and the person's leadership abilities are much more critical than the length of stay," said Sannicandro, an Ashland Democrat. "If we have a mediocre leader for a long time, that doesn't do us any good."

Former UMass board chairman James J. Karam said successful university presidents come "in many different shapes, forms, and personalities."

"It's a very large, complex, multibillion dollar organization, so you need someone who can manage that," Karam said. "But you also need to have people skills to get people to buy in and to convince the Legislature and the governor about what you're doing."

Karam said that Caret had many of the skills of a great university leader.

Caret successfully lobbied lawmakers to boost funding so that the cost of attending a UMass college is split evenly between students and the state. The funding increases have allowed UMass to freeze tuition and fees for the past two years.

He also oversaw an increase in donations from alumni and private donors and launched efforts to make the system more transparent and accountable.

"I don't think he's got an enemy in the entire state," said Maria D. Furman, vice chairwoman of the UMass board. "Personally, I think we'd want someone exactly like him."

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