

# State Center chancellor Deborah Blue to end official duties in June

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Reedley — Deborah Blue will end her official duties in June as chancellor of State Center Community College District.

Surrounded by dozens of friends and colleagues, Blue looked unmoved as the board that hired her just three years ago announced her fate Tuesday evening. Her job status has been under closed-door review by college district trustees over the past two months.

The board voted 4-2-1, with trustee Ronald Nishinaka abstaining and both trustees Dorothy Smith and Eric Payne voting no, to approve an amended contract for the embattled chancellor. Board President Patrick Patterson said the move changes Blue's contract, but declined to provide further details.

Before voting no, Payne spoke to the crowd, condemning the closed-door process used to discuss Blue's performance.

"We owe the public more than this ambiguous process," he said. No other board members explained their vote.

A copy of the new contract was not available Tuesday. Additional details, like whether Blue gets a severance package, were also unclear.

Several dozen people who attended the meeting -- which was called at the last minute on Monday afternoon to address Blue's job status -- were bewildered by the announcement. Some of her colleagues were visibly upset: one woman, who was sobbing, consoled Blue at the dais.

Many got up to the podium after the vote was cast, questioning Patterson about what the new contract means. The board president remained tight-lipped, offering few particulars to the crowd.

A joint press release later distributed to media helped clear up some questions.

A few things are obvious: Blue will officially retire on June 30, 2015. She'll serve as chancellor until this June, and will work in a more limited capacity as chancellor emeritus until the

following year. The board said it will conduct a national search over the next few months and expects to find a replacement by June.

"I look forward to my remaining service to the district, and while I'm looking forward to retirement, I will miss working with all the wonderful people in the district and the community," Blue said in the statement. She declined to comment further.

The announcement came after more than two hours of private talks among the board trustees -- plus several more hours spent during two special closed-door meetings held since January. Board members have been mum about the meetings, citing state laws that prevent them from discussing personnel matters. None acknowledged the meetings were about Blue.

But Blue's supporters caught wind the board was getting set to change her contract.

At a special board meeting on Saturday, several of her backers came out to speak about her accomplishments, pleading with the seven-member board to consider her skills before making a decision. Many cited Blue's race -- she's African-American -- as possibly playing a role in the discussion, while others said losing her would be a big blow to progress made to hire more people of color.

More than 100 professors, administrators and friends of Blue showed up Tuesday to continue their support. About a dozen spoke at the public forum to endorse the chancellor, calling her a "transparent leader" and a "role model" for women.

Blue -- who did not attend Saturday's meeting -- sat quietly next to Patterson and the other trustees as her friends and colleagues took to the podium one by one to sing her praises.

"When I go across the state and I speak about State Center and the leadership Dr. Blue has, others are envious," said Tate Hill, president of the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce.

After the vote, Hill said he felt Blue was unfairly forced out of her job.

"It was a poor decision of the board, to go against the public," he said.

Many called the move confusing, particularly because the chancellor recently helped secure accreditation status for two of the district's colleges after being under "warning" two years ago.

James Hendricks, a member of the Fresno Compact, a nonprofit business and education organization, chastised the board for dragging its feet over several weeks without making a decision. He said he's concerned the board has been too secretive about why it's taking up Blue's contract, saying, "the manner in which you have handled this has not been credible."

"You've created a situation that is not good for the district, not good for the chancellor or the community," he said. "You have not been decisive. It's not the kind of thing you nibble at the edges on, it's not the type of thing you play games with."

Mel Sanders said he's still waiting to hear why the board took up Blue's contract in the first place.

"The public needs to know," said Sanders, political action chair for the Fresno chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Blue, an Illinois native and a former Fresno City College associate dean, was recently tapped as one of four finalists for a top community college job in Louisiana. Another candidate was ultimately picked for the position.

Her last reported salary in 2012 was \$223,000. It's unclear what she'll be paid when she becomes chancellor emeritus in June.

**Previously: [Blue's status up in the air](#)**

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