

Departure of 3 top California educators leaves vacuum

By Carla Rivera, Los Angeles Times

Three of California's highest-ranking, most influential educators announced within the span of a few weeks that they would be leaving their posts, creating a vacuum in the state's higher education system at a time of unprecedented challenges.

The impending departures of Charles B. Reed and Jack Scott, chancellors of California State University and the California Community Colleges, as well as UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneau, have invited intense scrutiny and questions about whether the three institutions can entice visionary leaders willing to contend with a litany of issues:

Steep cuts in state support. Navigating California's byzantine political landscape and vast array of ethnic and cultural constituencies. Keeping campus gates open for the hundreds of thousands of college graduates who will be needed to fill the state's workforce.

The stakes for California and the nation are high, said state Sen. Alan Lowenthal, D-Long Beach, who chairs the state Senate Committee on Education.

"We have the finest system in the world, no matter what its shortcomings," Lowenthal said. "We've had an affordable higher education system that has spurred the U.S. economy. For years California has led the way, and we need more than ever to have the best of the best as leadership. But it's a tough job."

And some say it will not be as easy to find leaders as in the past. At a time of uncertainty and dwindling resources, "an intelligent person would think carefully about taking such a position," said Michael Tanner, chief academic officer and

vice president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

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