



Biographical Sketch • Full Version

## Russell A. “Russ” Kavalhuna, J.D. President, Henry Ford College



Russell A. “Russ” Kavalhuna, J.D., joined Henry Ford College as the institution’s sixth president in July 2018. The role unites his passions for public service, education, and institutional leadership. As the son of an immigrant, his family’s story is the foundation of his belief that public education is the gateway to the American Dream.

His core focus at Henry Ford College is student success. This includes building public and private partnerships, expanding funding and resources for college access, mentoring students, and leading innovations in individualized services for every student on their path to professional and personal success.

### Prior professional roles

Before becoming president at Henry Ford College, Mr. Kavalhuna was the Executive Director of Flight Operations at Western Michigan University’s College of Aviation, the nation’s third-largest collegiate aviation program. He also taught a course in the curriculum.

Prior to his position at WMU, Mr. Kavalhuna was a federal prosecutor and a commercial airline captain.

### Commissions, committees, and public service

In July 2023, Governor Gretchen Whitmer appointed Mr. Kavalhuna to co-chair the **Higher Education Workgroup of the Growing Michigan Together Council**. This Council was established to advise the governor on policies to grow and sustain a thriving population in Michigan. The four Council workgroups are charged with proposing initiatives to improve pre-K-12 educational outcomes and long-term funding solutions for higher education. They will also make recommendations to prepare Michigan’s workforce for in-demand jobs in emerging industries, and will generate recommendations for long-term, sustainable transportation and water infrastructure funding.

In May 2023, Mr. Kavalhuna joined the **Joyce Foundation as a Board member**. The Joyce Foundation is a non-partisan philanthropy that invests in public policies and strategies to advance racial equity and economic mobility. The Foundation supports policy research, development, and advocacy in six program areas: culture, democracy, education and economic mobility, environment, gun violence prevention and justice reform, and journalism. Their grant area is primarily Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, but they also explore promising, evidence-informed policy solutions nationally.

In 2021, Governor Gretchen Whitmer appointed Mr. Kavalhuna to the **Michigan Council for Rehabilitation Services**. Housed within the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, the 17-member MCRS reviews, analyzes, and advises Michigan's rehabilitation programs and services. The MCRS works to improve public vocational rehabilitation services delivered by the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons and Michigan Rehabilitation Services.

In 2021, Governor Gretchen Whitmer appointed Mr. Kavalhuna to his fourth term with the **Michigan Aeronautics Commission**. He was first appointed by Governor Jennifer Granholm in **2009**. Governor Rick Snyder reappointed him in **2013** and **2017**. The Aeronautics Commission is the statewide board for all aviation infrastructure spending and rule-making, which oversees a budget of \$100 million. Mr. Kavalhuna has served as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Aeronautics Commission on multiple occasions. He has chaired the Commission's subcommittees on General Aviation and Commercial Aviation, producing a statewide report on commercial aviation.

In 2020, Governor Gretchen Whitmer appointed Mr. Kavalhuna to the statewide **Workforce Development Board**, with a mission of advancing the development and continuous improvement of the workforce development system in Michigan. The Board comprises the Governor and 20 executive leaders from across the state. They represent elected officials, business and industry, and higher education. President Kavalhuna is the sole community college president.

In 2020, Mr. Kavalhuna was selected to join the inaugural cohort of the **Aspen New Presidents Fellowship for Community College Excellence**. The 25 college presidents selected annually through this highly competitive process represent a diverse set of leaders who strive to achieve significant improvements in student outcomes and greater equity in educational access and success. The inaugural cohort of Presidents engaged significantly in data collection, analysis, reading, and action planning as part of the Institute, with a goal of accelerating transformational change on behalf of students.

In 2018, Governor-elect Gretchen Whitmer's transition team selected Mr. Kavalhuna for **consultation on higher-education policy**. He continues today to offer the Governor's office insight on the intersection of education, statewide-talent development, and workforce development.

In 2018, Governor Rick Snyder appointed Mr. Kavalhuna to Michigan's **21st Century Talent Creation Subcommittee**, which included industry executives, labor leaders, educators, lawmakers, and representatives of various state agencies. The Subcommittee focused on changing demands for skills and how collaboration with educators can quickly prepare students for rapidly changing workplaces.

In 2016, former U.S. Presidents William J. Clinton and George W. Bush selected Mr. Kavalhuna to serve in the second class of their **Presidential Leadership Scholars program**. Mr. Kavalhuna has served as an alumni mentor to subsequent classes in the Leadership program, which serves as a catalyst for a diverse network of leaders brought together to collaborate and make a difference in the world as they learn about leadership through the lens of the presidential experiences of George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

## Previous experiences

Mr. Kavalhuna served as a federal prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he investigated and prosecuted crimes ranging from gun violence, human trafficking, bank robbery, organized crime, and fraud. He was a senior lawyer for the Michigan Supreme Court, and he has taught at Western Michigan University Cooley Law School.

As a pilot, he served as first officer and captain for U.S. Airways Express for five years. He also held a leadership position in the Airline Pilots Association collective bargaining unit.

## Education, awards, and honors

Mr. Kavalhuna earned his undergraduate degree in aviation science from Western Michigan University. He earned his juris doctor from WMU Cooley Law School, while attending part-time and working full-time as a pilot. He finished third in his class and was selected by his classmates as the Valedictorian speaker.

He holds an Airline Transport Pilot Certificate, the highest civilian license, and a law license in Michigan.

In 2022, the Detroit Regional Chamber selected him for its Excellence in Educational Leadership Award. *DBusiness* has recognized him as one of Detroit's 500 Most Powerful Business Leaders in 2018, 2020, 2021, and 2022. In 2015, the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) presented him its National Honor Award for Prosecution of Organized Crime.

## Personal

President Kavalhuna and his wife, Courtney, are proud residents of Dearborn.