



Biographical Sketch • Full Version

## **Russell A. Kavalhuna, J.D.** **President, Henry Ford College**



Russell A. 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 who attended a Michigan community college, he believes the community college model of education and service is the gateway to the American Dream.

His core focus at Henry Ford College is student success, and supporting every student along their path to a successful professional and personal life.

### **Prior professional roles**

Before becoming president at Henry Ford College, Mr. Kavalhuna was the Executive Director of Flight Operations at the Western Michigan University 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 May 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 May 2020**, Governor Gretchen Whitmer appointed Mr. Kavalhuna to the new 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 January 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 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 Institute takes place in two segments -- one in summer 2020 and one in winter 2021. Presidents are expected to engage 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 to offer the Governor's office insight on the intersection of education, statewide-talent development, and workforce development.

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

Mr. Kavalhuna is currently serving a **fourth term on the Michigan Aeronautics Commission**, the statewide board for all aviation infrastructure spending and rule making, which oversees a budget of \$100 million. Governor Jennifer Granholm appointed him to the Aeronautics Commission in 2009, and Governor Rick Snyder reappointed him in 2013 and 2017. He 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.

Presidents William J. Clinton and George W. Bush selected Mr. Kavalhuna to serve in the second class of their **Presidential Leadership Scholars program in 2016**. 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 managed more than 140 officers in a multi-year investigation and prosecution of 31 gang members. 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. He finished third in his class and was selected by his classmates as the Valedictorian speaker.

His awards and honors include the Airline Transport Pilot Certificate, the highest civilian license; the ATF National Honor Award for Prosecution of Organized Crime; the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Holland Police Department; and being named as an “Up and Coming Lawyer” by Michigan Lawyers Weekly.

## **Personal**

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