

Holyoke Community College Board of Trustees chair steps down

HOLYOKE – Robert Gilbert Jr. has banged his last gavel as chair of the Holyoke Community College Board of Trustees.

After serving as a trustee for 12 years, including the last eight as chair, the West Springfield resident and retired chairman of Dowd Insurance Agencies of Holyoke, retired after presiding over his last board meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 28.

“This is a bittersweet moment for me,” Gilbert said. “Serving on this board has been an incredible journey, one filled with challenges, triumphs, and, above all, a shared commitment to the betterment of this institution. I’m filled with gratitude for the privilege of working alongside such dedicated individuals, the collective passion for education and unwavering commitment to the success of our students, which has been the driving force behind every decision we’ve made.”

Gilbert was first appointed to the board in April 2011 by Gov. Deval Patrick, serving in various capacities, including chair of the Audit Committee and member of the Finance Committee. In October 2015, Gov. Charlie Baker named him as board chair, succeeding Helen Caulton-Harris, commissioner of the Springfield department of Health and Human Services.

In his eight years as chair, Gilbert served alongside three HCC presidents: William Messner, who retired in 2016, Christina Royal, who retired in July, and George Timmons, HCC’s fifth and current president.

“The relationship between the chair and the president is vital to the success of any institution,” Timmons said, “and so I have considered myself fortunate to have spent so many of my hours with you, Bob. HCC is an exceptional place because of your leadership and commitment to the college. I want to thank you personally for your support of me in this transition, your wisdom and, most importantly, your passion for Holyoke Community College.”

Making a surprise appearance



Retired President Christina Royal, left, and current President George Timmons, right, bid farewell to Robert Gilbert after his last meeting as an HCC trustee. *Submitted Photo*

at Gilbert’s last meeting was former President Royal, who praised him for his stewardship of the college.

“I don’t think, in my entire time knowing you, that you have not had your HCC pin on,” she said. “You have been such an advocate. I think everybody knows you as someone who has dedicated your whole career to supporting and lifting up this community. I am deeply grateful for your leadership and presence in the board chair role, and, beyond this, I look forward to just calling you ‘friend.’”

As a token of gratitude, Timmons presented the retiring board chair with a real chair emblazoned with the Holyoke Community College seal.

“While my time as trustee may be coming to an end,” Gilbert said, “my commitment to the mission and vision of the college remains unwavering. I am confident the Board of Trustees, in collaboration with the outstanding leadership of our very capable president, George Timmons, will continue to guide the institution to new heights.”

Until Gov. Maura Healey names a successor, HCC trustee Vanessa Smith will serve as interim chair.

The Board of Trustee next meets in January 2024.