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Capital Profile

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Carl Hayden

Chairman of the board of trustees, State University of New York

Personal: Hayden, 68, lives in Elmira and makes the six-hour round-trip to Albany a few times every month. The attorney and his wife, Cindy ("also known as 'the mighty Cinderella'"), have three grown children: Ashley, 37, works at a college in North Carolina; Matt, 35, is a chief assistant district attorney in Schuyler County; and Tim, 32, is a lawyer in Binghamton.

You commute to Albany and New York City and you're still in small-town Elmira. What keeps you there?

My family is there. I'm a son of upstate New York. I grew up in a small town in Cortland County. Elmira was the big city. I decided I didn't want to live in any of the great cities that I had spent time in, Boston and San Francisco. I decided to come back to my roots. I've had a very active and, I hope, successful legal career, and I really got to pursue my interest in public service through education.

There's a great writer buried in Elmira. Have you been to Mark Twain's grave?

My wife and Irene Langdon, who is (Twain's great-grand-nephew) Jervis Langdon's wife, work together to maintain that grave site. I've been there many, many times. She plants flowers, keeps it clean. Lots of people come by. There's not a whole lot of sunlight in that part of Woodlawn Cemetery, so there's a great deal of traffic and sometimes things need to be redone. For her, it's a labor of love.

So when is the SUNY system going to be as the good as the California schools? When are we going to have a University of California at Berkeley in New York state?

As soon as SUNY finds a champion. The answer to that is a policy decision taken by the governor and the Legislature to make our state university the best public higher education institution in the country. I think it's going to take a recognition that public higher education has both an independent value as one of the great mainstays of our democracy, but also that it is inex-

tricably linked with the fiscal and economic health of the state. You really don't need to look any further than the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering to see what can be achieved -- \$1 billion of state investment has leveraged \$3.5 billion of private investment. There's no comparable story anywhere in the country, but we simply haven't summoned the will to make equivalent investment in other SUNY institutions around the state. We need a coherent plan backed by serious money.

Why is it so hard to find a SUNY president? Albany has taken quite a while.

I don't think we're having any difficulty at all. We have just put in place a great new president at Stony Brook. We've got really solid presidents at Binghamton and Buffalo. The Albany situation was a special situation in that that search was conducted in the worst moments of our economic downturn. I can tell you, having headed the search for a new SUNY chancellor, the fiscal climate of the state or a region is a relevant consideration in the course of a search. If I was going to conduct a nationwide search for a great school like UAlbany, if I could make my way to a person of George Philip's stature and accomplishment, I would be very happy indeed.

In your estimation, the ideal college president is what?

I think it needs to be somebody who understands the rhythms of the academy, but who at the same time brings the impatience of the private sector, somebody who has a foot in each camp. Somebody who really has an entrepreneurial impulse and who will not permit decisions to be dithered to death. That's one of the attributes we found in (new SUNY Chancellor) Nancy Zimpher. She converted the University of Cincinnati into one of America's great urban research universities in a mere six years.

You have a powerful job in which you control the destinies of hundreds of thousands of students in New York state. Does your wife still make you get the grocery list? What's on your honey-do list right now?

I mow the lawn with a push mower every week. My dog and I walk to work on Saturday mornings. She has given up asking me to do anything that has any degree of difficulty about it, because I so consistently make a mess of it that she knows it isn't worth it.

– Scott Waldman