

Janet Napolitano, Homeland Security chief, to head UC

By Larry Gordon

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Janet Napolitano, the U.S. secretary of Homeland Security and former governor of Arizona, is being named as the next president of the University of California system, in an unusual choice that brings a national-level politician to a position usually held by an academic, the Times has learned. Her appointment also means the 10-campus system will be headed by a woman for the first time in its 145-year history.

Napolitano's nomination by a committee of UC regents came after a secretive process that insiders said focused on her early as a high-profile, although untraditional, candidate who has led large public agencies and shown a strong interest in improving education.

UC officials believe that her Cabinet experiences -- which include helping to lead responses to hurricanes and tornadoes and overseeing some anti-terrorism measures -- will help UC administer its federal energy and nuclear weapons labs and aid its federally funded research in medicine and other areas.

"While some may consider her to be an unconventional choice, Secretary Napolitano is without a doubt the right person at the right time to lead this incredible university," Sherry Lansing, the regent and former film industry executive who headed the search committee, said in a statement being released Friday. "She will bring fresh eyes and a new sensibility -- not only to UC, but to all of California. She will stand as a vigorous advocate for faculty, students and staff at a time when great changes in our state, and across the globe, are presenting as many opportunities as challenges."

Napolitano, who is a Democrat, was appointed by former President Clinton as the U.S. attorney in Arizona and then won elections as state attorney general and twice as governor, a position she held from 2003 to 2009. President Obama then named her to lead Homeland Security, an agency with an annual \$60-billion budget and 240,000 employees.

She has been a strong voice in favor of immigration reform that would provide a path to citizenship for those in the country illegally, a stance that has angered some Republicans who contend she has not done enough to secure the nation's borders.

A source close to Napolitano, who asked not to be identified because he was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, said that Napolitano deliberated for a long time after the executive search firm hired by UC quietly contacted her.

"I think she loves working for President Obama and serving the American people, but at the same time, this is a unique opportunity," he said. Napolitano knows "UC is probably the premier institution in the country. She is motivated by the fact that being a part of UC, she will be a part of educating future leaders of tomorrow and be part of a state that sets so much of the agenda nationally."

Napolitano, 55, is no stranger to California colleges since she attended Santa Clara University and was its first woman valedictorian before earning her law degree at University of Virginia. Her father was dean of the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, a family connection that UC regents also liked since

they oversee medical centers. In Arizona, she helped to enact plans to provide full-day kindergarten and to renovate university buildings, winning fans among educators.

The Napolitano friend insisted that nothing was pushing her out of Washington now, although the Senate's recently approved compromise plan on immigration faces an uncertain fate in the Republican-controlled House.

The secretary faced some controversy in [Congress](#) when critics alleged the [Boston Marathon bombings](#), reportedly perpetrated by ethnic Chechens from Russia who had been granted political asylum, exposed shortcomings in security.

The UC regents are expected to approve her nomination as UC's 20th president on Thursday during a meeting in San Francisco. Napolitano is expected to take up the UC reins some time in September, officials said.

UC has an annual budget of \$24 billion, 230,000 students, 191,000 faculty and staff, five medical centers and three national laboratories.

Her proposed salary has not been released, pending discussions among the regents. But since her Cabinet salary of about \$200,000 is about a third of the annual \$591,000 that current UC president Mark G. Yudof makes, the regents presumably will be able to avoid a potential furor and not feel pressured to give her a big pay raise over Yudof's.

Yudof, a former top administrator at state universities in Texas and Minnesota, will step down after five years as UC president in late August, in part due to some health issues. Yudof, who plans to teach law at [UC Berkeley](#), also has said it was a good time to leave as UC's finances were improving and most tuitions are frozen, thanks to extra state tax revenues that are helping to reverse years of brutal budget cuts and fee hikes.

In an era of tight budgets, public universities are seeking leaders who can bargain as peers with governors and legislators and also impress alumni and parents. Napolitano will deal with Gov. [Jerry Brown](#), who is a UC regent and has been pressing UC to move more quickly into online education and to improve graduation rates.

Robert Powell, the chairman of UC's systemwide faculty Senate and who consulted on the UC search, said Napolitano stood out among the more than 300 potential candidates. She "has demonstrated an outstanding ability to deal with complex organizations under demanding circumstances," he said.

Acknowledging that she will be a departure from UC's traditions of having a president with strong records in campus administration or academic research, he stressed that her political skills will be important. "When she goes to Sacramento, clearly the conversations will be on a different plane," he said.

As for any possible complaints that UC would be led by a Democratic politician, Powell noted that the regents' search committee included Republicans who joined in the choice for Napolitano and that she won elections in a Republican state.

A switch from politics and the Cabinet to university leadership is not unheard of. Donna Shalala, secretary of Health and Human Services during the Clinton administration, became chancellor of the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) and is now president of the [University of Miami](#). Former Indiana governor [Mitch Daniels](#) now heads [Purdue University](#).

Napolitano, who is unmarried and has no children, underwent a mastectomy for breast cancer in 2000, just weeks before she addressed the Democratic National Convention. She has been mentioned as a possible nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court and as U.S. attorney general.

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